



Protecting birds from harm in the garden

By DIANE LEWIS

Bedford Audubon is planning a bird-friendly vegetable garden at their headquarters at Bylane Farm on Todd Road. Their first meeting was Friday, Feb. 27. The day was warm and overcast, with redtails gliding on the air currents. Bluebirds, with their remarkably bright blue feathers and burnished red bellies, were already out and about. After 95 years as a volunteer-based organization, the Bedford Audubon has hired a full-time professional, Jim Nordgren, to lead them into a science-based environmental role, expand their teaching, research and conservation programs, and increase community involvement. It is hoped that the vegetable garden will involve and educate the community. It is bird friendly because it will not use pesticides, it will increase habitat, and by decreasing mowing it will help prevent climate change.

Bylane Farm was donated to Bedford Audubon by the Parker family 10 years ago. It brings their sanctuary here to a remarkable 340 acres of varied habitats. Foxy and Helen Parker, who grew up on the farm, said that there had been a large vegetable garden on the same site in the past, so the current plans are really resurrecting that garden rather than starting it. The site for the garden is a gently sloping, sunny hillside right next to the old greenhouse. The greenhouse is currently being renovated and will be used to start seeds for the garden.

Mr. Nordgren explained why he feels the garden will be such a constructive community project. "One goal would be to stop using pesticides," he said. "Currently, Westchester County homeowners use more pesticides than almost any other



DIANE LEWIS PHOTO

county in the state, including agricultural counties, to obtain emerald green lawns. Ninety-nine percent of all people in the U.S. have residual pesticides in their bodies, but we still lose one-third of the plants. This is the same percentage as in the Middle Ages. The pesticides don't help."

This is particularly important in Bedford, where these pesticides then wind up in our wells and reservoirs. Additionally, "pesticides directly kill 90 million birds a year," Mr. Nordgren said. While it is sad to see the bird populations diminish, we also need to remember this is indicative of the damage being done to the human population as well.

"Another goal is decreasing global warming," he said. "If people have vegetable gardens they have less lawn, thus fewer leaf blower and lawn mower emissions. Additionally, locally grown plants do not need to be trucked in, again decreasing carbon emissions and global warming."

The third goal that was discussed, of replacing lawns with vegetable gardens, is to help restore a more diverse habitat to maintain biodiversity in the insect and bird populations. We were told that 50 million acres in the contiguous U.S. are in yards. It is therefore imperative that we reconstitute diverse



Jim Nordgren, director of Bedford Audubon. At top, the greenhouse at Bylane Farm will be used to start seeds for the garden.

habitat in our yards if we do not want to lose species.

"People have money here, so they have big lawns," said Audubon naturalist Tait Johansson. "Change here can make a big impact."

Mr. Nordgren said that the other benefits might be less tangible but were at least as important. He said that stress reduction, increased concentration, even more rapid healing, have been documented with increased exposure to nature and increased physical activity experienced with gardening.

With the current recession people have less money and are spending more time with sim-

pler pastimes. "There may be a happy resurgence of nature and community, leading to an increased sense of well-being," said Mr. Nordgren.

The vegetable garden project is a joint effort of Mr. Nordgren, Mr. Tait and Cathy Clare of Katonah. Cathy is certified as a Master Gardener by Cornell Cooperative Extension. She is looking for volunteers to help start seedlings, transplant seedlings into the garden, weed and otherwise maintain the garden. Volunteers are also invited to help with garden planning. She will also teach volunteers about companion planting, how different plants can aid each other by repelling predators or by replenishing nutrients in the soil. There were a dozen other community members at this planning meeting, most representing other organizations eager to help.

Bedford is a wonderful town," said Dorothy Coletta, president of KVIS and a member of the Junior League. "People are always eager to help. If you let us know where and when you need us, our ladies will be there."

"We are unique in our experiential approach to education," said Mr. Nordgren.

Members of the Audubon Society said they hope not just to discuss problems but to show residents how to have a local impact. There are few places on earth more beautiful than their fields and woodlands, so come with boots and trowels prepared to learn.

If you are interested in native plants, consider helping to revegetate the wetland area with help from the DEC on May 16. They will drill the holes for the plants, so your efforts will accomplish a great deal. For further information contact Jim Nordgren at 232-1999.