

From the Potting Shed

Jan. 16, 2025

www.mgofbc.org



Best wishes to a colleague and friend



Photo by Karen Riede

Joel Flagler, our Rutgers Cooperative Extension agent for Bergen County, received a “good luck” cake from Madeline Flahive DiNardo, Union County ag agent, to mark his upcoming retirement March 1 after 38 years. The photo was taken during Landscape Day at the North Jersey Ornamental Horticulture Symposium Jan 9 at County College of Morris. Madeline noted that Joel has worn many hats during his tenure and presented him with a hat from the Robin Hood Inn (now the Valley Regency) in Clifton where the symposium was held for many years. A sheet cake for Joel was also served to symposium attendees for dessert.

Save the date: Feb. 18 MG of BC meeting

‘Hot Topics from the Hotline’

What’s inside

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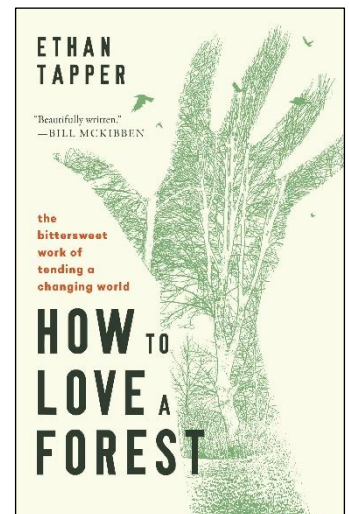
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Ethan Tapper: Author of ‘How to Love a Forest’

Click [here](#) to join the MG of BC meeting Tuesday, Jan. 21. The Zoom link will be active at 6:50 pm. The business meeting will begin at 7 followed by the speaker.

Ethan Tapper, our first speaker of 2025, will discuss his book “How to Love a Forest” at our Jan. 21 Zoom meeting. Broadleaf Books, his publisher, describes Ethan as a forester, birder, naturalist, and digital creator. He works, writes, hunts, and birds at Bear Island, his 175-acre working forest, homestead, orchard, and sugarbush, in Bolton, VT. Ethan’s publicist provided the following Qs & As to acquaint us with Ethan and his book.



What inspired you to write this book? How is it different from other books about forests and trees?

In my work as a forester, I noticed a couple of things: One is that the forests that many of us perceive as

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Jan. 21 MG of BC meeting: Ethan Tapper ‘How to Love a Forest’

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placid and peaceful are actually struggling under the weight of an incredible number of threats and stressors: The legacies of past land use, an incredible number of threats and stressors in the present, and a future that promises challenges like never before.

In the face of all of these things, I noticed that most people who care about forests and other ecosystems believe that the only way to love and to care for forests is to leave them alone — to protect them from ourselves — when, in fact, radical action is necessary to help our forests deal with all of these things and to move into a better future.

I wanted to tell the story of how taking action to protect and care for forests, even when it means doing something as bittersweet and as counter intuitive as cutting a tree, can be a truly profound act of compassion. I wanted to tell the story of how, in this moment, we need forests and that forests need us. I wanted to tell the story of how humans can (and I believe must) be a keystone species in our ecosystems.

“How to Love a Forest” largely focuses on your land in Vermont (Bear Island). Tell us a little about Bear Island. How did it inform or inspire the ideas in this book?

I bought Bear Island in 2017. When I first came to this land, it was the most degraded forest I’d ever seen. I say that it had “every problem that a forest could have.” Over the last seven years I’ve taken radical action to help this forest heal — cutting trees, killing deer, controlling non-native invasive plants — all things that were incredibly challenging and bittersweet, all things that required me to compromise and sacrifice, all things that required me to reimagine what it means to love a forest.

Through these actions, I’ve seen Bear Island transform from a symbol of everything that is wrong with this world to a symbol of what is possible if we’re willing to take these bittersweet actions, a symbol of hope.

While not every forest is as degraded as Bear Island, nearly every forest I walk into is degraded in some way, and nearly every forest could benefit from a little help. In this way Bear Island is a catalyst for the world



Broadleaf Books photo

Ethan Tapper

that we can build if we’re willing to take action and to reimagine what our roles in ecosystems can be.

Chapter 6 is about freedom, a topic that readers might not be used to seeing in books about trees and forests. What’s this chapter about? What do forests have to do with freedom?

Chapter 6 is actually my favorite chapter! Especially in the United States “freedom” is a word that comes up all the time, a word that we use to define ourselves, a basic human right, a word used to describe what we want and what we need from our lives.

Most of the time when people talk about freedom, they are talking about what I call “individual freedom,” essentially the idea that we should be able to do whatever we want. But many times, in exercising our individual freedom in ecosystems, we do so at the expense of our “collective freedom,” the freedom of all of us to live in a functional and beautiful world, and the freedom of future generations to do the same.

Many of the problems in our forests and other ecosystems were caused by people exercising their individual freedom at the expense of ecosystems and the people (all of us) that rely on them. I suggest that a greater freedom can be attained by understanding valuing not just our own personal freedom but also the freedoms that we all share.

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MG OF BC NEWS

Tip to track your volunteer/CE hours

By Suzanne Danzig, Volunteer Records chair

I have had a few inquiries regarding how to determine the breakdown of volunteer hours vs. continuing education hours. Some of you may have already figured this process out, but for others it may not be obvious, so these are the steps below.

This option is available only through Better Impact on your computer at myimpactpage.com. You will also find a link to Better Impact from the bottom of the homepage of our website.

- Click on the link above and log in to arrive at your home page.
- From there, go to the “Reports” tab at the top of the page and scroll down to “Hours and Feedback Report.”
- Change “Date Range” to “Last Year.”
- Then click on “View Report,” and you should see the breakdown of your outreach hours and continuing education hours.

I hope this answers your questions about how many continuing education hours you have accrued over the year. As always, I am available to answer any questions at suzannedanzig@gmail.com. Thank you for entering your hours; we have been a very busy crew.

Did you forget something?

If you have not done so already, it's time to renew your MG of BC membership for 2025! Please make your \$20 check payable to the Master Gardeners of Bergen County, and mail to MG of BC, PO Box 824, Saddle River, NJ 07458. Donations are always welcome. If you'd like to add a donation with your dues, indicate “2025 dues plus donation” in the check's memo line.

To ensure we have up-to-date contact information for you, click [here](#) to fill out the MG of BC Membership Renewal and Directory Update form online.

Reminder: If you complete the online form, you still need to mail your check to the above address. Or, if you'd prefer, print and complete the renewal form, sent with the Potting Shed, and enclose it with your check. You need to complete the renewal form only once — either online or on paper.

MGs make New Year's special for Valley Hospital patients



MGs Lisa Yoler (left) and Maria Bushman managed the distribution of these zygo cacti, along with greeting cards, to more than 100 patients at Valley Hospital in Paramus Dec. 31.

Lisa and Maria coordinated the project with Mary T. McHugh, coordinator of Adult Programming Volunteer Resources, and Kaitlyn Mocerri, manager of Volunteer Resources at Valley Health System. The Volunteer Resources Department paid for the plants. Lisa, Maria, and Wendy Sowa-Maldarelli (not pictured), along with Valley Hospital volunteers, went room to room distributing the plants.

Lisa reported that they didn't just deliver gifts, they delivered smiles, hope, and a profound sense of connection to ring in the new year. “The thoughtful gestures touched patients and staff alike, with many sharing stories of how the unique cacti brightened their day,” Lisa said. “One patient was so overjoyed to receive such a special gift, they said it reminded them of their garden and brought back happy memories.”

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VOLUNTEER SITE NEWS

Reservations not required



Photo by Miriam Taub

The "insect motel" at Teaneck Creek Conservancy is part of an eco-art installation by [Brandon Ballengee](#) called Love Motel. The Weed Warriors (the park's volunteers who include the Master Gardeners of Bergen County) periodically restock the decomposing wood. Join volunteers Wednesdays from 9-11 am. Meet in the parking lot of the Teaneck Creek Conservancy, 20 Puffin Way, Teaneck. Bring work gloves, water, and dress for the weather. Contact Paula Leibowitz, site coordinator, at paula07631@gmail.com for more information.

Hermitage seeks volunteers

Are you looking for a new site at which to volunteer? Consider the Hermitage. Early spring plans include seed sowing and clean-up of the garden beds. Volunteers work Tuesdays and Wednesdays from 9:30 am-noon; start date TBD. There's always something to do! Contact Bernadette White, site coordinator, at btwhite280@gmail.com. The address is 335 N. Franklin Turnpike, Ho-Ho-Kus.

(Valley Hospital, continued from page 3)

Lisa and Maria completed a similar project on Thanksgiving, the first of its kind at Valley, which resulted in "an overwhelmingly positive response," said Lisa. "The New Year's Eve event also had excellent results. We intend to continue with a themed project each month, hoping that funding will be secured through the Valley Hospital," she explained.

Lisa is well on her way to becoming a horticultural therapist. Read about her journey in the Dec. 1 [Potting Shed](#).

(Ethan Tapper, continued from page 2)

In the chapter "Resilience," you discuss coming around to using herbicide to control non-native invasive plants at Bear Island. You write: "Even without the invasive plants, animals, pests, and pathogens — even without a mass extinction, even without the legacies of clearing and mismanagement, even without deer overpopulations — the effects of climate change alone would be enough to threaten the integrity and the function of this forest. Today, the forest on the mountain must face all these things at once. To ask it to weather this storm without my help would be an act of negligence." How and why did you come to that decision and to understand that not doing something can be negligent?

The common idea that "nature" will somehow heal our ecosystems is beautiful and hopeful, but when you actually engage in [a] deep relationship and understanding with ecosystems you start to see how this idea is an example of magical thinking — and something that actually often prevents us from taking action to help forests and other ecosystems at a time when they need it so desperately.

Nature is not some ethereal, magical thing; it is millions of species engaged in complex relationships with each other, reacting to and participating in complex natural processes. In this moment, these species, these relationships, these ecosystems, these processes are all disrupted, under threat, collapsing. And at the same time, we have powerful tools that we can use to help them. But in many cases we do not.

In my mind, to have the ability to heal the ecosystems that sustain all life and to *not* do so is negligent, which is why I say that we can degrade ecosystems in two ways: By exploiting them, as we always have, and by doing nothing at all. We cannot decide to *not* decide. To do nothing is itself a choice, and one that we cannot afford.

EVENTS AND WEBINARS

Orchid Society show and sale Jan.17-19

North Jersey Orchid Society and Rutgers School of Environmental Biology Floriculture Greenhouses



From the 2023 North Jersey Orchid Society show and sale.

sponsor the 2025 annual orchid show and sale. Dates and hours are Jan. 17, noon-5 pm; Jan. 18, 10 am-5 pm; Jan. 19, 10 am-4 pm. The event is being held at a new location on campus — the Rutgers Cook Student Center, 59 Biel Road, New Brunswick. Free admission, but cars must be registered to park on campus. Click [here](#) for more information and parking registration.

Celery Farm: From invasives to natives

The Fyke Nature Association sponsors a lecture From Invasives to Natives: How Volunteers Are Changing the Face of the Celery Farm. It's Jan. 24 at 8 pm at the Allendale Borough Hall, 500 W. Crescent Ave., Allendale. Free admission. Click [here](#) to contact the Fyke Nature Association for more information.

Seed-sowing workshop at Thielke

Thielke Arboretum sponsors a seed-sowing workshop with Elaine Silverstein of the Bergen-Passaic Chapter, Native Plant Society of New Jersey Jan. 26 from 10:30 am-noon. Fee: \$15. Click [here](#) for more information and to register. Thielke Arboretum is located at 460 Doremus Ave., Glen Rock.

Tapping maple trees for syrup and fun



Tree huggers and pancake lovers: Learn how to tap sugar maple trees during a presentation and demonstration at the Hermitage. Three demonstrations are scheduled Feb. 15 at 1 pm, 2 pm, and 3 pm. Rain date is Feb. 16.

What's growing in your garden?



Photos by Janet Schulz

Despite the recent freezing weather, these hellebores remain perky in Janet Schulz's garden. At left is hellebore foetidus, or stinking hellebore, which emits an odor whenever the plant is bruised. At right is the bud of 'Ice and Roses,' which blooms in very early spring. Janet reported that she contacted the grower in Ontario who advised that as long as you can get a shovel in the ground, you can plant hellebores. Janet has planted hellebores as early as Jan. 1.

Tickets are \$35 per family, which includes a kit consisting of a tap, tubing, and instructions so you can venture out to tap your own trees. Hot chocolate and cookies will be on hand. Dress for the weather.

Click [here](#) to buy tickets. The Hermitage is located at 335 N. Franklin Turnpike, Ho-Ho-Kus.

Webinar: How to help those pollinators!

Rutgers Master Gardeners of Monmouth County sponsors a free webinar Baby, It's Cold Outside! Providing Winter-Safe Habitats for Pollinators and Beneficials. It's Feb. 1 from 9:30-10:45 am. Click [here](#) for more information and to register.