

Spotlight on Middlebury



This mature brush pile has a base of large branches topped with smaller ones. Leafy branches and woody debris from the garden are added periodically. It provides a bonanza of shelter, nesting places and food to a wide range of wildlife and birds. (Janine Sullivan-Wiley photo)

Provide habitat for critters

By JANINE SULLIVAN-WILEY

Thanks to a reader for suggesting this month's subject: considering our yards and gardens as valuable parts of a healthy ecosystem and habitat for native creatures. To be fair, such actions can be a bit fraught. But it can be done successfully - without estranging our neighbors. And every little bit helps. As with trading non-natives for native plants, it doesn't have to be "all or nothing." And many aspects of creating suburban habitat are easy and could almost be considered "benign neglect."

Let's start with lawns. Huge swaths of monoculture grass are an environmental wasteland. They support nothing (except perhaps the fertilizer companies). Consider replacing some sections with native plantings, which have the added benefit of needing less fuss - they are already adapted to this environment. For example, native milkweeds are the only things that monarch butterflies can live on, providing leaves for laying their eggs and providing food for their babies (aka caterpillars) and nectar for the adults.

Those native plant beds, left undisturbed over the winter

and into mid-spring also provide the winter homes for many native bees and pollinators. Notice how many have hollow stems: that's where those small insects go to make it through the winter. The seeds and berries left behind feed birds that overwinter up here and migrating birds returning in the spring. Native species of shrubs and trees provide the right places for our native birds to build their nests.

If you want to help the nest-builders, you can even put out materials they can use. The Audubon Society and the U.S. See Habitat ... Page 5

People help Kenyan villagers

By ELAINE STROBEL

Introduction: In March 2026, 13 people from across the U.S. traveled to a remote village in Kenya with Global Village Ministries (www.globalvillageministries.org) bringing with them much needed items for the village school and providing dental and health care to as many as they could during their stay. Middlebury resident Elaine Strobel was part of that group. This three-part essay is her account about the trip to the Maasai region of Africa that appears in the May, June and July print issues and online at Bee-news.com.



A teacher hands out materials to students in a school room. Each class has about 40 students. (Elaine Strobel photo)

During her visit, Strobel discovered an urgent need for eyeglasses, and she is asking for donations of used eyeglasses, particularly dark glasses. All glasses are appreciated. They can be dropped off Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Middlebury Senior Center in Shepardson Community Center at 1172 Whittemore Road in Middlebury.

Part 2 of 3 - The school. In Part 1, we learned Caroline, the daughter of a Maasai chief, hosted the mission group. Her parents believed in educating all their children, not just the boys, so she completed her education. When her parents died, Caroline inherited her father's land and established a village on the acreage for widowed or disabled women and their children, young girls from poor families who cannot be supported, and runaway married girls. Fifty-two people live there.

Caroline realized that many children in her community weren't attending school because the nearest government school was a five-mile walk through wilderness filled with wild animals. That's when she started a school for grades K-3 and added one grade each year. Now there are six grades. She is working to add grades 7 and 8.

She had to persuade parents to enroll their children, as many believe there is no value in education. Caroline even started a preschool. About 40 children are in each class. Once the young ones begin school, they want to stay. This school is the only education most of them will ever receive. The girls know they will be married off if they are not in school.

Caroline's goal is to get as many students as possible into high school. However, most will only reach eighth grade because families see no benefit in further education. Some learners are well-suited for a trade, yet their parents still won't let them train for one. The boys must go to work to support the family. If they have no skill or education, they become shepherds. Boys usually marry around 18 years old.

A 17-year-old boy recently ran away from home with his 14-year-old brother. He went to see Caroline and told her he wanted to go to school. He was placed in the third grade to start. His

brother was placed in second grade. One wonders what made them leave their home.

The school's tuition is \$300 per year. That cost covers teachers, one pencil per child, and used workbooks. Paper at the school is limited; most of it is reused. Children are taught English because it is especially important. As Kenya's official language, English offers greater employment opportunities.

All students bring a sturdy tree limb they can carry to school on Monday mornings. The branch is used to start a fire to cook their hot school lunch. School runs from 8 am to 5 pm.

Our partnership with Memuruti Junior School was one of the most meaningful parts of the trip. Over several days, we provided school health exams, soccer balls, pencils, and books, and spent time connecting with the students. Their curiosity, kindness, and eagerness to learn were truly inspiring.

Our interpreter, Lynn, lives in Caroline's village. Her mother is a blind widow who cannot command a dowry. She has four children. The mother is considered of no value. Lynn attended school, became proficient in English, and now works at a safari resort. She is now able to support her mother and siblings.

Coming in July - Part 3 - Healthcare.

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Make a Home Foundation 199 Park Rd. Ext., Middlebury Take the second entrance, go behind Aldo and follow the pink signs to the back. Furniture & Home Goods Thrift Shop JUNE HOURS: Wednesday - Friday & Saturdays, 6th and 20th, 9 am - 5 pm Dedicated to assisting the homeless, especially veterans and domestic abuse victims. DROP OFF DONATIONS: Wed - Fri 10 am to 4 pm Fee for Middlebury pickups - \$75 203-527-5100 www.makeahome.org



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