

# COVE CURRENTS

## GREETINGS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I have been thinking about predictability and comfort.

Why does a forecast based upon knowledge and memory so often lead to a sense of comfort? Because we know what to expect - we have been there before? Yes. Memory plays a role. However, predictability may not lead to comfort, but to the opposite.

Reflecting upon seasonal changes that I have come to expect, I feel a sense of calm, a sense of order. I have always thought that what I love about autumn, for instance, is the “nip in the air”, the moment when I notice the maple leaves have turned a bright yellow, oak leaves a deep red, a pumpkin patch ready for picking, a Thanksgiving table set for family and friends. More recently, I believe that calmness comes from more than those individual signs; it comes from knowing that autumn will arrive and that autumn will be defined in ways that are familiar to me. I’ll recognize it when it arrives.

There is predictability in nature that brings us comfort, a comfort we can’t always depend upon finding elsewhere in our hectic, everyday lives. Palmyra Cove Nature Park treats us to the predictability of nature; seasons change, tides come and go, birds and butterflies migrate. We experience this predictability in a personal way. Early in autumn, I was on one of my all too infrequent walks in the Park. The weather was warm as I passed bullfrog pond, turning left along the trail just south of the vernal pool, when suddenly I was in the midst of a swarm of Monarch butterflies. We had a particularly large crop of milkweed this summer and whenever I had an opportunity to pass one of these plants, I would sneak a peak under the leaves to check for Monarch eggs, so tiny they are difficult to see. As summer wore on, the eggs became caterpillars. The caterpillars got fatter, the leaves took on the appearance of green lace, and, before long, pupae hanging from Milkweed, became adult butterflies. The beautiful Monarchs that crowded the trail that autumn day were on the verge of leaving Palmyra Cove. They were heading for Mexico. I wondered if I would see them again before their departure. A week or so later I went to the same spot and they were gone. I felt sad, for the moment, but I could predict that the entire life cycle of the Monarch would repeat itself next summer. The predictability gave me something special to look forward to,

which brought a sense of comfort.

Visitors often say that they love Palmyra Cove because of its tranquil environment - it is quiet, serene, and predictable. They can predict what the Park will offer in a given season and time of day - wetlands teeming with dragonflies in summer, butterflies and birds migrating south from the Park in autumn, Saw-whet and Long-eared owls arriving in the Park in winter, deer grazing the edge of a trail in early morning.

While nature in the Park comforts us with its predictability, it would be a mistake to take it for granted: if something decimates the Milkweed crop, then the Monarchs will go elsewhere; if the Honeysuckle vines that create canopy for the Saw-whets are destroyed then those owls will find a winter home in another location. Attention must be paid.

A year that has been filled with experiences centered around the most uncertain issue of dredging - the flip side of “predictability yields comfort” - has helped me to understand how fragile the Park is and how important it is to the wildlife it sustains and to the humans it comforts.

You may recall that at a public meeting held in the Administration building of the Burlington County Bridge Commission on Monday August 13, 2007, Department of Environmental Protection Commissioner Lisa Jackson made it clear to the audience that while she would allow the Army Corps of Engineers to use the 20-acre cell (Confined Deposit Facility) for deposit of dredge material, she would protect the adjacent 50 acres of woodlands.

Commissioner Jackson has been true to her word. On Wednesday December 5, 2007, Tidelands Council met in Trenton and voted unanimously to amend the 1998 Management Agreement thereby reducing the Confined Disposal Facility from 70 acres to 20 acres and restarting the 30-year term of the Agreement.

I sincerely appreciate the efforts of Commissioner Jackson and the members of Tidelands Council to protect Palmyra Cove Nature Park.

My hope going forward is that we will continue to build the kinds of memories in Palmyra Cove Nature Park that create predictable experiences that provide the greatest comfort for all.

*Clara Ruvolo, Executive Director*





## LET US CULTIVATE OUR OWN GARDEN

Environmental degradation is now a generally accepted fact. Every day this message is loud and clear in all forms of media. Amid all the noise, I remembered a work I read long ago, one that seems as fitting today as it was when written in 1759. A French philosopher/writer, Voltaire, wrote *Candide, ou l'Optimisme*, now abbreviated in English to "Candide". The work concluded when, Candide, Voltaire's hero, came to the conclusion that our world is certainly not "the best of all possible worlds," and that a perfect world is not within our grasp. Voltaire suggested that we humans should occupy ourselves in daily activities rather than obsess on things beyond our comprehension. He concluded his work with, "but let us cultivate our garden".

As a new employee at Palmyra Cove, I was impressed with the commitment and skills of volunteer gardeners who literally put "cultivate our garden" into action in this public park. This is a

place where each of us can make a concrete, tangible difference. Yes, we can make a difference in this one spot.

Ward Dasey, an accomplished gardener, volunteered to help expand the already existing idea of creating a garden for migrating butterflies and birds, a respite where these travelers could find food, water, and rest before continuing their journey. As a result, the idea of a garden with many purposes became a reality. Ward propagated and nurtured the seedlings at his home, and when the time was right, he gathered a group of fellow gardeners from all over NJ to help plant them. The BC Bridge Commission maintenance crew cultivated a strip of land between the new access roads to the park. I came to work one day and discovered an amazing team of volunteer gardeners planting in all garden areas around the Discovery Center and on the access road. A garden was born. An idea became reality.

Because the park has a resident deer population, as well as ground hogs, rabbits, and other critters all bent on making a garden salad out of the garden, everyone was philosophical when the little shoots were planted. In choosing plants, the first question was always do the deer like this or that plant? "It will be an interesting experiment" is what Ward is fond of saying. What did they have to work with? Poor sandy, dry soil with weeding done by volunteers. This was not the plot of ground one would consider "El Dorado" as in Voltair's perfect place that lived in the imagination. But then, hasn't the desert bloomed in the Sinai?

And so, the Garden was tilled. Tender little shoots were planted. When nature didn't provide the needed water, Bridge Maintenance watered the vulnerable young plants. The sun shone. The deer, groundhogs and rabbits waited. And then one day, it happened. Flowers! Flowers everywhere! The sky filled with a snowstorm of Cabbage White Butterflies. Monarch caterpillars filled the milkweed before they morphed into butterflies. Hummingbirds flitted here and there among the colorful blooms. Plants and trees were filled with a moving rainbow of colorful birds. The deer, groundhogs and rabbits feasted on the zinnias and cosmos, but they left enough of the sages and other plants for the passing migrant birds. All this vegan feasting and munching aside, it was a true feast for our own eyes as well. A welcoming kaleidoscope of colorful blossoms waved in the breeze.

Winter is a busy time for gardeners. It's time to plan for next year's garden. There is a meeting of gardeners here at Palmyra Cove Discovery Center at 7:00 PM on January 8, 2008. Master Gardeners, highly skilled gardeners, and dilettante gardeners like I, will meet to plan next year's garden and garden projects. The meeting is open and we welcome all who want to participate, meet, or learn from experienced gardeners willing to share what they know. Bring your ideas on how we can contribute to "the Greening of America" right here at Palmyra Cove. We not only have the power to cultivate our garden, but in the process, to share that beautiful garden space with nature and people alike.

Pam Reid  
Assistant to the Executive Director



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*.

## Education Corner

**Staff Training and Updates:** Our initial staff training was September 11. We were pleased to welcome a new member to our staff, Joanne Dunston. Joanne is a former elementary school teacher who decided to stay home with her son and work at the Cove while her son is in school. The training focused on two of our current lessons - "Groundwater: The Water You Don't See" and "The Map Game" activity. We did an overview of the groundwater lesson and scheduled an intensive training on September 17. Staff members were divided into teams to play the "Map Game". The staff eagerly matched their wits and skills in navigating the orienteering course in the park.

In addition to required training sessions at the Cove, staff members often seek training opportunities elsewhere. Maryann Young has completed the Environmental Stewards training through Rutgers University and June Emens completed a Junior Master Gardener workshop. I have just completed an online Watershed Management course through the United States Environmental Protection Agency. Our environmental educators are paid professionals and are really the backbone of our program. We are proud of their dedication and enthusiasm. We are looking to add a few staff members for the spring season. If you have a passion for environmental causes and love to be outdoors, please call us at 856-829-1900 x 263.

**Fall Events:** Visits by schools are the highlight of our fall season. The season began with Philadelphia Mennonite High School on September 14. The Make A Splash! Water Festival followed on September 28. This annual event is organized by Cinnaminson Public Schools Project Challenge Coordinator, Elaine Mendelow. The Burlington County Bridge Commission and Palmyra Cove host about 200 students from Cinnaminson elementary schools. The water festival was followed by a busy October. Moorestown Upper Elementary School (MUES) led the way by sending 344 4th graders during the first two weeks of October, the fourth consecutive year that we have had the pleasure of hosting MUES. Tracy Michael, now the MUES science coordinator, has worked with us to make the trip enjoyable and educational. We also hosted Charles Street School, Palmyra, for several visits. Steve Graff, Palmyra coordinator of the Gifted and Talented Program, brings the students to the park several times during the school year. Mansfield Township

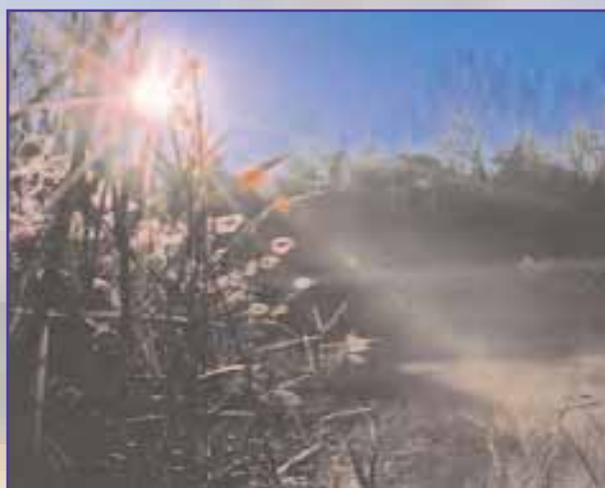
Elementary School also visited for the fourth consecutive year. Other returning schools were Our Lady of Grace Holy Rosary Regional School, Riverfront Elementary School (Florence), and St. Joseph's Pro Cathedral of Camden.

It is fair to say that without the support of students and staff from the schools that visit the Cove, Palmyra Cove Nature Park would have become a dredge deposit basin. Students and staff from many of the schools wrote letters, sent e-mails, and put out signs to support us in our "Save the Cove" campaign. When Lisa Jackson, Commissioner of the State Department of Environmental Protection, visited the Palmyra Cove, she had a pile of letters from students in hand. Those letters had a huge impact on the final resolution of the issue.

Due to the dredging dilemma, we did not schedule our usual "Adopt A Beach" fall cleanup. Thankfully, on Saturday, October 13, we received help from Linda Delaney and her friends from the Universalist Unitarian Church of Cherry Hill. Removing trash from our riverbank is an on-going task. Despite the river being cleaner than thirty years ago, much work remains to be done to improve water quality in the lower Delaware River. Trash, particularly plastic, is unsightly and a hazard to aquatic animals. We welcome volunteers from all ages and backgrounds to clean the shoreline. We will be having a spring cleanup in April, 2008.

**Looking Forward:** Since our dredging issues are behind us, we have been able to concentrate on our winter programs. We now offer hikes for senior citizens scheduled for most Wednesdays during the winter months and we will continue our evening owl prowls. For more information regarding the winter schedule, check our website, [www.palmyracove.org](http://www.palmyracove.org).

*Ed Sanderson, Director Environmental Education*



## THE HUMMINGBIRD HIGHWAY

### A Little Natural History –

Ruby-throated Hummingbirds who begin their lives in nests in May and June throughout the East eventually find their way to the dry regions of Costa Rica by late fall. It is a long journey for these tiny birds and covers thousands of miles. A bird born in New Jersey must navigate its way through the Southeast, swing around the Texas Coast, and then fly across Mexico. Somehow, even though they have never made the journey before, these tiny creatures find their way past all of migration's hazards, and so far enough have arrived safely at their destination's end to sustain their population from year to year. So far so good, even though the modern world has wrought changes all along their route.

### The Three Legged Stool –

Many of us have found out the hard way what can happen when a chair leg gives way. The Three Legged Stool is a good analogy for bird migration. One leg is for nesting, another for migration, and another for winter habitat. Remove any of those legs and it will all come tumbling down: if a bird's forests are cut down then it can't nest, if there isn't enough habitat during migration it will starve, and if its wintering territories have been converted to grazing and agriculture it will find no place to winter. Thus the Three Legged Stool.

### The Roll of Palmyra Cove Nature Park –

If you were to sit on the banks of the Delaware River at the cove in late July the first thing you might notice would be the gulls going about their business and the summering cormorants fishing up and down the river.

If you were lucky you might see a local Peregrine chasing a pigeon. But if you tarried long enough and looked closely enough you would see tiny black specks, like big bumble bees, moving south at fantastic rates. And what are those? They are Ruby-throated Hummingbirds making their way to Costa Rica. They have used the Delaware River for seasons beyond count and for good reason. The river banks in mid to late summer are rich and moist and full of food, at least they were before they became commercial zones. Native plants like Jewelweed, and Impatiens use hummingbirds to pollinate. Those plants wait to flower until the hungry migrants pass by. The clouds of gnats rising from the damp alluvial soil are protein used to build fat and muscle. It is a full course meal. But if you look across the river you will notice a problem. The native landscape is gone, replaced by industry and housing; the tidal flats have been rirapped, and all has been replaced by an urban desert. All along the banks of the lower Delaware River the story repeats itself: the once bountiful landscape has become a hungry place.

So, near the banks of the Delaware River we are planting a garden -- a way station for hungry travelers. Our goal is to give respite and sustenance to our small charges and make a place where people and hummingbirds can share a space. It is also our hope that gardeners will take what they have learned back to their own yards. Through education and the sharing of seeds and plants we hope to make our region a better host for these tiny wonders. We owe it to ourselves and our children.

*Ward Dasey, Guest Contributor*

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## Philly art students exhibit their handcrafted shelters and camp-out at the cove

What do you get when you mix 33 design students, a controversial nature park, and a dozen handcrafted shelters? You get an idea of how popular Palmyra Cove Nature Park has become since surviving a nearly year-long battle against dredge spoil threats. One of the educational institutions that became aware of the park's importance is The University of the Arts (formerly Philadelphia College of Art), a multidisciplinary university located in Center City Philadelphia that offers programs in the visual arts and design, performing arts, and media and communication. On October 18, Industrial Design students from the university held an outdoor exhibition and critique of their handmade emergency shelters and then camped overnight in the park.

"It was great to see the park and become aware of such a great resource so close to the city," said professor Beth Van Why. An urban art school tends to attract students who grew up in cities – for many of the students, sleeping in the woods was a first.

"We already saw two snakes – it was great!" said sophomore John Pender as he struggled to hang his shelter six

feet high in a tree before nightfall. "We've been working on our project for the last 20 hours straight. Pender and his three teammates designed their shelters based on the word tree; other themes were wearable, inflatable, found, public/private, emergency, and expand/collapse.

Richard Pearsall, a reporter from South Jersey's Courier-Post who had written about the park during the dredging controversy, walked among the shelters and interviewed students for a story about the project. He admitted he had never seen anything like the shelters.

"Where did you buy your tents?" He asked students in the wearable group, who had designed outfits that transformed into shelters.

"We made them. We designed them, we gathered the materials, and we sewed them together," explained student Sebastian Brauer, who wore a sport coat that turned into a tent.

This partnership between UArts and Palmyra Cove was a landmark event for both groups. The park had hosted only one previous campout, and that was with local Boy Scouts. Formerly, UArts held the event at a Chadd's Ford farm owned by a faculty member.

Courtney McLaughlin, co-founder of Cove Action Network (CAN), works in the University Communications department at UArts and helped set up the partnership. At the height of the dredging controversy, Courtney turned to her colleagues for creative ideas on how to protect the park. The chair of UArts' Industrial Design program (which has a reputation for being green), Rama Chorpash, responded that the park would make an ideal setting for his department's sophomore camp-out. Courtney realized that holding this event at the park would educate a whole new community about Palmyra Cove and would make more people aware of its importance.

Courtney invited professors Beth Van Why and Kerry Larkin to meet park director Clara Ruvolo, scout the park, and explore the possibilities. "We had to consider where the students would be able to build a campfire, since building a sense of community is almost as important as building the tents themselves," Courtney said. "At first we scouted out spots by the river, but then we found a lovely location in the woods south of Dragonfly Pond in an area which would have been destroyed by dredge spoils."

While the students set up their shelters, listened to music and built a campfire, the guest critics arrived. For the next two hours, the sophomores bounced their ideas off 40 "teachers." The found group's Bethany Casperite, with arms encircled by lovely vine-like tattoos, explained the importance of the critique process. "Our professors like teaching us by having us talk to the upper classmen to see how they did it," she said. "That's something they encourage, because you learn better that way."

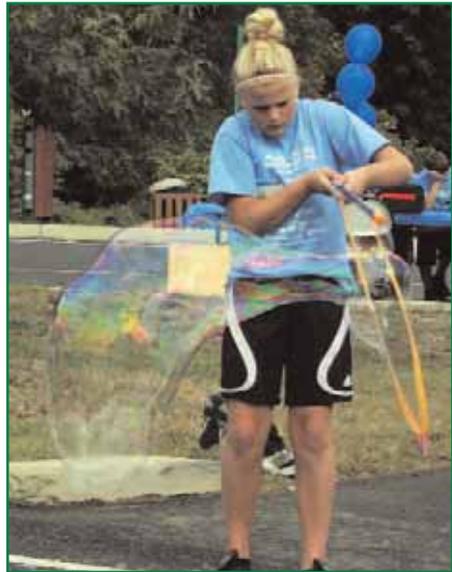
Bethany's teammate Elissa Meyers, who walked around barefoot, explained how the found structure balanced aesthetics and materials. She said her team used unpainted cardboard and green skylights to give the structure a natural feel. "We asked bike stores to give us their boxes because they just recycle them or throw them out," she explained. "We used cardboard, old screens and shipping plastic, but wanted it to look natural so we didn't paint it. We also designed shutters and then heat sealed them with an iron," said Elissa. With green skylights and an earthy color, the Yurt-like structure melted into the background of Palmyra Cove's woods.

The last group that presented, the emergency group, had to explain their walking-stick shelters loudly to be heard over the crickets. Night cloaked the campers in darkness and the ten or so students who had never camped out began to feel excited. After the critiques finished, the students cooked dinner and roasted S'mores over the campfire. Everybody kept talking about whether it would rain – and if it did, whether their shelters would keep them dry. But the weather cooperated, staying warm and dry. Even walking to the portable restroom gave students the chance to take a moonlit hike among ponds and trees and appreciate the park as a backdrop for their art.

All 33 students survived their first official critiques - and the night spent sleeping in handcrafted shelters under the threat of rain. Bug spray and positive feedback were in no short supply.

*Courtney Mc Laughlin, Guest Contributor*





# Cove Currents

## Palmyra Cove Nature Park

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In memory of our friend and colleague  
Andrea Bartolomeo  
March 17, 1979 - November 29, 2007

