

Gloucester County Nature Club

Monthly Newsletter

www.gcnatureclub.org

Nature Club meetings are open to the public
February 2005

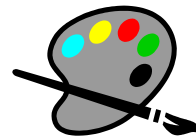
Program – Nature Artwork and Pot Luck

**(NOTE: Change of Date & Time – This is the THIRD Thursday in February!)
Thursday, February 17th at 6:00 PM at EIRC, Sewell**

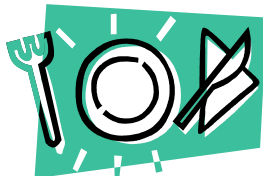
Program Coordinator - Bob Cassel 478-2496

This is our traditional non-standard program for February. This year we ask you to bring your favorite piece of nature-related artwork, along with a pot luck dish. Since we are eating, we are starting one hour earlier.

In keeping with this year's theme, we are asking each club member to come to the meeting with a piece of artwork which is related to nature. We would especially like items that have a story that you could share with the group.



As for those pot luck dishes - this time we're not limiting the dishes to desserts only. We're attempting to expand everyone's culinary horizon beyond the dessert tray, not just expand everyone's waists! **Also, please bring a plate and some silverware for yourself.** Who knows, maybe you have a special dinner plate with a nature theme that you'd also like to show off as your nature artwork (hopefully before it gets covered by food!). Our time this evening will be spent eating and socializing.



Field Trip – Winter Botany

(NOTE: This trip occurs BEFORE the monthly meeting!)

Saturday February 12th, 9:00 AM to Noon

Trip Leader: Karl Anderson

Co-leader: Kris Mollenhauer

Meet at the parking lot at the Riverwinds Trail in West Deptford at 9:00 AM. We will identify winter trees by buds, bark, and branching (and cheat by looking beneath the trees for fallen leaves and fruit). We will also look at some easy-to-recognize "winter weeds". Bring a lens if you have one. Dress to suit the weather.

Directions: Take Delaware Street in Woodbury, west across Grove Avenue, into the Riverwinds Development. The entrance to the trail will be on the right, about 1/4 mile past Grove Avenue. Watch for sign "West Deptford Scenic Trail".



Field Trip Report – Wintering Waterfowl at Shark River (1/15/05) by Renee Waters

January's field trip afforded Club members a unique opportunity to get rather "up close and personal" with a variety of winter waterfowl. We were gifted with the first sunny, yet crisp day of the New Year.

Our first stop and meeting place was the Belmar Marina in Belmar NJ where, among other species, a small group of Bonaparte's Gulls kept flying back and forth in front of us as if to make sure knew exactly who they were. From there we proceeded to Shark River Inlet where we at first considered ourselves fortunate to observe a few Common Loons and Long-tailed Ducks (my first sighting) off in the distance. Quite pleased with ourselves we proceeded back toward the boardwalk, when suddenly a Red-throated Loon bobbed up less than twenty feet from us and performed a little dive show.



The other three stops had us driving to and fro through beautiful Victorian seaside Belmar. We went on to Lake Como where we observed numerable American Coots, American Widgeons, Shovelers and Black Ducks. Our next stop, Silver Lake didn't have too many ducks in the water. That's because at least fifty Brants and twenty American Widgeons were brazenly "hanging out" on the bank. When we walked up to them to check them out they seemed unabashed. Other highlights were both Hooded and Red-breasted Mergansers, Buffleheads, a pair of Ruddy Ducks, and both Black and Surf Scoters.

All in all, 28 species of birds were seen:

Red-throated Loon	Common Loon	Double crested Cormorant
Mute Swan	Snow Goose	Brant
Canada Goose	American Black Duck	Mallard
Northern Shoveler	American Widgeon	Long-tailed Duck
Black Scoter	Surf Scoter	Bufflehead
Hooded Merganser	Common Merganser	Red-breasted Merganser
Ruddy Duck	Coot	Bonaparte's Gull
Ring-billed Gull	Herring Gull	Great Black-backed Gull
Pigeon	Belted Kingfisher	Fish Crow
Robin		

Conservation Corner – Fight Fast Track Now by Loretta Dunne

New Jersey has more people and more cars per square mile than any other state in the Union. Do we really want to fast track development anywhere in the state?

If you attended the January club meeting – you know a lot about the Fast Track Bill. If you have looked at the materials, thought about the implications and decided that you are opposed, now is the time to let your elected officials hear from you. There is a proposed bill to Repeal Fast Track and a repeal would be the best thing for this bill. The state officials need to begin again with a clean slate and then determine what a reasonable plan would be for New Jersey development.

If you missed the meeting or want more information on Fast Track, you can go to <http://www.savenj.net/> or <http://www.njpirg.org>. And here is a quick link to find your State Legislators - <http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/>.

Don't forget to send your letter to the editor expressing your views on the law. As of the January 25th, two letters have already been published in the Gloucester County Times – one from Bob & Carol Cassel and one from Gloria Caccia.

Top 10 Reasons To Repeal Fast Track

This bill was railroaded through the NJ Legislature with no debate and essentially no public input. The provisions of this law are so wide-ranging and threatening to the environment and public health that it will:

1. Threaten public health and safety - From roads and toxic waste site clean-ups to discharge of radioactive and chemical weapons waste into state waterways and security at the state's high risk chemical plants in a post 9/11 world, the scope of permit programs included in this law will certainly put our health and safety at risk.
2. Silence the public - the bill's 45 day timeline prevents meaningful public participation and prevents local review just as the legislative process did. Local environmental commissions and planning boards will have very little time to provide local information on permit applications.
3. Force municipalities to approve bad projects and take away home rule - Developers will apply to planning boards with all state permits in hand, putting pressure on the municipality to approve projects or zoning changes. Further, municipalities often don't have the authority to reject bad projects and rely on state agencies who have the authority to do so but Fast Track hamstring these agencies from doing so.
4. Increase sprawl - DOT and NY/NJ Port Authority projects will get expedited DEP permit review and will certainly lead to more sprawl, less cohesive planning, and less community involvement -- hardly "smart growth".
5. Extend sewers without any local approval - Water Quality Management Plan amendments will be automatically issued as permits by rule without any municipal input, allowing developers to lay sewer lines and tap water supplies in areas not zoned for growth.

6. Allow developers to Pay to Pave - Permittees can hire consultants to write and approve their applications without appropriate government oversight. There are no ethics provisions and the consultant can be the brother or employee of the permit applicant. Talk about the fox watching the hen house!
7. Close the courthouse doors to the people, the state and the environment - Polluters can appeal permit decisions to the Office of Administrative Law but the public and the state cannot. The presumption of validity is shifted away from the state agency to make it easier for the polluter to get a permit denial overturned. The judge's decision is final and cannot be appealed.
8. Establish two classes of citizens - The law subjects residents of smart growth areas to weaker oversight and ignores the constitutional requirement for equal protection for residents from different areas of the state. Further, wealthy developers get fast-tracked while Mom & Pop builders get further sidetracked.
9. Violate the state constitution and federal law - Violates federal Clean Water Act agreements and the public's right to due process. The EPA, US Fish and Wildlife Service and NOAA have expressed concerns that this law may jeopardize federal delegation and funding of programs.
10. Give the State power to unilaterally designate Smart Growth Areas-The DCA, DEP and Ombudsman can arbitrarily designate areas for growth, essentially condemning land for redevelopment. This essentially guts home rule and undermines local zoning and planning.

Other Nature Notes

Great Backyard Bird Count

If you enjoy watching the birds that visit your backyard in winter you should join the 8th annual Great Backyard Bird Count that runs from February 18-21st. This citizen science project is run by the National Audubon Society and Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The event is simple, on any or all of the days simply count and record the species and number of birds you see. You don't have to count in your backyard, though most participants do, but you can visit parks or even count at work. The location is up to you and so is how much time you spend. You can observe for as little as half an hour or watch from sunrise to sunset. Wherever you choose to observe you should record the highest number of each species you saw and the amount of time spent observing. Each observation location and day's data should be kept separately. This is a great activity for the whole family (or a scout group) and you can even do it from your living room if you so choose. After you are done counting you should go to www.birdsource.org/gbbc to enter your data. If you don't have internet access or would prefer to drop off your data and let someone else enter it, you can take it to the Wild Birds Unlimited Store located on Egg Harbor Road in Washington Township (in the Acme Shopping Center). More information, counting tips, and detailed directions can also be found at www.birdsource.org/gbbc. For those without internet access you can call Paula or Brian Hayes at 468-9272 for more details.



Cumberland County Winter Raptor Festival

The fifth annual Cumberland County Winter Raptor Festival will be held at the Mauricetown Fire Hall in Mauricetown, NJ., Saturday, February 5, 2005, from 7:00 am till 8:30 pm. From dawn to dusk the region's abundance of birds of prey will be highlighted, through both field observation and informative lectures from avian experts at the cozy Mauricetown Fire Hall.



Staff members of the New Jersey Audubon Society will be stationed at prime viewing sites from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. to assist novice bird watchers spot and identify the bald eagles, hawks, owls, and ospreys which soar over an estuary system chock full of the birds' favorite snacks. Bring binoculars!

Early risers can start their day at Turkey Point in Downe Township with a 7 a.m. Sunrise Walk hosted by internationally renowned author Pete Dunne, who is also director of the Cape May Bird Observatory.

To warm up, visit the fire hall between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., grab some hot food & beverages, and browse the exhibits and wares from environmentally-minded groups. The cooks of the Mauricetown Fire Company will be busy preparing warm beverages, breakfast snacks, and their famous Down Jersey Crab Cake platters and other Bayshore delicacies which will be offered at modest prices.

There is also a series of five presentations set throughout the day to enhance knowledge of the habits of these aerial hunters. The presentation schedule is as follows:

- **10 a.m. - Flying Over Cumberland County: A Raptor's View** - Steve Eisenhauer, Regional Manager of The Natural Lands Trust
- **11 a.m. - Introduction to Delaware Bayshore Birding and Wildlife Trails** - Lillian Armstrong, Director of Birding and Wildlife Trails, New Jersey Audubon Society
- **1 p.m. - Raptors on the Bayshore, The Shifting Tide** - Pete Dunne, Keynote Speaker, Vice President, New Jersey Audubon Society
- **2 p.m. - Owls of Southern New Jersey** - Pat Sutton, Program Director, New Jersey Audubon Society's Cape May Bird Observatory,
- **3 p.m. - The Maurice River, A River Worth Protecting** - Jane Morton Galetto, President, Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and Its Tributaries

The day's events wrap up at 5 p.m., again at Turkey Point, in a quest to spot the elusive night stalker, the great horned owl. Pat Sutton, program director of the Cape May Bird Observatory, has successfully guided this expedition in the initial four years of the Cumberland County Winter Raptor Festival. The co-author of "How to Spot an Owl", her expertise in tracking these magnificent, but rarely seen, birds is unmatched.

Registration begins at the Mauricetown Fire Hall in Mauricetown, NJ, at 8:00 a.m. Admission is only \$8 for adults and \$4 for children 12 and under. For more information call the Cumberland County Department of Planning and Development at 856-453-2177 or 1-866-866-MORE.

Wild Birds Unlimited now offers an everyday 10% discount to GCNC members!

Wild Birds Unlimited has recently entered into a discount agreement with the GCNC executive committee, and is pleased to now offer GCNC members an everyday 10% discount on all purchases excluding optics and food or sale items. Sharon Oakes, owner of Wild Birds Unlimited, appreciates the many volunteer contributions made by GCNC members and hopes members can benefit from this discount. Members are requested to identify themselves as GCNC members before their sales are finalized. The store is located on Egg Harbor Road in Washington Township (Acme Shopping Center). Questions? Please call Sharon at 218-2973.

**Conservation-related tour: Solar Houses, Sustainable Houses
White Dog Café's 8th Annual Eco Tour
Saturday, March 19, 9AM**

Dennis Winters, coordinator of the Philadelphia Million Solar Roofs Partnership, will lead a tour of homes using sustainable technologies, including solar power, to save energy and non-renewable resources. Dennis will take us first to the Los Balcones solar project in Norris Square where members of the MSR Partnership have installed electricity-producing solar panels on eight adjacent affordable housing row homes.

We'll also visit Hap Haven's two Germantown houses. Each incorporates solar heated hot water pumped by solar electricity, whole house fans for summer cooling; high performance windows; water-based paints and more. In addition, the 1895 carriage house incorporates a passive solar design; energy star appliances; recycled lumber, stone, brick and carpeting; an in-ground cistern for recycling rain water and a composting system.

Hap has been helping homeowners lower the environmental impact of their homes for almost 25 years – most recently through his new company, SunHaven Solar. Back at the White Dog for lunch, Dennis will discuss other solar and sustainable houses in the Philadelphia area, and how to apply for grants to add a solar installation to your home or business.

\$36 fee includes breakfast of muffins and coffee, tour, discussion, lunch, tax & gratuity. Call the White Dog Café at 215-386-9224 for reservations.

Looking Ahead:

Programs-

March – Plant Communities of NJ

April – Raptor Project – Wednesday April 20 from 7:00 PM to 8:30 PM
Pitman High School Auditorium, 225 Linden Ave., Pitman

The Raptor Project provides a close encounter with 15-20 different kinds of LIVE EAGLES, HAWKS, OWLS and FALCONS. This is the largest and most varied collection of traveling raptors in the world. The presenter and Project Director, Jonathan Wood, is a Master Falconer and Wildlife Rehabilitator, bringing unique insights, observations and humor to this nationally acclaimed show. His program emphasizes awareness of the vital role of raptors in the environment, their conservation, rehabilitation (of injured birds) and captive breeding programs (to re-establish endangered species). Presenting up to 1,000 educational programs a year, the Raptor Project has been seen on PBS, Good Morning America and The Today Show, to name a few. Great for families. The last time this program was here, it drew an audience of well over 300!

May – Insects and Annual Plant Sale

June – Club Picnic

Field Trips-

March 19th – Scouting for Ducks with Dick Ebert

April 24th – Mt. Cuba Gardens

April (several days) – BirdQuest Training Sessions

May – BirdQuest '05 (6th Year!)

June – Amphibians in the Pinelands

Club Notes:

- The February Executive Committee meeting will be at 7 PM on February 13th at Ed & Millie Cleary's house.
- If you'd like to receive the newsletter electronically or receive more info about the club please email Brian or Paula Hayes at pnbhayes@comcast.net or call 468-9272.
- The Nature Club is always looking for ideas for future programs and field trips. Please contact the program or trip coordinator if you have ideas or would like to help.
- Information for the next newsletter should be sent to Barry Bengel at sharkeyes@comcast.net or 6 Greenwood Drive, Sewell, NJ 08080 by the 15th of the preceding month.