

COVE CURRENTS

GREETINGS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I'm not sure why, colder temperatures, shorter days, longer nights, whatever the reason, winter is a time for reflecting and a time for planning. For those who view life as a continuum, using winter as a bridge season to contemplate the past as prologue to the future seems no more than natural. This urge may be stronger than usual for me this year, as winter 2007 marks the fifth anniversary of the dream that has become Palmyra Cove Nature Park and Environmental Discovery Center.

How should we define ourselves in the winter of 2007? How would we like to define ourselves in the winter of 2012? Five years seems like a long time when we look forward; when we look back, we know how fleeting that time span really is.

Palmyra Cove Environmental Education Foundation, Inc. was established to support the mission of Palmyra Cove Nature Park: conservation, environmental education and passive recreation. This mission has informed our choices and guided our progress from those early days of organizational development, and will continue to do so into the future.

Conservation, the preservation of natural habitat, is our first responsibility. Everything we do at Palmyra Cove follows from our commitment to conservation. However, at this writing, natural habitats at Palmyra Cove are being threatened by the US Army Corps of Engineers' insistence on expanding the dredge material retention basin at the Cove to 70 acres.

The NJ Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) had set aside seventy acres of the Park in a 1998 agreement with the Burlington County Bridge Commission (BCBC), as a condition for preserving the 250-acre tract of land that has become Palmyra Cove Nature Park. The DEP reserved the acreage for use by the Corps as a retention basin for dredge material from the Delaware River. In the past, a twenty-acre parcel of the seventy-acre set-aside was cleared, a basin was constructed and dredge material was deposited into the site. In the summer of 2003

the Corps made application to the DEP for use of the entire seventy-acre site at Palmyra Cove in order to fulfill its dredging responsibility. The DEP determined that the Corps had not made a convincing case for its need to use the entire seventy acres.

We heard no more from the DEP or the Corps until October 2006, when we learned from Palmyra Borough that the Corps was back to claim the remaining fifty acres of the seventy-acre site and the DEP was found in the Park surveying and staking the site for a proposed seventy-acre dredge retention basin. In order to construct a seventy-acre dredge retention basin for the Corps, the DEP would have to authorize the clear-cutting of an additional fifty acres of mature hardwood forest adjacent to the twenty-acre basin that had been constructed earlier. Such a project would ultimately result in a seventy-acre sand pit within a 250-acre nature park stripped of most of its forested areas, irreparably altering habitats and the delicate ecological balance in Palmyra Cove Nature Park.

Upon learning of the plan we asked for and received a meeting with the DEP. The meeting was held on October 17, 2006 and was chaired by the DEP Deputy Commissioner/Chief of Staff Adam Zellner, with participation from his staff and that of Tidelands Council. Also attending were representatives from the Borough of Palmyra and its redeveloper and the BCBC/Palmyra Cove, including me. We expressed our belief that not all seventy acres were required for maintenance dredging and that other sites should be found to share in accepting the dredge material which would come from as far away as Trenton. Mr. Zellner promised to work with us on those issues while a Request for Proposal (RFP) for site preparation was being prepared. All of the stakeholders including BCBC/Palmyra Cove were told they would receive a package of materials, in about two or three weeks, explaining the proposed project and scope and how habitats would be protected. Our representatives have had further oral communication with the DEP Commissioner's Office. However, as of the date of



Education Corner

Staff Training: I will be attending the annual Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education (ANJEE) conference at Princeton University in February. The conference provides opportunities for formal and informal educators to add to their knowledge and skills through workshops, meetings, and an assortment of other venues. My first day at the conference will focus on bird skinning, which is a first step in bird taxidermy. This will be a new venture but hopefully beneficial to our activities at the Cove. We also hosted the ANJEE board meeting on January 9.

In December, several staff members met with Liza Herschel, Senior Director of Zam's Quest. Zam's Quest is a problem-based learning curriculum that utilizes role-playing techniques to teach students about international, national and local environmental issues. Palmyra

Cove will function as a training center for teachers who purchase the Zam's Quest curriculum.

Winter Activities: We have added a beaver hike to our repertoire of winter activities. We have a beaver in our back pond, now called Beaver Pond. It has built a lodge and is maintaining a dam in a small channel that flows southeast from the pond. Numerous signs of beaver activity are adjacent to the pond. Beavers are basically nocturnal, but it has been spotted infrequently during daylight hours.

Our red foxes have been more active lately and are in the mating season. We can expect to find a new litter of cubs in the spring. These animals are usually nocturnal but may be seen more often in the daytime during winter months. While the number of visitors to the park declines in the winter, it is often the best time of year to see many of the park animals.

Winter is also a good time to clean up the park because there is less vegetation and ticks. We will be hosting a beach cleanup on March 3rd with the Burlington County 4H. Please call or e-mail the Cove if you or your organization is interested in participating. We have also created a new lesson about trash, which uses indexing system, as a way to determine sources and solutions to trash problems along the riverbank.

Schools: We were pleased to host the Philadelphia Mennonite High School in December. Our theme was animals in winter. Students explored various habitats to investigate ways animals adjust to changes in seasons. We have begun reserving dates for spring visits by local schools. We will be hosting Riverton School for the first time this May. Riverton teachers Sue Blackwell and Chris Durante attended a wetlands workshop at the Cove in October and decided to bring their classes. We look forward to a day of fun and learning with the Riverton students and staff.

Programs: Beginning on December 28, we hosted 60 people for our first owl prowl of the season. Our naturalist, Kristina Merola, led a classroom session and introduced the audience to Clack, a screech owl loaned to us by Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge. We combine an indoor program with an outdoor walk. We have live owls because the chance of actually seeing an owl in the wild is about 1 in 10 at best. Light refreshments are also available for the 2-hour programs. We charge a fee of \$10 per adult and \$5 per child (\$7 and \$3 respectively for members). Reservations are required to guarantee participation in the activities. One more owl prowl is scheduled for February 15.

Palmyra Cove Nature Park and the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia will be hosting a free workshop for educators on May 4. The workshop introduces teachers to activities and concepts related to wetlands through our Wetlands Education Project. The hands-on activities are interdisciplinary and geared to grades 4 to 8. Visit our website or call for details. The Wetlands Education Project is the result of an EPA grant that requires us to educate a number of teachers about wetlands. We will be hosting many more workshops throughout 2007.

Edward Sanderson, *Director Environmental Education*

Letters to the Editor can be mailed to Clara Ruvolo at Palmyra Cove Nature Park, 1300 Rt. 73 North, PO Box 6, Palmyra, NJ 08065-1090.

Photos credited to Brad Fusco, Bennett Landsman and Richard Merry

Palmyra Cove Environmental Education Foundation thanks Ed McCabe for his assistance in editing *Cove Currents*.

Naturalist's Notes

The unseasonably warm start to winter has many migrating and resident species taking advantage of the availability of plentiful food and fresh water. Our year-round resident species are very active around the park. The red fox are busy building new burrows in the "desert" next to Dragonfly Pond.

Our new resident beaver(s) have been putting a lot of time and effort into making Beaver Pond more to their liking. The beavers have built a small dam and a large lodge; they have also been cutting and storing trees under water to feed on if the pond freezes over later this winter.

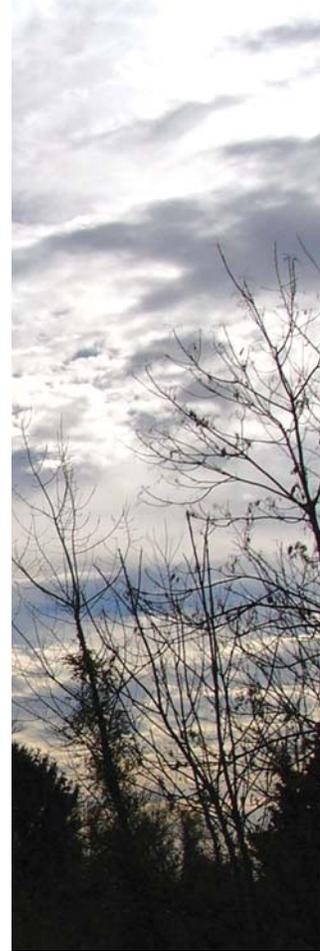
The warm weather has had little effect on the hibernating species of the park. Even on the warmest days, reptiles and amphibians were still tucked in their winter homes, waiting for spring.

Migrating species, on the other hand, seem to be taking their time leaving their forests in northern North America. By this time last year, our winter resident Saw-whet Owls, Ring-billed Ducks on Beaver Pond, and a few loons could be seen on the Delaware. Not so as of January 24. There must still be plenty of food and unfrozen ponds to keep our winter residents from migrating southward.

Human visitors to our park have also been active this winter. Our first and third Saturday walks every month have seen new and old participants enjoying various aspects of the nature park, including winter birding and tracking our resident mammals. Our night time Owl Prowl programs have been filled to capacity.

Our Great Horned Owls, though hard to find, are active in winter with finding a suitable nest, courtship, and egg care. We have been scouring the park looking for signs of their nest site. Though they show themselves once in a while, their nesting site this year is still their secret.

We will keep watching wildlife through the winter. If you are interested in joining us for a Saturday walk or one of our other programs, look to our schedule of events for dates and times.



Kristina Merola, *Naturalist*

Upcoming Events

Please call to ask for prices and RSVP at 856-829-1900

March 3	Insects in Winter Family Hike 9:00 – 11:00am	April 21	Beginning Birding Pre-lesson 8:00 – 9:00am
March 5	Cove Caterpillars Toddler Program 10:00 – 11:00am	April 21	Beginning Birding 9:00 – 12:00 pm
March 6	Cove Caterpillars Toddler Program 10:00 – 11:00am	April 21	Earth Day Festivities 10:00 – 3:00 pm
March 12	Cove Caterpillars Toddler Program 10:00 – 11:00am	May 4	Wetlands Education Teacher Training 9:00 – 2:00pm
March 13	Cove Caterpillars Toddler Program 10:00 – 11:00am	May 5	Burlington County BirdQuest 7:00 – 1:00pm
March 17	Beginning Birding Pre-lesson 8:00 – 9:00am	May 12	Special guest Wild Man Steve Brill "Edible Plants" hike 1:30 – 3:30pm
March 17	Beginning Birding 9:00 – 12:00pm	May 19	Beginning Birding Pre-lesson 8:00 – 9:00am
March 19	Cove Caterpillars Toddler Program 10:00 – 11:00am	May 19	Beginning Birding 9:00 – 12:00pm
March 20	Cove Caterpillars Toddler Program 10:00 – 11:00am	June 2	Spring Flowers Family Hike 9:00 – 11:00am
March 26	Cove Caterpillars Toddler Program 10:00 – 11:00am	June 16	Beginning Birding Pre-lesson 8:00 – 9:00
March 27	Cove Caterpillars Toddler Program 10:00 – 11:00am	June 16	Beginning Birding 9:00 – 12:00pm
April 7	Awaking to Spring Family Hike 9:00 – 11:00am	July 7	Wetlands Fun Family Hike 9:00 – 11:00am
April 12	Night Migration Presentation by Robert DeCandido 7:00 – 8:30pm	July 9 - 13	Cove Campers Summer Camp 9:00 – 12:00pm
		July 16 - 20	Cove Campers Summer Camp 9:00 – 12:00pm
		July 21	Beginning Birding Pre-lesson 8:00 – 9:00am
		July 21	Beginning Birding 9:00 – 12:00pm

GREETINGS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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this writing we have not received these written materials.

In late January we were promised by the DEP Commissioner's Office that we would receive the draft RFP in the next few weeks and that promptly thereafter we would have a meeting with representatives of the Commissioner's Office in an effort to reach a compromise that balances our goals against the goals of the Corps and which complies with all statutory and regulatory requirements. Please know that I along with the Burlington County Bridge Commission will continue to be ardent advocates for the preservation of Palmyra Cove Nature Park.

Over the past five years many people have worked very hard to create an organization that offers environmental education programs and passive recreational opportunities that make the best use of the Park as an outdoor science lab and recreational facility while acting as responsible stewards of the land entrusted to us. Thousands of students have participated in our education programs; tens of thousands of visitors have enjoyed birding, hiking, kayaking, family outings, and special events in the Park and in

the Environmental Discovery Center. Agencies and organizations as diverse as the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the National Resource Conservation Service, as well as private, and corporate donors, have contributed to the work we do at Palmyra Cove.

We are poised to expand our environmental education programs to include high school and college level students and to expand our teacher workshop offerings with continuing education opportunities for teachers. Furthermore, we will continue to work in partnership with South Jersey Tourism Corporation to increase the variety of recreational opportunities available to families in the region and beyond.

In this winter of 2007, Palmyra Cove Nature Park as a community, regional, state and bi-state resource is "well begun." Whether or not circumstances over the next five years allow us to move further toward our goal of becoming a premier environmental education resource within a protected natural environment that encourages passive recreation remains the question. The answer will depend largely upon the outcome of our efforts with the Department of Environmental Protection and the Tidelands Council.

Clara Ruvolo, *Executive Director*



Cove Currents Palmyra Cove Nature Park

1300 Route 73 North
PO Box 6
Palmyra, NJ 08065-1090

