

COVE CURRENTS

Greetings from the Executive Director

Winter has always been a favorite season of mine, but I will remember this one for the significant disappointment it delivered and for the significant step we took toward our future.

We had scheduled our major fund-raiser of the year for Saturday, February 6, 2010. We called it Frost and Feathers Ball. How prophetic that was. The fund-raising committee worked tirelessly for months and when we left the Environmental Discovery Center on Friday, after setting up and decorating the exhibit hall for the dinner dance the next evening, the room was picture perfect for a winter ball. However, for several days we had been hearing dire predictions of a pending blizzard scheduled to hit our area on Saturday, February 6th, but this is New Jersey, we thought, how bad could it be? I resisted suggestions that perhaps I should cancel the event. After all, a list of delightful guests had been printed; silent auction items had been donated, recorded, and displayed; a delicious menu had been chosen; the hall looked gorgeous in blue and white with “snowflakes” hanging from the ceiling and tiny white lights wound throughout the trees just outside of the large exhibit hall windows. And, I wanted, more than anything, for this party to take place. However, for most of Saturday I listened to weather reports and watched from my living room window as snow fell and drifted high for as far as the eye could see. I spoke with my colleagues and the caterer by phone many times throughout the day, still resisting the idea of cancelling. Not until I heard from the band leader, who said that his musicians were snowed in, did I relent.

The disappointment of cancelling the ball notwithstanding, this winter season provided us with the pleasure of its beauty as well as time for planning for the future.

As you know, environmental education is the cornerstone of our mission at Palmyra Cove Nature Park. Under the outstanding leadership of Director of Environmental Education Edward Sanderson, Naturalist Kristina Merola and an experienced teaching staff provide outdoor experiential education programs that are an excellent and important complement to traditional classroom studies in environmental science. This spring will be our busiest ever with field trips planned for 1,723 students from 23 different schools.

Going forward, our goal is to add programs using a Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) curriculum for

students of all ages, but with a special emphasis on grades 9 through 12. Toward this end, Palmyra Cove Environmental Education Foundation, Inc., along with its partners, Drexel University, Rowan University, Burlington County Institute of Technology, and the Burlington County Bridge Commission, has applied for a grant from the National Science Foundation to fund a geoscience educator at Palmyra Cove Nature Park.

The Burlington County Bridge Commission recently entered into a partnership with Drexel University. This new initiative called “The Learning Bridge” allows Drexel faculty to utilize the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge as a teaching tool for civil engineering students. The Tacony-Palmyra Bridge provides these students with field experience that addresses not only the design and construction of the bridge, but also the environmental, social, political, and economic issues relevant to the bridge. They “study” the bridge in a real-world setting. Eventually, they will monitor data that measures the effect of pressures placed upon the bridge under various circumstances. This approach provides Drexel students with an opportunity to participate in experiential learning in a way that enhances and enriches the traditional academic classroom experience.

If we are able to add a geoscience educator to our staff, then PCNP will be in a position to offer programs that stress the STEM curriculum and reach a broader audience, the secondary school population. These programs will be modeled on our successful environmental education programs; we will use the same outreach techniques to reach this new audience. These programs will encourage students, male and female from every socio-economic bracket, to consider science and technology as options for extended study and career opportunities. STEM programs will bridge the gap between environmental education programs for elementary school students and experiential learning opportunities for university students.

There is an opportunity, I believe, for Palmyra Cove Nature Park to become a regional destination for informal experiential learning that not only introduces students to new and exciting information but also cultivates a desire to learn, expand horizons, and excel.

Clara Ruvolo, Executive Director





The Rodent That Shaped a Continent

Those who are familiar with articles that I've written for *Cove Currents* know I like to write about birds. Well, other animals that live in the nature park are just as fascinating. One of these animals is the North American Beaver.

The North American Beaver is the largest rodent in North America. It is a semi-aquatic mammal that spends a great deal of its life in or near water.

Beavers have thick brown fur and can attain 30 to 40 pounds in weight. Their hind feet are webbed to aid in swimming. A distinctive feature is their broad flat scaly tail. Beavers slap their tail on the water to warn other beavers that danger is near. Food for a beaver consists of aquatic vegetation, leaves of trees such as the willow and the inner bark of trees. Our educator, Ed Sanderson, has noted that our beavers seem to like black cherry trees. Beavers have very sharp prominent front teeth that they employ to good use in cutting down trees.

Beavers cut down trees for several reasons. First they use the downed trees to build a mound shaped lodge along a waterway where they will spend much of their lives. Then they will build a dam across that waterway to form a moat around their lodge. The moat serves to protect the lodge from predators. Before winter sets in they will gather a cache of food which they will submerge in the pond they have made. A beaver pond can

flood many acres. This sometimes brings beavers into conflict with their human neighbors. The beaver is second only to man in its ability to alter its environment. Once the lodge has been constructed, a beaver can start a family. Beavers have one litter a year. A normal litter consists of 2-3 young called kits. Young beavers will live with their parents for about two years after which they will leave to find their own territories. A beaver can live up to 10 years in the wild.

How did this rodent shape a continent? In Seventeenth Century Europe no self-respecting gentleman was properly dressed without his beaver fur felt hat. Demand for beaver fur to make hats had driven the European Beaver to near extinction. French traders looked to the Americas to supply beaver fur, the American Beaver being just as suitable for hat making. Trappers penetrated deep into the unexplored continent in search of their furry quarry. Following the trappers into the West were the trading companies, then the prospectors, farmers, and townspeople. Soon all of North America was populated by Europeans. By the 1850's, beaver fur hats were out of fashion and the beaver was all but gone. By that time, Canada and the United States of America had come into existence and a new world order was about to begin. It's a lot more complicated than that, of course, but the role of the beaver in bringing about modern America cannot be underestimated. Canada has recognized the role of the beaver in Canadian history by making it their national animal, and by putting its visage on their nickel.

Clyde Croasdale, Guest Contributor



East Meets West at Palmyra Cove

The Holidays came early this year for Palmyra Cove Nature Park with the arrival of a special feathered friend, a female Spotted Towhee. This Western bird is without a doubt a gift that keeps on giving. Birders from New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland have flocked to Palmyra Cove repeatedly just to get a glimpse of her. We have hosted her stay for three-plus months and we could not be happier.

During a conversation I had with Birder Greg Mahler a couple of months ago I asked, "Will she stay or will she go?" The Spotted Towhee's normal range is from the Western Great Plains to the Pacific Ocean. In answer to my question Greg said, "I believe she will stay, because food is abundant" and "if she doesn't find the Hawks too bothersome." At that exact moment, a large Red-Tailed Hawk flew just above us and landed on a tree approximately seven feet ahead. It was as if the Hawk were listening to our conversation and wanted our attention and admiration. We, of course, complied.



Photo by Jonathan Maccornack

During my research on the Spotted Towhee, I discovered the New Jersey Birds Record Committee (NJBRC). The first known record of a Spotted Towhee in New Jersey was in Middlesex County in 1952. The fifth and last accepted record by Ward Daisy was fifteen years ago in Salem County.

I am proud to say that our Spotted Towhee is the first which will be recorded in Burlington County, New Jersey. I would be remiss if I did not mention that the third Spotted Towhee recorded in New Jersey at Island Beach State Park in 1987 was banded and photographed by Eileen and Greg Mahler. Greg was gracious enough to let me interview him.

I spent many lunch hours in the park this winter watching, listening, and hoping to get a look at this rare beauty. The birders I met were friendly and more than happy to give me helpful tips. Apparently our Spotted Towhee has

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Rethinking the Greening of America's Lawns

An unprecedented change is happening in America's view of the garden and lawn today. Water is expensive in urban and suburban areas. Many seemingly effective pesticides are now banned as health hazards. The populations of moles, voles, rabbits, squirrels, and deer damage our plants and grasses. They are problematic because the predators who keep their numbers in harmony with the environment can't survive in urban and suburban areas. Our landfills are overflowing. The number of migrating birds is rapidly diminishing because they are finding feeding habitat harder to find on their journey.

Gardening traditions were brought to America by the settlers from the major old world gardening communities. As Americans living in towns and country houses, we see our home as framed by lush green lawns coming from the English and French traditions. We see perennial gardens coming from the Cottage Garden tradition as beautiful. We can see elements of the calming Japanese gardens in many local gardens. The Japanese influence is much greater in America's city spaces and small pocket gardens; however, there are large-scale attempts at Japanese-style gardens like the one at the Rockefeller Estate along the Hudson River in New York State. We have culturally accepted the weedless, forever-green lawn framing our home as a source of pride and a thing of beauty. It is our tradition, much like the expansive lawns of the English, or the manicured lawns of the French aristocracy except, here, the lawn is on plots of ground averaging one quarter acre to two acres. This notion of lawn is so ingrained that anyone not complying with lawn

regulation is often seen as a threat to the property value and aesthetic nature of the neighborhood.

The true beauty of a landscape is that it is ever-changing. Garden and landscape styles become fashionable, and then go out of fashion according to prevalent views. There will always be thinkers who wonder how they can do a thing better, or more efficiently. Since we live on relatively small plots of land, what can be done to ease the landfill burden? What would be pleasing from the street, but practical to maintain? What would feed both birds and butterflies? Please, if you have ideas either come in or send them to me. The gardeners here at Palmyra Cove are thinking along those lines and are interested in your ideas. It's time to rethink our future, our homes, and our lives. The beauty of a landscape is its capacity to change—hopefully, we can say the same of ourselves.

Pam Reid, Assistant to the Executive Director



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chosen Eastern Towhees as her companions. My research revealed that the two species are very closely related; until recently they were considered one species, the Rufous-sided Towhee. The Spotted bird bred in the West and the Eastern bird in the East. In 1995 the American Ornithologist's Union (AOU) decided that the two groups were sufficiently distinct to be considered a separate species.

Another interesting fact that makes this bird so elusive is that it is a ground-dwelling bird. The Spotted Towhee uses a two-footed scratching method, kicking both feet backward at the same time through the underbrush, dry leaves, and grasses to uncover hidden seeds and insects. It has a strong conical bill adapted to seed cracking. This movement is often quite loud and helps to locate the bird, along with its call. Ear birding unfortunately did not help me to see her. But I know I heard her!

The Spotted Towhee has a short neck and chunky body with a long rounded tail. The males have jet-black upperparts and throat; their wings and back are spotted bright white. The flanks are warm rufous (red) and the belly is white. Females have the same pattern but are grayish where males are black.

In conclusion, I want to thank Mother Nature for sending Palmyra Cove Nature Park this precious gift via airmail!

Kim Addiego, Cove Assistant



Photo by Jonathan Maccormack



Education Corner



Staff Changes: In anticipation of hosting more than 1,700 students this spring, it was necessary to hire additional staff. Maryann Young, a former Cove teacher, will be able to rejoin us and work several days this spring. We also welcome Leah Cleary, a resident of Moorestown. Leah has a background in education and working with special needs children. A native Arizonan who grew up next to a national forest, Leah cultivated a love for the outdoors early in life. We look forward to her sharing the magic of nature with children who visit the Cove.

Staff Spotlight: Anjie Horn and Al Shinn have been mainstays at Palmyra Cove since 2003. They started as volunteers

in the spring of 2003 and became teachers by the fall of that year. Al worked many years in industry and was also a “waterman of Barnegat Bay.” Al spent many summers feeling for clams on the bay bottom and selling his catch to restaurants. If you have been seining at Palmyra Cove, then you probably have met Al Shinn. Al also helps with scout activities, cleanups, and anything that needs to be done. Al is very involved in his church, Sacred Heart, and likes to be busy. He and his wife, Betty, live in Palmyra. Anjie is an avid birder who readily shares her passion with all interested parties. Her love for nature is contagious and if you have been lucky enough to accompany her in the park, you know what I mean. She almost always finds something special. Anjie also works with scout groups, leads Beginning Birding Hikes and Family Hikes, and helps with Cove Caterpillars, cleanups, and assorted activities at the Cove. Anjie lives in Riverton with her husband, Gary. Al and Anjie are two special individuals who exemplify the best of Palmyra Cove.

Winter Activities: One of the highlights of the winter season is our “Owl Prowls.” We had our first Owl Prowl on January 7, 2010. This was a two-hour indoor program

that started with a live owl presentation by Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge. The indoor program was followed by a one-hour hike where participants searched for owls. In past years, we had a live owl presentation in our classroom during the last week in December. Cedar Run was closed that week, so our Naturalist, Kristina Merola, borrowed an owl from Cedar Run for a classroom presentation. Unfortunately, the owl we borrowed, Clack, passed away last year. None of the current group of Cedar Run owls has the temperament to be handled by outside staff. We followed the January 7 program with three 1 hour hikes on successive Thursdays. We had twenty-six people attend the January 7 Owl Prowl and a total of 37 attend the last three. Considering it was a fairly cold January, we were pleased with the turnout. The greatest disappointment was not seeing owls. A pair of great horned owls nested in the park during the past five winters, but the nesting tree tumbled down last fall and we have not been able to locate the new nest. We are still searching.

First-graders from Yocum School, Maple Shade, hoping to see our owls, visited on February 2. This was a return visit from last year. It was disappointing not to see the owls again, but we found their pellets. The children probably saw 25 deer and examined recent cuttings from our beavers. It was also a spectacular day for seeing birds. The birds must have sensed the impending snowstorms and were in a feeding frenzy. Who says children aren’t as tough as they used to be? These first-graders walked more than a mile on a cold day and had no complaints. They were certainly hungry at lunch time, though.

The Burlington County 4H participated in a beach cleanup on January 18. The timing was perfect. The ice along the riverbank had melted since the last cold spell and the snows of February were still two weeks away. Since the 4H visit, we have seen mostly skiers and snowshoers. Last year I was hoping for snow. This year I am ready for Spring. It looks as though Punxsutawney Phil was right about six more weeks of Winter. We know Spring is on its way because pitchers and catchers just reported to Spring training. Cove teachers will be coming to Spring training in March. Similar to baseball fans, we look forward to the new season.



Edward Sanderson, *Director, Environmental Education*

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

Photos credited to Bennett Landsman, Steve Greer and Jonathan Maccornack.

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

Naturalist Notes

Winter at Palmyra Cove Nature Park has been great for our cross-country skiers and snowshoe enthusiasts. The park turned unrecognizable under all of the snow, and new “trails” were made by visitors while the marked ones were not visible. The snow cover was also great for tracking our resident animals, from our common white-tailed deer, eastern gray squirrels, and eastern cottontails, to the secretive striped skunks, raccoons, and red foxes. Our Beaver Pond beavers have been active all winter, as can be observed from more trees gnawed down behind the pond near the tidal cove.

While warming up inside, I have been preparing for our spring events: Cove Caterpillar preschool series, Palmyra Cove Nature Park’s Second Annual Sustainability Fair, and Burlington County Bird Quest, as well as Family Hikes, Beginning Birding for Adults, and Cove Camper’s Summer Camp.

Cove Caterpillars preschool program for 2 to 5-year-olds has expanded again this spring, our fifth season, due to an increase in demand. Regularly scheduled from 10:00 am to 11:00 am Monday and Tuesday mornings, the program now has an additional afternoon session on Monday from 1:00 pm-2:00 pm. We are looking forward to a great season of hands-on learning about owls, life in a log, snakes, and other nature topics.

Palmyra Cove Nature Park’s Second Annual Sustainability Fair will be held on Saturday, April 17, from 10:00 am to 2:00 pm. Our family-oriented event will be larger than last year and will include more family activities. Our keynote speaker is Kris Ohleth, Director Environmental Programs, from Deep Water Wind. She will be discussing the wind turbines to be placed 16 miles off the Jersey shore. Other vendors will include Nogginhaus LLC on photovoltaic energy, Land Forms native landscaping which will be handing out tree saplings, and BCIT with its hydrogen fuel cell golf cart. Animal ambassadors will be around the park promoting conservation through Woodford Cedar Run, Falconer Jennifer Penna, and Turtle Lady Cindy Pierson. Pompeston Creek Watershed Association will be promoting clean waterways through a hands-on model. Local businesses will include Schwering’s Hardware with energy conservative products, Wildbirds Unlimited with environmental friendly bird-feeding products, Busy Bees on backyard beekeeping and honey production, and My Grandmother’s Garden with organic soap and body products. Teacher Steve Graff and Charles Street School will be holding a recycle, reuse Science Fair in our Environmental Discovery Center. Amani’s Veggie Garden will be

available for lunch and snacks. We also will be looking for beach clean-up volunteers for our annual Adopt-a-Beach shore clean-up along the Delaware River. To register for the beach clean-up, please contact Ed Sanderson at:

856-829-1900 x 263 or
esanderson@bcbridges.org.

Palmyra Cove Nature Park will hold the Fourth Annual Burlington County Bird Quest on Saturday, May 1, from 7:00 am to 12:00 noon in celebration of International Migratory Bird Day. Bird Quest is a fun, mini-competition for beginning and intermediate birders to find as many species of birds as they can in Burlington County in 5 hours. Last year, eighty-seven species were observed around the county, but not all by one team. The number of species per team ranged from 40 to 47. Think your team can do better? Now is the time to register for our 2010 event.

Family Hikes are still being held the first Saturday of every month from 9:00 am to 11:00 am (cancelled for May 1 for Burlington County Bird Quest) and Beginning Birding for Adults is still being offered the third Saturday of every month (cancelled for April 17 for Palmyra Cove Nature Park’s Sustainability Fair).

Cove Campers Summer Camp 2010 will be held the weeks of July 5-9 and July 12-16. The camp is for children going into 3rd, 4th, 5th, or 6th grades in the Fall that are interested in nature, animals, crafts, hikes, and outdoor skills. In celebration of our fifth year of camp, an evening hike will be held for the participants and any immediate family members on the Friday after each week of camp. For more information or to register for any of the above listed events, please contact Kristina Merola at:

856-829-1900 x 267 or
kmerola@bcbridges.org

Kristina Merola, Naturalist



Upcoming events Winter 2010

(For information or to register, please call 856-829-1900 x 264.)

April 12	10:00-11:00 am	Cove Caterpillars	Preschool program
April 12	1:00-2:00 pm	Cove Caterpillars	Preschool program
April 13	10:00-11:00 am	Cove Caterpillars	Preschool program
April 17	10:00-2:00 pm	Sustainability Fair	All Ages
April 17	10:00-2:00 pm	Adopt-a-Beach Beach Clean-up	All Ages
April 19	10:00-11:00 am	Cove Caterpillars	Preschool program
April 19	1:00-2:00 pm	Cove Caterpillars	Preschool program
April 20	10:00-11:00 am	Cove Caterpillars	Preschool program
April 26	10:00-11:00 am	Cove Caterpillars	Preschool program
April 26	1:00-2:00 pm	Cove Caterpillars	Preschool program
April 27	10:00-11:00 am	Cove Caterpillars	Preschool program
May 1	7:00-2:00 pm	Burlington County Bird Quest	All Ages
May 3	10:00-11:00 am	Cove Caterpillars	Preschool program
May 3	1:00-2:00 pm	Cove Caterpillars	Preschool program
May 4	10:00-11:00 am	Cove Caterpillars	Preschool program
May 15	9:00-12:00 noon	Beginning Birding for Adults	Adults
June 5	9:00-11:00 am	Family Hike	All Ages
June 14	10:00-11:30 am	Summer Vacation Family Fun Program	Family Program
June 19	9:00-12:00 noon	Beginning Birding for Adults	Adults
June 21	10:00-11:30 am	Summer Vacation Family Fun Program	Family Program
June 28	10:00-11:30 am	Summer Vacation Family Fun Program	Family Program
July 3	9:00-11:00 am	Family Hike	All Ages
July 5	9:00-12:00 noon	Cove Campers Summer Camp Week 1	3rd-6th graders
July 12	9:00-12:00 noon	Cove Campers Summer Camp Week 2	3rd-6th graders
July 17	9:00-12:00 noon	Beginning Birding for Adults	Adults

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