



# COVE CURRENTS

## Greetings from the Executive Director

Spring arrived at Palmyra Cove right on schedule. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for your spring issue of Cove Currents. For that, I apologize.

Standing at a window of the Environmental Discovery Center on a late spring morning that felt more like winter, I marveled at how indifferent the birds at our feeding station were to the cold temperature and the torrential downpour: flying in, flying out, eating (no need for bathing), fluttering their wings to shake off the excess water. Then color arrived: a Red-Bellied Woodpecker and a brightly colored male Cardinal were joined by spring arrivals, Red-Winged Blackbirds and Eastern Phoebes. It looked and felt like an all-day rain from a dark gray sky, but as the light changed in the early afternoon, traditional feelings of spring came to mind: reawakening, optimism, new beginnings. Bull Frog Basin and Dragonfly Pond, favorite sites for lessons on the value of wetlands to the ecological community, would fill with water once again; water that we hope will sustain aquatic life through the heat and drought of August.

Bright yellow school buses, as sure a sign of spring as Tree Swallows, roll into the parking lot with students eager to trade their indoor classroom for one in the Park. They disembark into the capable care and tutelage of Ed Sanderson, Kristina Merola and our entire teaching staff. We are off to another winning season at Palmyra Cove Nature Park. The joy of spring is to be found in the promises it holds and the expectations it arouses. Spring, as no other season may make us aware that we share the planet with more than a million different species all needing clean air, clean water, a stable food source, and shelter. It's not just about us.

Palmyra Cove reminds us that life is about caring, sharing, and the unexpected. In spring this is especially so. It is in the spring that our migratory birds come back to rest on their trip further north or to nest and keep us company throughout the summer. For song-birds, Palmyra Cove

provides the only mature interior forest habitat along the Delaware River coastline from the Water Gap to Cape May. It is in the spring that the wetlands come alive with aquatic life. These wetlands are especially important in an urban park such as Palmyra Cove, situated as it is in a highly developed residential, commercial, industrial region of over two million people.

In spite of its promise, however, spring 2007 has been a particularly difficult time for the staff of Palmyra Cove Nature Park and for the members of Palmyra Cove Environmental Education Foundation, Inc. The Park continues to be in jeopardy from the Army Corps of Engineers, the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection, and the Tidelands Council.

The threat that I brought to your attention in the Winter 2007 issue of Cove Currents persists. In my effort to bring you up to date on the status of that threat, I have waited until I could gather as much information as possible to present a comprehensive report on the subject. Hence, the late arrival of your newsletter.

We continue to be in danger of the Army Corps of Engineers' commandeering 70 acres of our 250-acre nature park for a dredge retention basin where they will deposit material from channel maintenance dredging. This project would destroy the park as a wildlife refuge and as an outdoor environmental science classroom. In the months between the winter issue of Cove Currents and this issue, hundreds of our supporters, countless numbers of students among them, have written letters and signed petitions supporting Palmyra Cove Nature Park and its mission. We continue to send these documents to Jon Corzine, Governor, New Jersey; Robert Andrews, US Congress, District I; Lisa Jackson, Commissioner, NJ Department of Environmental Protection; Lt. Colonel Gwen Baker, District Commander, US Army Corps of Engineers,

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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 and Catherine Nyikita for their assistance in editing *Cove Currents*.

## Naturalist Notes

With the coming of spring and warmer weather, we again focus on the natural world and our maintenance of it. We begin planting flowers and vegetable plants, mowing the lawn, mulching, cutting back our shrubs and stems that did not live through the ice storms of winter, and preparing our outdoor living spaces. We feel the need to be outdoors in the cool, fresh air before the humidity of the summer makes us retreat back to the indoors and the air conditioning, waiting for autumn. Palmyra Cove Nature Park's trails are open from sunrise to sunset for you to enjoy the chilly mornings or warm afternoons of spring with the flowers and wildlife. Look to our schedule of events for dates and times of guided hikes.

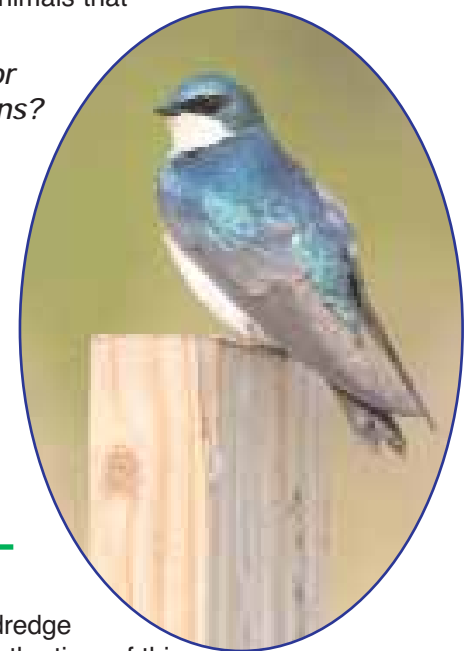
This month we are going to take a closer look at a herald of spring, the tree swallow (*Tachycineta bicolor*). The tree swallow is a fairly common and wide-spread summer resident, typically returning from its wintering grounds in early to mid-march. These small songbirds have a broad, rounded head with long, pointed wings, a long, notched tail, and tiny legs and feet. Its short, wide bill is well adapted to catching small insects in flight. It is also one of the few birds capable of digesting the wax in bayberries (*Myrica* spp.), an important food source in the winter. Tree swallows can most often be found near water and need open areas to catch food. They can drink and bathe from the air, simply flying over the water and dipping the bill to drink, or splashing into the water momentarily to bathe. Tree swallows have bi-colored plumage, dark on top and

white underneath.

Mature birds have a blue-green iridescent back. Tree swallows make a twittering call you can hear in flight. Their original nest sites were in tree cavities near water and woodpecker holes. The draining of swamps and cutting of dead trees has reduced the number of natural nest sites, and more and more often, tree swallows use nest boxes, including bluebird boxes. Outside of the breeding season, they congregate in huge flocks that roost together. You can watch the tree swallows and their aerial acrobatics at Palmyra Cove Nature Park if you visit Dragonfly Pond or Beaver Pond from early spring through autumn. We observed tree swallows on our first spring family walk of the year, "Awaking to Spring" on April 7. Participating families also observed the first flowers of spring, red fox dens and tracks, new trees our Beaver Pond beavers have removed in the maintenance of their lodge, white-tailed deer, and many bird species, such as American robin, Swainson's thrush, and singing red-winged blackbirds. Our next Family Hike will be held on Saturday, June 2, from 9:00am – 11:00am. We will be looking for more spring flowers and the animals that visit them.

*Have any questions or plant-related questions? Feel free to ask the naturalist.*

*Call Kristina at 856-829-1900 ext 267*



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Diane Allen, State Senator, District 7; Herb Conaway, State Assemblyman, District 7; Jack Conners, State Assemblyman, District 7; and to your local, elected officials. Groups of environmentalist have also joined the cause: NJ Audubon Society, including the Conservation Department and the Important Bird and Birding Program; Sierra Club; Gloucester County Nature Club; and Pompeston Creek Watershed Association among them. The New Jersey Field Office of the Federal Fish and Wildlife Service has been a particularly helpful resource.

On February 28, 2007, Commissioner Lisa Jackson took time from her busy schedule to visit the park, to learn about our programs and to tour the Army Corps' site within the park boundaries. We appreciate the time Commissioner Jackson took for this site visit. At the conclusion of her visit, she told us that there were many "competing interests" surrounding this project, but that she would keep our concerns in mind as she worked her way toward a decision: would she or would she not allow the Army Corps of Engineers to claim 70 acres of Palmyra

Cove Nature Park as a dredge material deposit site? At the time of this writing, three months after her visit, Commissioner Jackson has yet to inform us of her decision.

On May 25, 2007, Congressman Rob Andrews met with me at his Haddon Heights District Office. We discussed many of the reasons why the members of Palmyra Cove Environmental Education Foundation, Inc. believe that Palmyra Cove Nature Park should be preserved as an important wildlife habitat and as a valuable environmental education site. Congressman Andrews agreed that if the Army Corps of Engineers is allowed to deposits dredge material in the Park, then both the preservation and education functions will cease to exist. Congressman Andrews has promised to do what he can to protect the Park for his constituents and for all of the residents of the region.

Please, rest assured that I will keep you informed as our campaign to "Save Palmyra Cove" continues.

Clara Ruvolo, Executive Director



## Education Corner

**Staff Training:** Staff training took place on April 16 and 17. Teachers participated in a new orienteering activity that does not require use of a compass. Detailed maps, showing natural and cultural features, are used to navigate. The skills of orienting, folding, and thumbing a map are taught. These skills can be applied to the use of any map. To emphasize the use of these skills, we have added a new Environmental Discovery Center (EDC) map game. Students use a map of the EDC to locate exhibits and answer questions. Staff members also received additional training in watershed activities.

**Schools:** Spring is the time of year when we host most of our school trips. We have no open dates available for school visits. Out of 17 schools visiting the Cove, all but one school has been here before. We are always pleased when schools express an interest in a return visit. It indicates that they enjoyed their earlier visit and we are delighted they have chosen to return. Our new school for the spring is Riverton School. Teachers Sue Blackwell and Chris Durante attended a fall workshop and decided to bring their 3rd grade classes in May. We also welcomed back students and staff from the following schools: Baldwin (Pennsauken), Baptist Regional (Cherry Hill), C. B. Lamb (North Hanover), New Albany (Cinnaminson), Haddonfield Friends, Hartford (Mount Laurel), King's Christian (Cherry Hill), Mary Roberts (Moorestown), Sacred Heart (Mount Holly), Samuel Smith (City of Burlington), Southampton Elementary, St. Joseph's (Camden), Strawbridge Elementary (Haddon Township), Tabernacle Elementary and Thomas Paine (Cherry Hill). More than 800 students and teachers will be visiting this spring.

**Seniors and Tots:** As part of our effort to provide educational experiences to all ages, we are hosting the Tot Corporation Nursery School and Riverside Senior Citizens. Tots is a perennial visitor to the Cove, while it will be the first visit by the Riverside Senior citizens. We believe that environmental education can be appealing to people of all ages and backgrounds.

**Programs and Workshops:** Palmyra Cove was pleased to host Dr. Robert DeCandido, popularly known as "Birding Bob" of New York City's Central Park. Bob migrated to Palmyra Cove via train from NYC. His interest in birds has taken him around the world, but Bob spent many years as a park ranger in Central Park and still leads walks there. His presentation highlighted his studies of night migration at the Empire State Building.

As part of an EPA Grant that financed our inventory of the cove area of the park, we are hosting and presenting a free wetlands education workshop on May 4. The workshop is offered to formal and non-formal educators who teach children in grades 4 – 8. Palmyra Cove Nature Park and The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia are jointly sponsoring the workshop. Presenters include Kristina Merola (Cove Naturalist), Sharon Angus-Smith (staff of Academy of Natural Science) and Ed Sanderson (Cove educator). Space is limited to 20 participants. We will continue to offer these workshops in the spring and fall seasons. Please check our website or call for information on future workshops.

On June 30, 2007, Palmyra Cove will host a workshop sponsored by The Peopling of Philadelphia Collaborative, Inc (POPCI). The workshop theme is Energy and Climate Change: Energy Transfer in an Ecosystem. Presenters are Marlene Robinson, Director of POPCI, and Ed Sanderson. The workshop will begin at 9:00 AM and finish at 2:30 PM.

For more information, please contact *Marlene Robinson at (856) 824-9399 or [mrpopci@comcast.net](mailto:mrpopci@comcast.net)*.

Edward Sanderson  
*Director Environmental Education*



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



## Zen Birding An ode to Birdquest 2007

Birding, as I knew it, was confined to watching the visitors to my bird feeder, mere casual glances at colorful little specks moving in the trees or shrubs, or observing nature while hiking. Birdquest at Palmyra Cove has altered that view forever.

For those of you who, like me, are not avid birders, Birdquest may seem a bit intimidating because there are teams attempting to identify the largest number of bird species seen in Burlington County in a single morning, starting before 7AM, and ending at Noon at Palmyra Cove. Everyone at the Cove told me this was an event for novice birders and that I should just try it. My co-workers were all involved, so I thought, well...Why not?

I convinced my daughter, Shari, and son-in-law, Marty, both photographers, to join in. They planned a leisurely day with their cameras and birds. Since they have more birding skills than I do, they designated me Captain of the team. Apparently the person who knows the least gets the administrative role. They convinced Anita, a fellow photographer, to join us even though she had to drive from her home in North Jersey.

Birding obviously requires certain skill sets. I had none, so I joined Kristina Merola's Beginning Birding Class. Kristina is the experienced Naturalist at the Cove. Armed with my new found knowledge from Kristina's class, I was brazen enough to ask a gentleman, who was walking in the park, to join our team. As it turned out, Bill is an avid birder with extensive knowledge. He asked his friend Greg, also an avid birder, to join us. So, we had our team: six people, most of whom were strangers, each different in many ways.

After much negotiating, we finely agreed to meet at 4:30AM at the Vincentown Diner on Rt. 38. Yes, I did mean 4:30AM!! It was a balmy night. The full moon shown brightly in the pitch black sky. We caravanned to Whites Bog, where the habitat is conducive to many nocturnal birds. The white sand road magnified the blue moonlight and lit our way through the darkness of the wood.

Greg crouched, cupped his ears with his hands, and called, "Screech Owl!" All calls had to be confirmed by 3 members of our 6 person team. Bill called, "confirmed". No one else said anything. I recorded 2 after Screech Owl. About three minutes later, Anita called, "Screech

Owl confirmed". Yea! Our first species! Suddenly, in the moonlit quiet this quest really started to be fun! "Whippoorwill", called Marty (confirmed by everyone). You have to love the egocentric Whippoorwill, calling his own name in the dark.

The sun seemed to pause below the horizon of the cranberry bogs, now steaming in grey predawn light. Slowly, the lily pads, spring flowers, and beautiful woods began to emerge from the dark. With the rising sun, colors became intense. Yellow Warblers fluttered in the honey light of dawn. Color was everywhere, moving, dancing through the trees. In dawn's honey colored light, sight, sound, color, form, movement, habitat, were all used to identify each species in turn. I can't remember when I was so aware of my surroundings... so in the moment.

At 7:00AM, we moved to Amico Island, in Delran. A tall stand of Cottonwood trees clothed in early spring green was filled with darting Baltimore Orioles, kinetic art, like stained glass in motion in the golden early light. An Osprey did some people-watching as he flew over us. Anita was the first to spot a triangle of Glossy Ibis passing overhead. Back to Palmyra Cove for our last observations, we added an Indigo Bunting, Red Eyed Vireo, and other new species to our list. Everyone was smiling. Everyone felt that we had discovered far more than our initial goal to count observed bird species in Burlington County. We found comrades, adventure, and some kind of dormant spirit within ourselves.

I never realized how much sound and sight we filter out in order to focus on our daily lives. In the dark, I was forced to be open to what I heard. It was challenging. Then just when I was getting a handle on that, the sun came up, and I was required to use both sight and sound. I mean really use the senses, and then make decisions on what I perceived. I found there was no other way to bird but truly be in the moment in a way I seem to have forgotten.

If you have never thought of birding well, this might just be the right time, and Palmyra Cove is a great place to start. Come on in and join Kristina's Beginning Birding Group, or just wander through the park and see what you experience for yourself. Maps and Bird Charts can be found at the front desk. As for me, I'm hooked. See you in the park.

Pam Reid, *Assistant to the Executive Director*

## Cove Currents

### Palmyra Cove Nature Park

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







# Palmyra Cove Nature Park

## Summer Camp

July 9 through July 13, 2007

July 16 through July 20, 2007

9:00AM – 12:00PM

For students going into  
3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grades



Enjoy nature-related learning and fun at the Cove. Become a Cove Camper and explore and discover all that Palmyra Cove Nature Park has to offer. Programs include seining, frog studies, interpretive hiking, log exploration, plant and animal observation, and nature-related crafts. Space is very limited, so please call Palmyra Cove Nature Park at 856-829-1900 to reserve your spot today!

