

Beetles Galore!

By
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Patience and hope are worthy virtues. Sometimes they're even rewarded.

This certainly seems to be true for the biological control project initiated in 2005 by the NCLT's Land Stewardship Committee to control the well established infestation of Purple Loosestrife in the Scantic Riparian Area (SRA), a prime wetland along the Scantic River in Somers. Purple Loosestrife is a serious invasive pest introduced over 200 years ago from Eurasia. Since then it has spread throughout the eastern parts of the USA. Though beautiful it crowds out native plants in wetlands and makes the sites useless for our native flora and fauna.

In June 2005 our beetle farming team raised and then released 8,000 or so leaf beetles in the genus *Galerucella* at six strategic locations in the SRA. Details of the project were published in the September 2005 issue (No. 15) of the Northern Connecticut Land Trust's newsletter, "Landmark". It should be available on the land trust's web site: <http://www.NorthernCTlandtrust.org>.

Alas, in 2006 there were no signs of the beetles and the loosestrife seemed to be thriving if not actually spreading. Since the beetles survive most of the late summer and all winter as adults in the roots of their host plants we suspected the torrential rains and flooding in October of 2005 killed them all off. After all, much of the site had been under as much as 5 feet of water for many weeks and lesser amounts for most of the winter and early spring.

No beetles could be found again in 2007 but an occasional plant showed feeding damage that appeared to have been caused by some chewing beetle. Just maybe *Galerucella*. In spite of that spark of hope I was sufficiently discouraged that I called Donna Ellis (Loosestrife contact person from the UConn Extension service) to plan a second release the next year. That turned out to be unnecessary.

Recent visits to the site this June and July show BEETLES GALORE! It is hard to find a single plant anywhere on the site that doesn't show at least some sign of beetle damage. Many plants are severely mutilated and stunted. It's very difficult to know how many beetles are there but I'd guess they number in the hundreds of thousands if not millions. It is clear that in this case patience and hope paid off!

We do not expect the loosestrife to disappear altogether but rather to drop back into a more natural balance with the rest of the flora. It will be interesting to see how the composition of the flora in the affected area changes as that happens.

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