



Gloucester County Nature Club

Monthly Newsletter

www.gcnatureclub.org

Nature Club meetings are open to the public
December 2004

Program - How to Attract and Manage a Colony of Purple Martins **Thursday, Dec 9th at 7:00 PM at EIRC, Sewell**

Program Coordinator- Bob Cassel 478-2496

Remember the Purple Martin colonies near great open wetlands along the Mantua Creek in Paulsboro? This fascinating bird is the subject of our program on December 9th when Wildlife Biologist Allen C. Jackson brings us the story of: **How to Attract and Manage a Colony of Purple Martins**. In spite of dwindling suitable areas in Gloucester County we hope our speaker may stimulate members who have ground space to get started by erecting gourd poles. The art of attracting Martins will be covered in the program. Most of us don't have space to start a colony, but all of us will appreciate the role of this cheerful bird in keeping insects (especially mosquitos) under some control.



Field Trip – Christmas Bird Count **Saturday December 18th, All Day**

Coordinators: Bob Cassel & Brian Hayes

Description Below - Paula Hayes

Christmas is coming and I can hardly wait! But it's not the presents, cookies, big dinners, and shopping that I look forward to it is the Christmas Bird Count! The Christmas Bird Count (CBC) is an annual count that began 105 years ago. It is currently the longest running continual wildlife-monitoring project in the world. Scientists use the 105 years of data to monitor trends in bird populations. On December 18th groups will head out into the count circle, ours is a 15 mile circle within Gloucester County, and count every bird they see. The fun is just getting out on a day and enjoying the world around you. It is so much better than a Saturday at the mall. It certainly is exciting to see rare birds but on this day they all matter. And I promise you if you leave the couch and come out, you will see more than if you stay home or visit the mall. For those who are already hooked, we can't wait to see you, and for those who aren't, why not give it a try and join an established group for the day or part of the day? I know I'll be one of the 50,000 people to do a CBC again this year. I will be up early on December 18th searching (listening) for owls with my group. The Gloucester County CBC has been in existence for over 50 years. You can learn more about CBCs or look at data from past years at <http://www.audubon.org/bird/cbc/index.html>. There will be a gathering for those who participate in the CBC the evening of December 18th. National Audubon requires a \$5 fee of all participants, used for administrative costs. If you'd like to join the count please call Bob Cassel at 478-2496 or Brian Hayes at 468-9272.

Field Trip Report – Perkiomen Trail “Bike/ Hike” (10/16/04) by Bonnie Hart



After a series of rainy days, a thankfully sunny day greeted the members of the GCNC on October 16. This was the day of the scheduled Field Trip to the Perkiomen Trail where we had the enjoyable options of hiking or biking (actually, equestrian rides are welcomed too but none of us thought to bring a horse!) It was a perfect autumn day with crisp air warming as the sun strengthened. The fall foliage sparkled looking like candy-colored cellophane against the sunlit blue sky. Flickers greeted us in the parking lot and later in the day we were treated to a couple of Red-tailed hawks too.

About a dozen of us met at Lower Perkiomen Valley Park where a couple of us choose to hike and the rest of set out on bikes. The Perkiomen Trail stretches from Green Lane, PA all the way to Valley Forge –nearly 20 miles in length – we bikers rode maybe a third of that. Pausing on occasion we saw chestnut trees and a fern species, Common Polypody, unusual in NJ but common in PA. Since invasive plant species had been the featured topic at the GCNC meeting earlier that week, we often pointed out non-native plant species to each other. It was fun having an opportunity to use and reinforce the information we had just learned.

Some of the members more familiar with the trail shared its history with us as we biked along. Established primarily through a Rails-to-Trails project we biked past a few creek-side homes that were remnants of its one-time status as a 1920’s vacation spot. With the creek beside us we conjured up images of an era with stately, leafy trees like the chestnut and elm and could easily understand why folks would vacation here.

I learned later that the rail line was founded after the Civil War. The first trains started running in 1868. Passenger service ended in 1955 and then in 1976 freight service ended too. It was in the late 1970’s that the Rails-To-Trails project was first suggested but the Perkiomen Trail we know today was only recently completed in 2003. And greater things are in store. Rather than being an independent corridor, The Perkiomen Trail is one element in a plan to create 160 miles of interconnected recreational trails.

The Perkiomen Trail connects three county parks separated by private property and commercial establishments. We got a flavor of this as we biked past wooded slopes, neighborhood back yards and storefronts. As we each biked at our own pace, we all agreed it was a great trip for a group. Sometimes you’d find yourself alone on the trail drinking in the scenery and other times with the group sharing conversation and laughter.

After a couple of hours on the trail we met back at our starting point to eat our lunches. We squeezed around a picnic table some needing to stand for lack of room at the table. Then to our surprise an off-road vehicle appeared toting a picnic table that was plopped down beside us. Thanking the ranger we shared our lunches with him as he good-naturedly ribbed us about our “Jersey” accents. From the weather and scenery to the company and accommodations, The Perkiomen Trail Field Trip was truly enjoyable. A great way to get outdoors, get exercise and be with nature-loving friends.

Still Soliciting Your Input on the Club Logo

As was mentioned in the last newsletter, we are looking into the possibility of changing and/or updating the current club logo. We have had several great suggestions, but we still need more input! You may provide your suggestions as a hand drawn image, computer generated image, or even as a written description.

Conservation Corner - Greening the Holidays by Loretta Dunne

The approach of the holiday season brings a shudder of apprehension to many – all of that shopping, the lines at the malls, and the lack of time to really enjoy the holidays. But you can make this year different and give the planet and yourself a break. If you use this opportunity to spend your dollars in ways that matter, you will be surprised to discover that it is much more rewarding.



Here are a few general guidelines and things to consider for a greener season:

- Think before you buy. You are investing dollars in the economy. Will the item end up being discarded in a year or two? How was the item produced? Would the person be just as happy with a gift that has a more positive impact on the environment?
- Why give a store-bought item?
 - Give a gift of time (for example, take someone to the movies, play, or a winter picnic in the park). Why not use the gift-giving opportunity as a way to set aside some quality time?
 - Re-gift those perfectly good items you received and never used.
 - The baked good gift is still viable, especially now that really good home-baked cookies cost a fortune from upscale stores. I just baked pumpkin muffins that would sell for \$1.50 each in the supermarket. Those cookies and cakes are valuable!
 - Give a membership or a donation in someone's name to a cause that you value. Buy a subscription to a magazine, such as E, the Environmental Magazine.
- If you shop in stores, why not frequent the small businesses in your community or places such as the NJ Audubon bookstores? Things might cost more than in the big box stores, but if we like to have small stores in our towns, we need to support them. One suggestion is to buy fewer things and spend a bit more on them. And buy things that matter. There are wonderful children's books about the outdoors that can give a life-time of pleasure and memories to a child. Or buy something made from sustainably grown wood. Recently, I picked up a beautiful cutting board made of bamboo. There are lots of choices.
- Gift certificates to a restaurant or nature store are always welcome. Movie tickets are also popular.

- And what about changing some of your traditions? Maybe you want to do a Pollyanna among family members, rather than giving a gift to everyone. In my family, we decided to just give to the children and that decision cut our shopping needs drastically. Instead of the cut Christmas tree I was used to from my childhood, I purchase a small, live tree or bush and keep it in the house, decorated, for a few days. I have a few large American cedars that are now growing in my backyard as a testament to this idea.
- Keep your paper use to a minimum. Use old calendars or comics from newspapers to wrap gifts. Use old Christmas cards as decorations on the packages. Be creative. Carry a cloth bag or a strong paper shopping bag with you into the stores so you can avoid waste. If you send cards, buy ones that use recycled paper.

You'll be surprised to find that a greener Christmas will keep you further from those lines in the malls and closer to your family and neighborhood; the perfect place to be for the holidays.

Looking Ahead:

Programs-

January 13th – Habitat Management at Lakehurst Naval Air Station with John Joyce
 February 10th – Non-standard monthly program – Nature Artwork

Field Trips-

January 15th – Shark River with Bob Duke
 February 12th – Winter Tree ID Walk with Karl Anderson
 March 19th – Scouting for Ducks with Dick Ebert

Club Notes:

- The November Executive Committee meeting will be at 7PM on December 5th at Bob & Carol Cassel's house.
- If you'd like to receive the newsletter electronically or receive more info about the club please email Brian or Paula Hayes at pnbhayes@comcast.net or call 468-9272.
- The Nature Club is always looking for ideas for future programs and field trips. Please contact the program or trip coordinator if you have ideas or would like to help.
- Information for the next newsletter should be sent to Barry Bengel at sharkeyes@comcast.net or 6 Greenwood Drive, Sewell, NJ 08080 by the 15th of the preceding month.

Also of Interest Locally:

- **Bird Walk** - For those that are not already aware, Scotland Run Park hosts a **Bird Walk** at 8AM on the first Saturday of the month in the Autumn and Winter, and on Tuesday nights at 6PM in the Spring and Summer. Bob Duke from the Nature Club and Park Naturalist Jill Taylor will be your leaders. The next Bird Walk at Scotland Run will be **December 4th at 8AM**.
- **"By Or Own Hands": Native American Artifacts from Harrison Township** - This fall the Harrison Township Historical Society has opened an exhibit featuring objects from ancient times. This collection, donated to the society last year, belonged to George A. Turk. A farmer and life-long resident of Ewan, he and his brother, David began collecting Indian artifacts early on, as did their father, Walter R. Turk. The resulting collection represents two generations of collecting. Most of the objects were found on the family's farms around Ewan in Harrison Township as well as nearby Elk Township. There is a wide range of objects in the collection, from arrow points and knives to food preparation, leatherworking and woodworking tools. The oldest pieces date from the Early Archaic Period, indicating human habitation here as early as 1000 BC. This collection is on display at the Old Town Hall in Mullica Hill. The Old Town Hall will be open to the public on weekends from 1 to 4 p.m. beginning Saturday October 9 and closing Sunday, December 5.

The following press release has been included in the newsletter as a follow-up to last month's presentation on non-native invasive plant species:

For Immediate Release:
October 14, 2004
Contact: Peter Boger (609) 984-1795

DEP ANNOUNCES NEW INVASIVE SPECIES POLICY DIRECTIVE Will Prohibit Planting of Non-native Species on State Lands

(04/120) TRENTON - New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Commissioner Bradley M. Campbell today announced a new policy directive prohibiting the planting of non-native species on state lands. The initiative will help to reduce the spread of invasive species that choke out New Jersey's natural flora and threaten wetlands and waterways.

"State agencies need to lead by example and stop planting invasive species on lands that we manage," said Commissioner Campbell. "This is a small, but important step in our long-term struggle to address this significant threat to New Jersey's rich natural heritage."

Under the policy directive, Commissioner Campbell is ordering DEP employees and DEP consultants and contractors not to use invasive, nonindigenous plant species in planning and implementing plantings, landscaping and land management activities such as habitat restoration and reforestation on state lands and waters.

Included in the policy directive is an advisory list that will be periodically updated, which enumerates invasive plant species that have already been identified by the DEP as unsuitable for

planting. The list to date includes 20 tree species, 40 shrub species, 15 vine species, 66 herb species, and 16 grass and sedge species.

The McGreevey Administration has been aware of and confronting the problem of invasive species for some time. In July 2003, the Final Report of the New Jersey Comparative Risk Project identified invasive species, including plants, insects and other organisms, as one of the top four environmental problems facing New Jersey. In 2004, Governor James E. McGreevey signed an executive order forming an Invasive Species Council charged with submitting an Invasive Species Management Plan for the state next year.

There are more than 1,200 nonindigenous plants in New Jersey that have been introduced accidentally or intentionally mostly from Europe and Asia. Because these tend to have few if any natural predators or parasites on this continent, they are aggressive competitors for space and nutrients in New Jersey's natural areas. Invasive species also threaten New Jersey's agricultural resources through lost production and marketability for agricultural products. Nationally, damage from invasive species costs is estimated at \$123 billion annually.

Invasive species often form dense stands or thickets that crowd out native vegetation. Harmful invasive species not only threaten plant biodiversity but also affect wildlife that depend on the displaced native species for food. Invasive species alter and potentially harm the structure, composition and function of natural ecosystems.

A report entitled An Overview of Nonindigenous Plant Species in New Jersey is available on the DEP's Web site at <http://www.nj.gov/dep/parksandforests/natural/heritage/InvasiveReport.pdf>.

A copy of the Commissioner's policy directive is available at <http://www.nj.gov/dep/commissioner/policy/index.html>.