

Conservation Commission Corner

A quarterly letter from the Conservation Commission for the Lakeville Journal

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Dear Readers,

Welcome to the Salisbury Conservation Commission's quarterly missive. The SCC is a new town committee formed to advise and support, but not make policy on, the many wonderful environmental resources we have in town. It's a win-win commission!

One of our goals is education; educating ourselves and our fellow Salisburyans on the unique natural habitats specific to our beautiful and fascinating town and how to preserve them.

In these quarterly missives, the SCC will take shallow dives into topics germane to an environmentally engaged community and that celebrate our town's unique ecological features. In the future, please look for articles on what is a vernal pool; the importance of upland areas; farmland; and streams, rivers, lakes.

We would like to be interactive so please send topic suggestions and comments to leepotter@salsiburyct.gov.

All The Light They Can "See": Micro Sextants OR Like Moths to a Flame

Is it a well-known fact that moths have micro sextants in their brains? We don't know, but like mariners who used the sextant and stars to navigate, so do moths.

Do you know when you leave a light on outside all night, in the morning you find quite a few dead moths around it? Let's focus on the moths, the significance of those carcasses and what we can do to help these night flyers.

Moths are not as sexy as their Lepidoptera cousin, the butterfly, but they are perhaps wiser having been around about 100 million years longer. Today, we are going with brains over beauty. The New Canaan [CT] Land Trust says this about moths: *In addition to their role as pollinators, moths fill an important link in our natural food webs. Their caterpillars feed the animal kingdom. Songbirds raise their young principally on caterpillars. Frogs, toads, and salamanders prey on them, as do chipmunks, squirrels, foxes, and most other mammals living in our New England habitats.* <https://newcanaanlandtrust.org/moths-butterflies-unsung-cousins/> Needless to say, moths are vital to our Salisbury habitats.

In most cases, our moths are nocturnal and their aids for navigation are fascinating. In January 2024, last month, “The Guardian” wrote about new science regarding moths: *According to Dr Sam Fabian, an entomologist at Imperial College London, moths and many other insects that fly at night evolved to tilt their back to wherever is brightest. For hundreds of millions of years, this was the sky rather than the ground. The trick told insects which way was up and ensured they flew level.* <https://www.theguardian.com/science/2024/jan/30/why-are-moths-attracted-to-lights-science-answer>

When ALAN, or artificial light at night, is present, moths and other nocturnal insects, are relying on it to inform their imbedded navigation systems that have yet evolved to understand it. ALAN causes confusion and exhaustion as the moths continue to circle a lighted bulb believing that illumination is directing it to shelter the way the moon and stars would.

A wonderful resource about ALAN is DarkSky.org. They say: *The best way to protect moths from light pollution is to turn off exterior lights when possible, and to shade windows in lighted rooms at night. If you must use outdoor lighting, consider dim low-voltage lighting, lights that are motion activated, or LED lights with a warm color temperature, as these are all less attractive to moths and other insects.*

And while it is true that some people don't like moths eating their sweaters, even Tim's Pest Control in Norwalk, CT says dim the lights. *Lights attract adult moths, so it is extremely common for our home's exterior lights to attract them to our homes.*

And NO BUG ZAPPERS!

See you in three months.
SCC