

MEET THE NEW NEIGHBORS!

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When temperatures climbed into the 80s during the second week of April, it was time to begin looking for butterflies. Unfortunately after a colder and longer winter than usual, none could be found. Nevertheless, several patches of weeds were blooming in the lawn turning it into a rustic meadow. These three weeds grow as winter annuals and reach their peak just as the grass returns to life. At least the first two are said to be edible.

Upper Left: Hairy Bittercress (European native).

Lower Left: Henbit Deadnettle (Eurasian native).

Lower right: Persian Speedwell (Eurasian native).





Pussy Willows are best known for their silky, gray catkins. When observed over a period of weeks, the gray turns to red, orange, yellow, and finally a pale yellow-green. This is a Goat Willow, introduced from Europe. The native American Willow has less densely packed flowers.





After the hordes of Asian Ladybird Beetles on the Elm last fall, I began to wonder if any native species were left. I thought I found one, but it turned out to be a Seven-spotted Ladybird Beetle introduced from Europe. It is very similar to the native Nine-spotted Ladybird Beetle.

At present our large Heath is the biggest bug magnet in our garden as only a few other flowers are blooming.



At last a native species of something! A Common Black Ground Beetle scurries across the patio. A number of similar looking beetles bear the same common name.



This is the well known Honey Bee which originally came from Asia but is now distributed worldwide because of its honey making and pollinating abilities. This one is probably from a wild colony. We see Honey Bees any time of the year if it gets warm enough. During winter, they frequent the Heath which usually begins blooming in December. Presently, they visit the Crocuses which are nearly done blooming, the Heath, and also the Pussy Willow where they are much more successful collecting pollen than at the Heath. There they fill the pollen baskets on their hind legs until they are nearly as large as their heads.



This is a native Mining Bee species. It was very challenging to photograph because it rarely sits still and spends most of the time flying around sparring with other Mining Bees. It is smaller than the Honey Bee, but is also an important pollinator. It burrows into the ground to make a nest. The individual occupants can often be seen looking out of their burrows to see who happens to be flying past.



Despite the similarity to Yellow Jacket Hornets well known for their aggressive and anti-social behavior, this is a European Paper Wasp. The markings on the thorax and the orange antenna are good ways to identify this non-native species.

This is probably the same species that has had a nest inside our bird bath for years and can be found nesting in other enclosed, dry spaces around the outside of our house. If so, it is an exceptionally non-aggressive species. We can attest to this after accidentally bringing the nest inside once while cleaning the top of the birdbath in the sink, and we have never been stung despite disturbing the birdbath on a regular basis.

Perhaps the fact that it is a heated birdbath explains why this wasp is active so early in the season.



ANT WAR!!! Early April seems a bit early for this, but all summer long, neighboring ant colonies in our garden fight with each other, sometimes forming thick piles at least a half dozen ants deep. Where it is possible to distinguish individuals, they seem to be locked together into groups. Each war can last a day or more. It's never apparent that a resolution has been reached, but judging by the frequency of the battles unconditional surrender must be rare. I've never seen bodies or victims being carried off.

These may be Black Garden Ants. Despite the presence of several other species of ants in the garden and accounts of inter-species wars on the internet, the wars we see are always intra-species conflicts.

I'll have to pay more attentions to ants this summer and watch which species farm which aphids and so on.