

# COVE CURRENTS

## GREETINGS FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I learned to love winter in Grand Forks, North Dakota where winter is not a season but an experience: winds whip, unobstructed, across the plains from the Arctic Circle; the wind chill factor is measured in minutes – or seconds – the time it would take, on a given day, for an exposed area of skin to suffer frostbite; children go to school wearing not only hats and mittens, but also face-masks; batteries must be kept warm overnight or cars are unlikely to start in the morning; ice forms on the INSIDE of the living room window.

In North Dakota, the challenges and rewards of winter – planning, preparation, beauty, and quiet time to slow down our hectic lives – are clear even to the temporary resident.

Winter at Palmyra Cove is not nearly so dramatic, but, nevertheless, beautiful and welcome.

While the challenges of winter at PCNP are limited, certainly it is a place to find the time for quiet contemplation or, if you're a member of the PCNP staff, for planning a year filled with events and activities you will not want to miss.

- I am pleased to introduce Kristina Merola who will play a significant role in program development as naturalist/educator at PCNP. Kristina earned a Bachelor of Science Degree from Cook College, Rutgers University in New Brunswick and a Master of Science Degree in Ecology from Frostburg State University in Maryland. Kristina is in the process of identifying species of vegetation found in the Park and creating a database from which she will develop self-guided trail maps. Join Kristina on the first and third Saturday of each month for guided trail hikes. She will share with you her wealth of knowledge on the varieties of plant, bird, and wildlife at home in the Park. Hikes begin at 9 AM at the Environmental Discovery Center and last approximately two hours. Be advised – participation may become habit forming!
- Throughout the year we will be working with our partners from Burlington County College and the Philadelphia Academy of Natural Sciences on an Environmental Protection Agency funded project to

develop a Wetlands Education Program. The project will include a species inventory of the Cove, our tidal wetland, development of a site-specific wetlands curriculum and teacher workshops. This project is exciting for us because it expands our educational initiative. Furthermore, as you may know, the debate over deepening dredging of the Delaware River channel to 45 feet has resurfaced. If the decision to deepen the channel goes forward, then the species inventory database will be useful as a baseline for comparative research, in the future, into the effects of dredging on the ecology of the Cove.

- While there is no shortage of debatable issues, Climate Change appears to have taken center stage over the past year in no small measure, I suspect, because of the record-breaking hurricane season of 2005. It has been a year of weather related devastation worldwide and many of us are trying to understand why. Does this weather represent an aberration, a trend, a cyclical event? If you are interested in the science of weather in general and in the subject of climate change in particular, then you will not want to miss the program to be held at the Environmental Discovery Center on Tuesday, February 21, 2006 at 7 PM. We are pleased that Bob Wanton, Meteorologist with the National Weather Service Forecast Office in Mt. Holly, will be our featured speaker for the evening. His presentation will begin with a review of the previous hurricane season and move on to a discussion of Climate Change. Reservations are recommended for this one. We expect a full house.

Frank Windfelder wraps up his Big Year of Birding at PCNP with his final column in this issue of Cove Currents. Frank's personal count in 2005 reached 205. Thank you, Frank, for sharing your experience with us through your delightful and informative column.

Winter is a wonderful season for birding (think owl) and hiking in the Park, skiing when weather permits, taking advantage of indoor events at the Center, or just stopping in for a visit. We'll be looking for you.

Clara Ruvolo, *Executive Director*





# Membership – Winter 2006

Winter is the time for renewing. What better time than now to renew your membership with the Palmyra Cove nature Park (PCNP)?

The process is simple, whether you are renewing your membership or want to become a new member: log onto our website at [www.palmyracove.org](http://www.palmyracove.org) or you can contact us directly to have a membership application sent to you.

Individual Annual memberships are \$20.00, Family memberships are \$25.00. Student Memberships are \$10.00 or three hours of volunteer service. As a member, you will be invited to scheduled special events as our guest or at

a reduced cost. Furthermore, a copy of our quarterly newsletter *Cove Currents* will be mailed to you. As always, your generous membership contribution will go towards purchasing supplies for our environmental education programs. It should be noted that since 2004 PCNP has instructed over 6000 students from all over southern New Jersey and parts of Pennsylvania. For additional information, please contact:

Terri Zinn, *Assistant to the Executive Director*  
856-829-1900, extension 262 or  
[tzinn@bcbridges.org](mailto:tzinn@bcbridges.org)

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## EDUCATION AT THE COVE

### **STAFF TRAINING**

As part of our mission to provide quality environmental education, we continue to seek opportunities for professional and personal growth for staff members. The winter season may experience a drop in school visits, but

learning has no off-season. Staff attended programs and workshops that involved watershed monitoring, peregrine falcons, wetland construction design, raptor care and handling, language arts in environmental education, and tracking and trailing mammals. This training has led to the addition of new lessons on peregrine falcons, plans for planting a new wetlands area, and modifications to some existing activities.

### **SCOUTING**

Many scout groups have continued to use the Cove as a laboratory for their badge work. Scouts from Delran (Troop 3938), Burlington Township (Pack 10, Den 6), Merchantville, and Palmyra Riverton braved the elements to take night hikes, improve compass and map skills, and acquire badges. Scouts from Moorestown, Bordentown, and Cinnaminson will be visiting in January and February for night hikes and orienteering.

### **SCHOOLS**

Charles Street School teacher, Steve Graff, has brought students on several field trips to the Cove. Orienteering and winter ecology has been the main focus. Steve wants his students to experience nature throughout the year and learn how seasonal changes affect wildlife. Schools are currently reserving dates for the spring. We

are pleased to have many schools returning. St. Joseph's Pro Cathedral, Thomas Paine Elementary, Haddonfield Friends, Tabernacle Elementary, Southampton Elementary and C.P. Lamb School have scheduled return visits. We look forward to welcoming the following schools for their first visit: Seneca High School, Westampton Academy, New Albany School and Wilbur Watts Intermediate School.

### **PROGRAMS**

Since we have a resident falcon on the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge, we have created a new curriculum related to the peregrine falcon. This new program will either be part of our bird study programs or a separate program. We are also creating a site-specific wetlands curriculum for the cove area of the park called the Friends of Palmyra Cove Wetlands Educational Program (PCWEP). The program will be used to train elementary and middle school teachers in wetlands ecology as part of an EPA grant awarded to Palmyra Cove Nature Park.

Our evening education programs included an additional owl prowl in December. Our December 29 owl prowl brought 36 visitors to the park. Kristina Merola, our park naturalist, hosted the indoor portion of the program. Her special guest star was "Clack," a screech owl that we borrowed compliments of Woodford Cedar Run Wildlife Refuge. Kristina used Clack and other materials to offer insights into owl behavior and adaptations. Palmyra Cove will be hosting owl prowls with Cedar Run on January 26 and February 23.

Edward Sanderson, Director *Environmental Education*

REGISTER EARLY FOR SPRING FIELD TRIPS  
call: ED SANDERSON 856-829-1900 ext 263  
[esanderson@bcbridges.org](mailto:esanderson@bcbridges.org)

Visit our website at [www.palmyracove.org](http://www.palmyracove.org)

# PALMYRA COVE HIRES NATURALIST



Palmyra Cove Nature Park has named Kristina Merola to the new position of naturalist. In this position, Merola will create and maintain a comprehensive database of the different species of vegetation and habitats that exist along the

Cove's trails. Also, she will conduct nature hikes on the first and third Saturday of each month that explore the wide array of plants, birds and other wildlife throughout the 350-acre nature preserve.

A naturalist for more than ten years, Merola possesses knowledge in ecology and biology and has been employed as a naturalist with various nature and ecological centers including Liberty State Park, New Jersey Audubon Society and the Camden Children's Garden.



## Big Year of Birding Finale

Submitted by Frank Windfelder

### NOVEMBER

The month began auspiciously when I found a second Vesper Sparrow on the 1st. Tom Bailey found the year's first Dunlin in the tidal cove on the 5th, and Paul Driver had late Prairie, Nashville, & Black-throated Green Warblers. On the 6th, there were seven Ruddy Ducks on the Delaware River, another new bird for the year. On the 7th, the last Blue-headed Vireo of the year was seen.

The 9th was an amazing day. Ducks were everywhere, with at least 47 Hooded Mergansers present. Snow Geese were going over. There was a blue-phase Lesser Snow Goose in one of the flocks. Double-crested Cormorants were streaming downriver. A flock of 20 Lesser Scaup that flushed out of the tidal cove were new for the year, species #216, and new for me, species #200. There was a Red-throated Loon and a Pied-billed Grebe on the river.

On the 15th, an American Coot on the Delaware River was only the second of the year. There were also four Ruddy Ducks present. On the 19th, a very late Blue-gray Gnatcatcher was seen. On the 25th, Tom found a male Long-tailed Duck on the river, and I found a female. On the 26th, a Gadwall was in the tidal cove, and on the 27th, a single Greater Scaup flew downriver. My personal list now stood at 203.

### DECEMBER

On the 1st, there were seven Common Mergansers on the river, the first of the season. Two Red-breasted Mergansers were flying upriver. A late Eastern Phoebe, a Merlin, and two Black-capped Chickadees were pres-

ent. But the best bird was a Northern Saw-whet Owl, found by Kristina Merola. On the 2nd, there was an adult Bald Eagle and an American Bittern.

One each of Red-shouldered Hawk, Northern Harrier and Greater Scaup were seen on the 3rd. But the best bird was a lingering female Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, possibly the same individual seen on November 19th. It was good that we got a couple of late-lingering passerines early in the month, because the weather was about to turn prematurely cold and snowy.

On the 4th, a group of five Long-tailed Ducks were winging their way downriver. Even better for me was a group of five Common Goldeneye, bringing my personal total up to 204 species. On the 9th, I was shocked to see a flying first or second winter Glaucous Gull, another new one for me.

On the 11th, Tom and I relocated the Glaucous Gull in the tidal cove. It proved to be a first-year bird. A flyover Horned Lark was only the second Palmyra record. But perhaps the most astonishing thing was the passage downriver of 600 Canadian geese, 200 Snow Geese, and 125 Common Mergansers.

On the 22nd, a birder supposedly saw and photographed a Northern Long-eared Owl. I could hardly sleep that night in anticipation of seeing it. I went directly to the spot on the 23rd, but saw a Great Horned Owl instead. However, Ted Young had spotted a Rough-legged Hawk hovering over the big pit, only the second record for Palmyra.

Of the 216 species of birds observed throughout a wonderful year, my personal list was an astonishing 205.



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 Bennett Landsman • Friends of Palmyra Cove thank Ed McCabe for his assistance in editing *Cove Currents*.

# NATURALIST'S NOTES

Autumn 2005 was the beginning of my busy and exciting tenure at Palmyra Cove Nature Park. On November 5th, I led the first in a series of Nature Discovery Walks, *Leaf Detective*. Subsequent walks through January 7, 2006, included *Moving with the Winter Birds*, *Winter Weeds*, and *Tracking Winter Wildlife*.

Nature Discovery Walks will be held on the first and third Saturdays of every month from 9:00 a.m. to 11:00 a.m., as follows:

**February 18 – Moving with the Birds** Focuses on changes in our feathered friends during the winter and early spring migrating season

**March 4 – Trees in Winter** Discover the clues used to identify some of the Cove's oldest inhabitants

**March 18 – Moving with the Birds**

During the inclement weather, I have been working on a plant database. My goal is that a visitor coming to the Environmental Discovery Center will be able to identify a questionable plant encountered at Palmyra Cove Nature Park.

While mid-to-late winter may not be some people's favorite time of the year, there are a lot of discoveries to be made at the Cove – sights that will be missed by those who are

put off by the weather. Many bird species, some migrating here only in winter, come to the Cove to feed on the abundant food supply. Groups that can be observed here in winter include Grebes, Ducks, Hawks, Owls, Woodpeckers, various Songbirds, and more. With the trees bare, wildlife can be watched with an unobstructed view.

On the trails, look for the nests that can be reused in spring. The size of a nest can help determine what kind of animal could use it. Once the trees leaf out, there will be little chance of finding the nesting animals unless you know where to look. For example, an oriole nest from last year can be discovered hanging over the Deep Pond off Eastern Cottonwood Trail.

Birds are not the only reason to visit the Cove. Many mammals, or evidence of them, can be discovered. After a significant snowfall or drenching rain, try tracking a number of the Cove's resident wildlife, such as White-tailed Deer, Red Fox, Raccoon, and Rabbit by following their footprints.

Finally, for those who really do not want to come out into the winter cold, we will hold our Spring Stretch walk on **April 1** to watch our animal friends awaken from their long winter's nap.

I hope to see you exploring the Cove this winter!

Kristina Merola, Naturalist

Join us February 21, 2006 at 7 PM at the Environmental Discovery Center with Bob Wanton, Meteorologist National Weather Service  
Reservations Recommended

Cove Currents Issue #5 – Winter 2006



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