



COVE CURRENTS

GREETINGS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The longest political season in memory is upon us. I love it!

Political campaigns are often referred to as “theater” and this season began with a cast of thousands. We watch and listen to John and Mike, Hillary and Barack. Through debates, rallies, paid advertising, newspaper, television, and radio reporting, surrogates on the stump, pundits everywhere, and sound bites repeated endlessly day in and day out, we are bombarded with information.

Democracy depends upon a well-informed electorate. We take great quantities of information, sort through it in a way consistent with our age, experience, national and world views, and we make a choice. In order to separate the wheat from the chaff, though, we have to have some knowledge of the major issues affecting us as individuals, as a nation, and as citizens of the world. We have to be capable of sorting through promises and declarations, made by the candidates, of thinking critically and analytically about what we see and hear, in order to make a determination about how well the candidates suit our needs.

The end result of politics is government.

Unfortunately, important issues of concern for the health of the environment, such as climate change, alternate sources of fuel, and suburban sprawl are not front and center in the political debate.

At Palmyra Cove Nature Park we are doing our best to educate future voters. This campaign season has prompted me to think about the mission of Palmyra

Cove Environmental Education Foundation, Inc. (PCEEF) and about how we should expand that mission going forward. Our environmental science education focus has been on programs written for elementary school students, taught in small groups in a 250-acre outdoor classroom. These programs are popular among teachers, parents, and students. We will continue to develop and expand them. As students study the science of wetlands, woodlands, and habitat conservation, the hope is that they will become stewards of the environment and eventually demand, as voters, that those issues that impact the health of the environment will become important to the politicians seeking their votes.

In keeping with our interest in helping to develop a well-informed citizenry, however, we should do more. Palmyra Cove Nature Park has the potential to develop into an important regional center for the study of science. We have taken another step in that direction. Palmyra Cove Nature Park (PCNP) has teamed up with Burlington County Institute of Technology (BCIT) to become a GLOBE partner.

As described in the GLOBE literature, “The GLOBE Program (Global Learning and Observation to Benefit the Environment) is a worldwide hands-on, primary and secondary school-based education and science program”, financed by NASA and the National Science Foundation. Internationally, GLOBE is a partnership among the United States and 111 countries around the world. Scientists and students participating in the program collect and share data from a variety of research projects with their counterparts in other countries.

Education Corner



Professional Development: The winter season is a time when many of the park animals go into hibernation or resort to catnaps during the cold weather, which has been so infrequent this year that our climate seems more like the coastal plain of Virginia than the New Jersey I remember. One January stretch of weather was so mild that a garter snake was sunning itself on one of the park trails. The decline of human visitors in winter provides an opportunity for more intense exploration of the park by the staff and new opportunities for professional development, such as the EPA's free online professional development courses.

The EPA site enabled me to get a certification in watershed management and expand my understanding of bio-monitoring, two topics that are inextricably related and applicable to the habitats of Palmyra Cove.

Biomonitoring is basically using living organisms to determine the pollution in a body of water. The EPA has established consistent practices (protocols) for monitoring bodies of water. One type of monitoring involves aquatic macroinvertebrates, organisms that can be seen without a microscope. Certain macroinvertebrates are highly tolerant to pollution while others need superior water quality to survive.

By using consistent methods of collecting and identifying macroinvertebrates, it is possible to establish an indication of water quality. Currently, there are no established protocols for freshwater tidal areas and wetlands.

Through research and collection of data, the EPA expects to establish criteria for wetlands and other aquatic habitats. Once the EPA establishes these new protocols, states will have to adopt standards consistent with the EPA. Palmyra Cove will be offering educational activities that focus on biomonitoring beginning this spring. Palmyra Cove will host a Saturday, May 17, workshop on the topic of Energy Transfer in an Ecosystem; biomonitoring will be one aspect of that workshop. Additional workshops include Project WET on April 4 and a free wetlands workshop, grades 4- 8, on May 13. For details on workshops see our website (www.palmyracove.org) or call (856-829-1900 x263).

Winter Activities: Beginning in December and continu-

ing through the winter months, we began a series of senior hikes every Wednesday, from 9 to 11 AM. Each week had a different theme. For the most part, with the exception of the orienteering, the hikes were sparsely attended. We will continue theme hikes in the spring for all ages; participants should call or email to establish a time, date, and theme that suits their needs. We are hoping this flexible schedule will encourage more people to get off the couch, out of the car and into the park. Kristina Merola, our naturalist, will continue her birding and family hikes on the first and third Saturday of the month.

We had three evening owl prowls this winter. The January 17 owl prowl was very special since Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge released a rehabilitated Saw-Whet owl. Palmyra Cove has habitats that support the migration of Saw-Whet owls and more than 25 people braved the rain to see the release. As many of you know, Cedar Run presents a program with live owls as part of our January and February owl prowls. Our partnership with Cedar Run in these ventures goes back several years. Their efforts are much appreciated and certainly add to the educational offerings at the Cove.

On January 21, students, parents and teachers from St. Mary's – Doane Academy visited the park as part of a community service commitment in honor of Dr. Martin Luther King. While this day is a holiday for many, it was not a day of leisure for the community at St. Mary's. Led by faculty member, Ginny Miller, the group helped pick up debris that was deposited in the dredge cell last September. We count on volunteers to help clean up our riverbank several times a year. The spring cleanup is scheduled during our Earth Day celebration on Saturday, April 26. We appreciate the contributions of all groups and individuals who care enough to help. If you would like to help maintain our shoreline, but this date is inconvenient, please call or email and we can make other arrangements.

Schools News: In February, we hosted a home school group with students and parents from Burlington, Camden and Gloucester Counties. Over 30 parents and children (ages 5 – 13) hiked the park trails. The younger children observed wildlife and collected assorted natural items that could be used in art projects or as little reminders of their visit. The older students learned how animals adapt to winter by observing a variety of birds (including owls), mammals and insects. Winter is actually a great time to visit the park. Since many plants die in winter months or lose their leaves, some animals and nesting places are more visible during the cooler months.

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

Hiking around the park, I always have my eyes out for migrating or uncommon bird species. I walk River Trail looking for diving ducks that have flown in to find food for the winter in the Delaware River. I walk Saw-whet Trail looking for the saw-whet owls under honeysuckle canopies. I check Beaver Pond for ducks and hawks that may be flying by. I hike down to the Cove to see if the great blue herons are back or if there are any uncommon gulls feeding in the mud flats. All the while, there are our resident winter bird flocks flying around, feeding on the seeds that have fallen under last year's leaves or picking over-ripened berries off the vines and shrubs. These winter residents are the species we see at our bird feeders eating the sunflower and nyjer seeds or suet we put out for them, the birds that got me interested in birding when I was in elementary school. These common birds are often overlooked by more experienced birders who focus on rare sightings and lost exotic birds, though these are the birds that make up our everyday landscape. They are the species that provide the background music for our outdoor adventures. They are the species that are most closely connected to our daily lives and backyard habitats.

Our backyard birds include house finches, American goldfinches, house sparrows, Northern cardinals, song sparrows, European starlings, Carolina wrens, American robins, Carolina chickadees, tufted titmice, American crows, blue jays, downy and hairy woodpeckers, red-bellied woodpeckers, and mourning doves. One can see more or less than these species depending on the seed that is put out for them. House finches will come to eat just about anything offered. American goldfinches are attracted to feeders with nyjer seeds and oil sun

flower seeds. House sparrows prefer millet. Northern cardinals love sunflower seeds of all types. Song sparrows like to eat white and red proso millet. European starlings will visit our feeder for just about anything, but prefer peanut hearts and oats. Carolina chickadees will also come to sunflower seeds and peanut kernels. Tufted titmice will come for peanut kernels and sunflower seeds. Blue jays come to feeders for peanut kernels and sunflower seeds. Dark eyed juncos are ground feeders that scuff the ground for red proso and white proso millet as well as fine-cracked corn. Mourning doves will take sunflower seeds, millet, and nyjer seed that have dropped from the feeder. Carolina wrens, heard more often than seen, prefer insects and may come to a feeder that is offering mealworms as a treat. The woodpeckers can be enticed to visit your feeding station if you provide suet.

Take some time to get to know your backyard birds. Providing food for them in an area you can readily watch and you will be amazed at their different behaviors, pecking orders, and acrobatics to acquire the easily-obtainable food. As a bonus, your backyard birds may also draw the attention of a sharp-shinned hawk looking for a fly-through fast food restaurant provided by your feeding station.



Kristina Merola, *Naturalist*



Try a Moonlight Walk in the Park

I had the good fortune of joining in “Owl Prowl” this month. Cedar Run representatives brought several owls of different types and told the whole group some very interesting information about each species. Following the indoor lecture we formed small groups and trekked through the moonlit park with our naturalist leader, Angie.

One of our fellow hikers, Adam, looks at the world from a different perspective, since he is three years old and about two and a half feet tall. It’s a tall wood and a long road if you’re three years old. Flashlight in hand, he led our group, moving like an experienced hiker, knowing how to place his feet on the rough trail by instinct, to the surprise of his mother. Angie stopped along the way to point out what deer tracks look like. Adam got it, and we followed them for a bit, looking for sleeping deer with our flashlights, but deer are secretive, and they were well hidden. Adults, concerned we might be pushing Adam too far, asked if he was ready to go back. His little face fell and his mouth followed his resolute eyes. “NO!” he said. Well, OK, onward then.

Angie pointed out fox tracks, and Adam led the way to a fresh fox hole, home to one family living in the park. We learned the hole was one of many, all intercon-

nected so the fox had lots of escape routes for the family in case of emergency.

Adam was ready to trek to the back of the park to see if we could see the beavers at night, but we were running out of time, so we slowly worked our way back to the parking lot, checking out rotting logs and other interesting things along the way. We did not see an owl, but had a wonderful time anyway. Thank you, Angie. Great job.

Family outings are easier than ever at the park, because of a membership policy change. Before the policy change an “Owl Prowl” cost \$7 per adult and \$3 per child for members, but the new policy is that most activities in the park will be free to members! That change means that you can come to Beginning Birding Classes, Guided Hikes with our Naturalist, Owl Prowls, and many other activities without charge, if you are a member. Today, annual Membership costs are \$40 per family and \$25 per individual... NO ADMINISTRATION COSTS come out of your membership. All money is used to directly support educational activities in the park. It is an investment I highly recommend because it supports excellent programming and provides a unique local resource for your family.

Pamela Reid, Assistant to the Executive Director



Focus on The Northern Flicker



The Northern flicker, *Colaptes auratus*, is a common 11 to 12 inch woodpecker with very distinctive plumage. The yellow-shafted sub-species, with bright yellow central shafts of the wing and tail feathers, is found across the eastern United States. Bright yellow flight feathers and white rump patch are easily recognizable in flight. At rest, the barred top, spotted belly, and black chest crescent are also good field marks. The female has a gray crown, brown face, and red nape crescent. The male looks the same, but also has black malar feathers that resemble a mustache.

The Northern flicker can produce a variety of calls: “Keew” is a contact call, “Bwirr” is a flush call, “Wik-a-

wik-a-wik-a-wik-a” is a close contact call, and “Kwikwikwikwikwikwikwi” is the territorial and mating song heard in the spring.

The Northern flicker can often be observed on the ground in open woodlands and forest edges in the cities and suburbs, eating their preferred food – ants! Instead of excavating for wood-boring insects like most other woodpeckers, Northern flickers use their bills and feet to dig in the dirt to find ants, and then use their long, barbed tongue to lap them up. When ants are not available, they will also eat seeds, nuts, and fruits. Northern flickers are year-round residents in New Jersey, nesting in cavities, poles, posts, houses, banks, haystacks, and nesting boxes. Their excavated holes may be used by other species, such as European starlings, Eastern gray squirrels, Eastern screech owls, and American kestrels.

Kristina Merola, Naturalist



GREETINGS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Continued from page 1

Nationally, GLOBE is a cooperative effort of schools in partnership with colleges and universities, state and local school systems, and non-government agencies.

PCNP/BCIT is the only GLOBE partner in New Jersey. All GLOBE Teacher Training Workshops in New Jersey, therefore, are conducted at Palmyra Cove. Any teacher who wishes to use GLOBE equipment to collect and share data, nationally or internationally, must attend a GLOBE workshop and learn GLOBE

protocols in order to become a GLOBE certified teacher. John Moore, Teacher of Geospatial Technologies and Director of GLOBE programming at BCIT, provides the education side of the partnership while PCNP provides the facility/laboratory side.

We are excited about this new initiative and about the prospect of expanding our educational programming as a way of helping to educate future informed citizens not only of this nation, but also of the world.

“Children are the living message we send to a time we will not see”. John W. Whitehead

Clara Ruvolo, Executive Director



Education Corner

continued from page 2

This winter we are partnering with The Delaware Riverkeepers to put together a spring program for environmental science students from Camden High School. Fred Stine, of the Riverkeepers, is coordinating with Camden High School. The Cove will schedule and conduct the activities for their April 17 visit, the first to Palmyra Cove by Camden High School. We look forward to working with the school staff, students, and

The Delaware Riverkeepers in this venture.

Available spring dates are quickly disappearing from the calendar, particularly in May. We anticipate expanding our staff in order to schedule larger groups and to schedule more than one school on some days. We have some open dates in April and June. Please call or email if you are interested in bringing students to the park.

Edward Sanderson, Director Environmental Education



OWL PROWL...ALWAYS A FAVORITE



Upcoming Events

Please register for all programs by calling **856-829-1900 x 264**

March 15	Beginning Birding for Adults	9:00 to 12:00	Adults	\$10 per person, Members FREE
April 4	Project WET teacher's workshop	9:00 to 3:00	Teachers	\$10 per person
April 5	Family Hike	9:00 to 11:00	All ages	\$5 per person, \$15 per family, Members FREE
April 7	Cove Caterpillars	10:00 to 11:30	Children ages 3 to 6	\$5 per child, Members FREE
April 14	Cove Caterpillars	10:00 to 11:30	Children ages 3 to 6	\$5 per child, Members FREE
April 19	Beginning Birding for Adults	9:00 to 12:00	Adults	\$10 per person, Members FREE
April 21	Cove Caterpillars	10:00 to 11:30	Children ages 3 to 6	\$5 per child, Members FREE
April 26	Earth Day Celebration	10:00 to 2:00	All ages	Free
April 28	Cove Caterpillars	10:00 to 11:30	Children ages 3 to 6	\$5 per child, Members FREE
May 3	Burlington County Bird Quest	7:00 to 12:00	All ages	\$15 per participant
May 13	Wetlands Education teacher's workshop	9:00 to 2:00	Teachers	Free
May 17	Workshop on the topic of Energy Transfer in an Ecosystem	9:00 to 1:00		\$50 per person
	Beginning Birding for Adults	9:00 to 12:00	Adults	\$10 per person, Members FREE
June 7	Family Hike	9:00 to 11:00	All ages	\$5 per person, \$15 per family, Members FREE
June 18	Summer Vacation Family Fun Program	10:00 to 11:00	All ages	\$5 per participant, Members FREE
June 21	Beginning Birding for Adults	9:00 to 12:00	Adults	\$10 per person, Members FREE
June 25	Summer Vacation Family Fun Program	10:00 to 11:00	All ages	\$5 per participant, Members FREE
July 2	Summer Vacation Family Fun Program	10:00 to 11:00	All ages	\$5 per participant, Members FREE
July 5	Family Hike	9:00 to 11:00	All ages	\$5 per person, \$15 per family, Members FREE
July 7 to July 11	Cove Campers Summer Camp Week 1	9:00 to 12:00 daily		
	Students going into 3rd through 6th grades			\$155 per student, \$115 per Member
July 14 to July 18	Cove Campers Summer Camp Week 2	9:00 to 12:00 daily		
	Students going into 3rd through 6th grades			\$155 per student, \$115 per Member
July 19	Beginning Birding for Adults	9:00 to 12:00	Adults	\$10 per person, Members FREE

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