

Melissa McClure's Butterfly Garden

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Long time Great Gull Islander Melissa McClure was tragically killed in a street accident near her apartment in New York City on August 20, 2019. Melissa had volunteered on the Great Gull Island Project for many years. Every spring she drove a van from the Museum to Connecticut bringing Project equipment for the season on the island. In the fall she drove the equipment back to the Museum. On Great Gull Island everyone knew Melissa for her two great loves – cooking and gardening. You had to be on the island with Melissa to experience her many memorable dinners, but everyone got to enjoy her gardening efforts. Over the years she planted fruit trees, roses, forsythias, and many flowers. A few years ago, Melissa planted some Garlic Chive outside the Carpenter Shop Headquarters building. The patch has grown in the last couple of years and in late-August and early-September it has become a magnet for butterflies. This year, after Melissa's tragic death the butterfly show was particularly spectacular. On many days there were scores of butterflies feeding on the Garlic Chive flowers, as well as many other insects. During this period, I saw more than a dozen species of butterflies on or in the immediate vicinity of the Garlic Chive flowers. I was not able to photograph all the species seen, but I photographed many of them. This collection of photos is dedicated to Melissa. [NOTE: The pictures are not all to the same scale.]



Part of the Garlic Chive patch with feeding butterflies.



The most prominent butterflies were Monarchs.

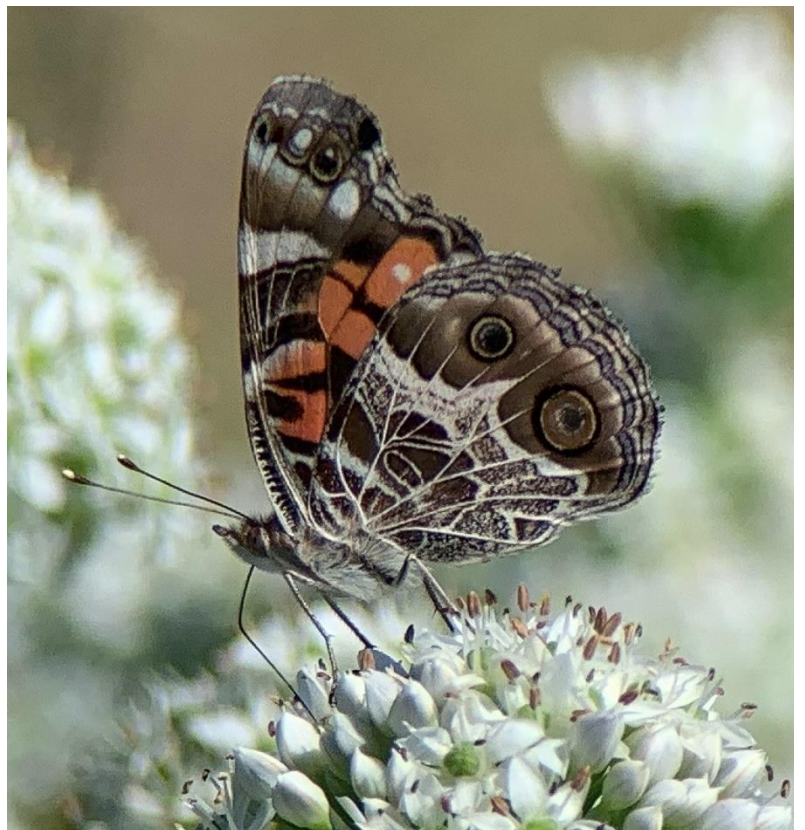


The most numerous butterfly on the Garlic Chive was the small Common Buckeye.

Almost as numerous as the Common Buckeyes were the many American Lady butterflies with small numbers of Painted Lady butterflies mixed in.

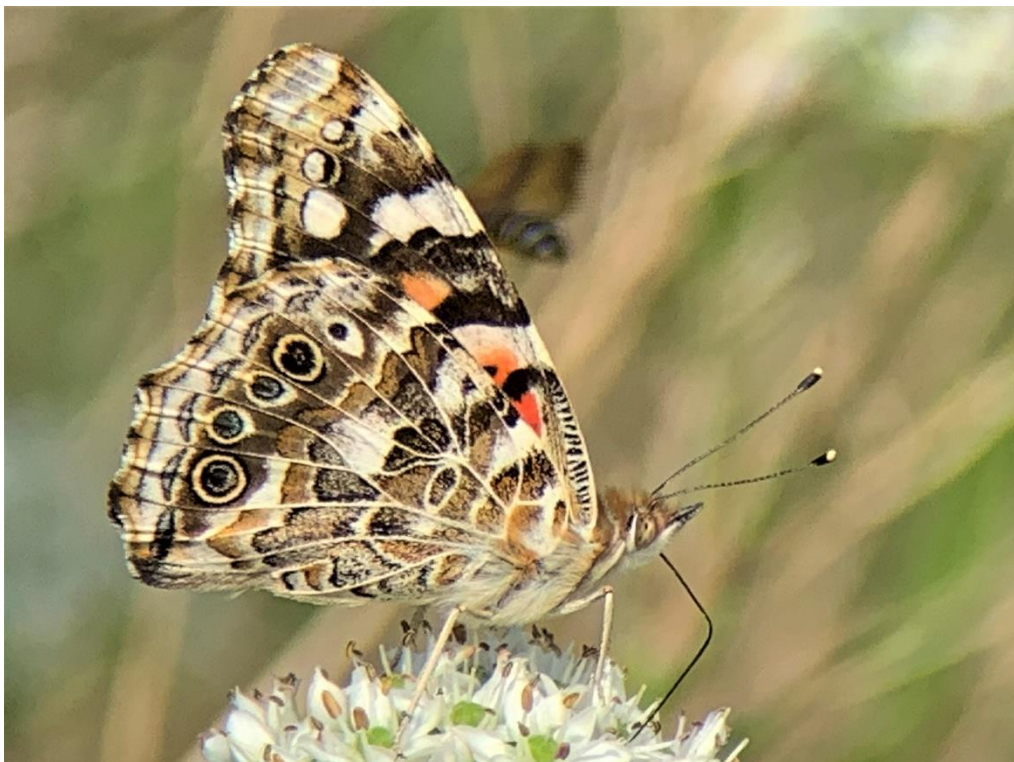


American Lady





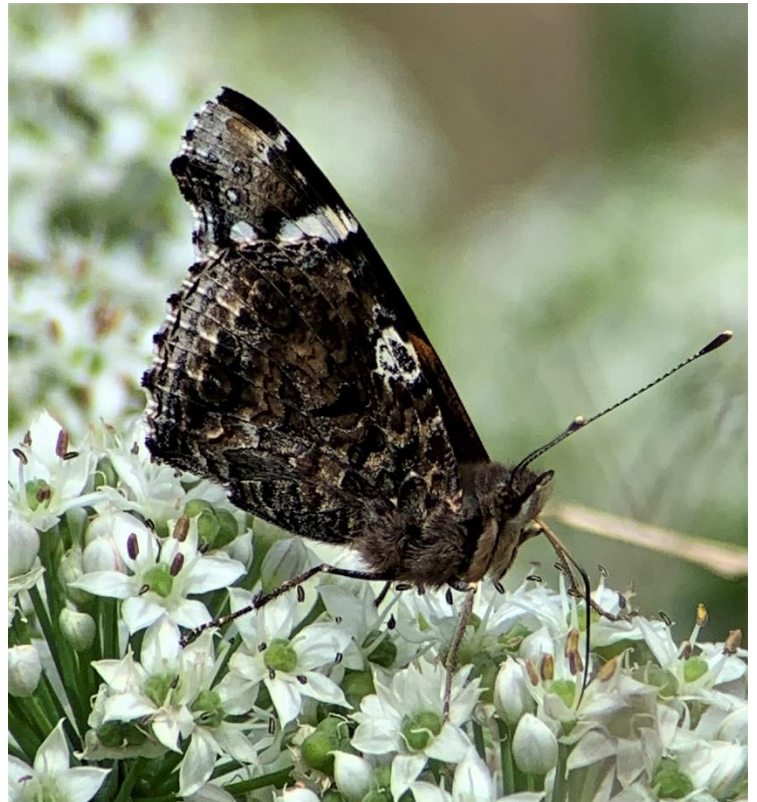
Painted Lady



Cabbage Whites are very common on the island and though I frequently saw them flying over and near the Garlic Chive flowers, I never saw one land on the plants. Other less common to rare butterflies visited the patch. I saw a Black Swallowtail one day but did not get a photograph of it. Red Admirals are relatively common on the island earlier in the season, but a couple of individuals did stop by the patch.



Red Admiral



Several species of sulphurs also stopped by the Garlic Chive patch. Clouded Sulphur and Orange Sulphur are both present on the island every summer though their numbers seemed down this year. The larger Cloudless Sulphur is a southern butterfly that only comes north in numbers every few years. The summer of 2019 was an irruption year for Cloudless Sulphur into the New York area. I saw the first one on Great Gull in early-August. I never saw a Cloudless Sulphur stop at the Garlic Chive flowers, but they frequently flew over it and the one below was photographed on a bindweed flower next to the patch. The Clouded Sulphur below was also photographed nearby, not on the chive flowers, but I did see the species visit the Garlic Chive.



Orange Sulphur



Clouded Sulphur



Cloudless
Sulphur

Also seen visiting the chive patch were a couple of small blue butterflies, Gray Hairstreak and Summer Azure (a form of the Spring Azure).

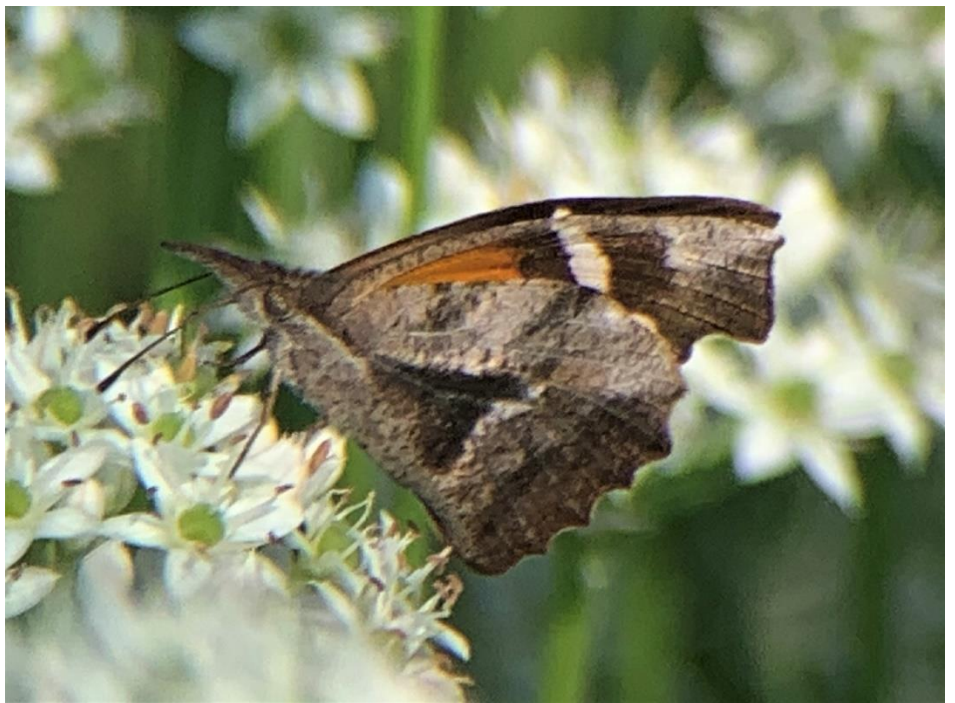
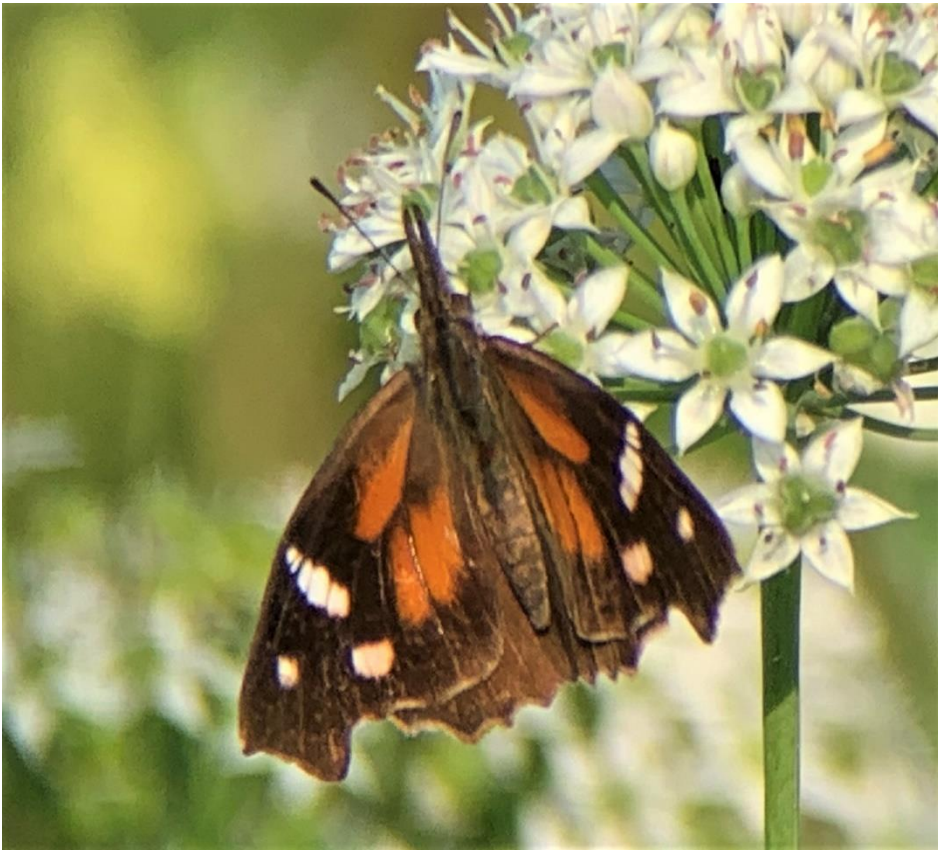


Gray Hairstreak

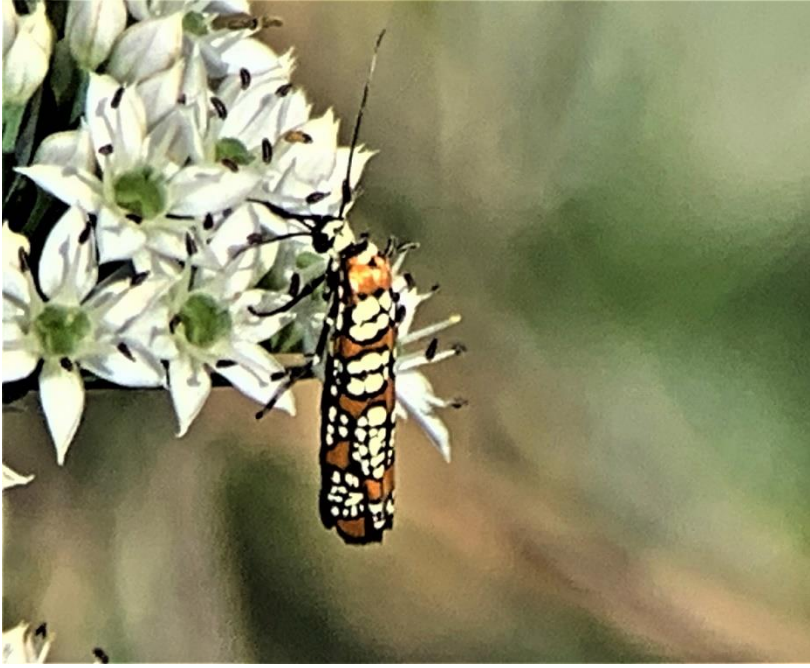
Summer Azure



On September 4th I was delighted to spot a real rarity on the Garlic Chive flowers – an American Snout butterfly.



Butterflies were not the only insects to frequent Melissa's Garlic Chive patch. Whenever you walked by you could hear the hum of the nearly countless small wasps and bees also feeding at the flowers. I also photographed two distinctive small moths at the flowers. The Ailanthus Webworm Moth was relatively common on the flowers and the Yellow-collared Scape Moth was an occasional visitor.



Ailanthus Webworm Moth

Yellow-collared Scape Moth

