



Gloucester County Nature Club Monthly Newsletter

www.gcnatureclub.org

Nature Club meetings are open to the public.

February 2021

Monthly GCNC meetings are currently suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Please stay tuned, as the situation is continually evolving.

Our regular monthly meetings are may be suspended, but we are happy to be able to present the following:

Special Live Online Program!

Cultivating Respect for Insects - An overview of the ecosystem services that insects provide.

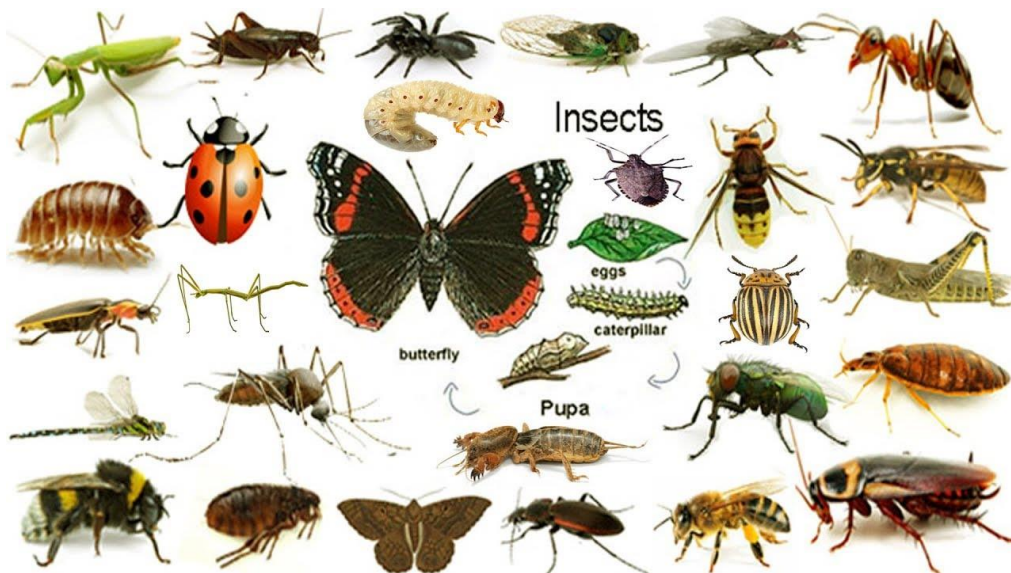
Thursday, February 11, 2021 at 7:00pm

Presenter: Dr. Daniel Duran, Assistant Professor, Rowan U; Naturalist, Scotland Run Park

Program Coordinator: Rich Dilks 856-468-6342

Web link: <https://meet.jit.si/GCNMeeting>

Simply put: all life on earth depends on insects, for more reasons than most people realize. This talk will explore some of the immeasurably important ways that insects keep ecosystems functioning. Nutrient recycling, pollination services, and trophic interactions will be reviewed. Lastly, there will be a discussion of the ways in which we can conserve our much needed insect diversity.



"My interests are in the fields of systematics, taxonomy, and conservation. My research is primarily focused on biodiversity exploration and the discovery of 'cryptic species'; species that are distinct evolutionary units, but go undetected due to physical similarity with closely related species. I mostly use tiger beetles (Cicindelinae) as a study system. I am also interested in examining the important roles of insect and plant biodiversity in ecosystem functioning."

- Dr. Daniel Duran

Dr. Duran has taught a wide range of ecology and evolution courses at the university level, and he gives public lectures about the importance of biodiversity. He is the Naturalist at Scotland Run Park in Gloucester County. He is also a coauthor of *A Field Guide to the Tiger Beetles of the United States and Canada* and is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Geography and Environment at Rowan University.

NW Gloucester County Christmas Bird Count - December 19, 2020.

The Gloucester County Christmas Bird Count of 2020 was very successful. Despite having Coronavirus stacked up against us, many of the participants enjoyed getting outdoors safely to conduct the count. There were 48 field participants and 7 feeder watchers this year. Altogether we saw (and heard) 96 species of birds in the circle. This is a very good accounting for this count circle. All areas were covered. A special thank you goes out to Marilyn Henry and Scott Reynolds, who graciously opted to shift some responsibilities to make sure all 13 areas were covered. Thanks again. For those of you unable to attend this year, we hope to see you again next year. We will be holding your spot.

Each year is different. Some species replace others, yet we don't normally expect this to happen. Somehow it averages out the count and we typically wind up in the 85-95 count in species. Each year it seems like we get unexpected misses like: Snow Goose (who would have thought?), Eastern Meadowlark (however numbers have been low over the last decade plus) Wood Duck and then there are the game birds - Bobwhite and Ring-Necked Pheasant. There probably are 10 or so unlikely misses and 15 or so very likely miss. Add those all up and we would be closer to 120 species on the count. We could only dream (especially the compiler). The However it is always best to have a true sense of what is out there and there is nothing more true than the years of compiled info.

Which brings me to a brief note and how our counting and compiling bears out the facts. As most know, the House Finch was introduced in the east from the west. The first recorded House Finches on a Gloucester Count were in 1961 - 8 birds. As the years progressed, numbers of House Finches jumped. By the late 70's and early-to-mid 80's, the quantities on the count jumped to the 1000's and 2000's, more equal to what we get in counts of Dark-eyed Juncos and White-throated Sparrows nowadays. Interestingly the House Finch count this year was 150 birds! Their numbers have certainly peaked. I think the eye disease they get and Cooper's Hawks have played a major part in their decline. Without the hard work of many people we would only be guessing at this info.

There were a few observations worth noting as well. Firstly the fact that no one saw Snow Geese. There were some in the eastern part of the county and in Salem County, but outside of the count circle. Duck species were typical but there were a few marginal species missed. just be his meals. Bald Eagles were seen at a record high - 36. Compilers (previous) Will Middleton and Bob Cassel would likely have scoffed if told back in the 80's that we would be seeing 36 Bald Eagles in the year 2020! Alison Derenberger in our group picked out a small flock of 10 Snipe in the meadows along Oldman's Creek. Thanks to those who looked for owls too. Great Horned Owls outdistanced Screech Owls this year! 3 Merlins was a count high this year. Hairy Woodpecker and Eastern Phoebes were record highs too, 28 and 3 respectively. Another record high was the 21 Hermit Thrush. In the sparrow world we had two other record highs - Savannah Sparrow at 107 (86 seen by one party) primarily viewed on edges and in asparagus fields) and White-throated Sparrows 2512; kind of surprising because that species has seemed to be declining recently in our results.

"Out of the ordinary" or "write-ins" included the following:

Common Yellowthroat seen by Jack Mahon and Jerry Haag.

Black Scoter picked up by Scott Henderson, Barb Bassett, Jeff Holt, and Jayne Rhynard.

Common Loon by Lloyd Shaw and Gary Lizzi.

Sandhill Crane - viewed by Cathy and Betsy Carter. Only the second time for Sandhill Crane; first time seen by the Strohmeiers and the Hennings. The Carters had five birds.

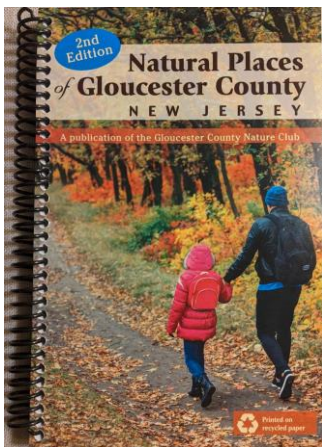
The Black Scoter was a new variety to the count.

Should anyone want a full listing of the results, merely send me an email or note, and I will forward the info to you either by email or by mail. Again much obliged to all you participants. Hopefully you found it to be a rewarding experience. Hopefully next year will allow us to go eat at full tilt once again. Don't forget to research the results on the Audubon website. If you need help figuring it out just give me a holler. There is some very interesting data to be found. I believe all of our records are on there since the first count. Be safe! Save the date - December 18, 2021 is our next count.

Ron Kegel, compiler.

ronaldk52@comcast.net

Natural Places of Gloucester County NJ - Second Edition now available!



Our wildly popular ***Natural Places of Gloucester County NJ*** book is back as a 2nd Edition with a new fresh look, updated information, and new locations. Great for getting out of the house exploring the outdoors while still staying socially distanced and safe. Just what you need to stuff stockings and find places full of natural beauty tucked away in our county.

The Natural Places Guide is one of the many ways the Nature Club provides valuable detailed information, not available elsewhere, about the plants, trees, birds, mammals, reptiles and amphibians at over 35 local Natural Places. Each site description includes directions, address and parking information plus a map of the site to make visiting easy and enjoyable. For the Second Edition, information for existing sites has been brought up-to-date. Several new sites have also been added, including: Tall Pines State Preserve, Andoloro WMA, and Tranquility Trails.

Copies of ***Natural Places of Gloucester County NJ*** are now available for purchase at local retailers including:

- Bob's Little Sport Shop - 316-318 Delsea Drive North, Glassboro, NJ 08028
- Damingers Natural Pet Foods - 641 Main St, Sewell (Mantua Township), NJ 08080
- Triple Oaks Nursery & Herb Garden - 2359 Delsea Drive, Franklinville, NJ 08322
- Wild Birds Unlimited Cherry Hill - 1619 N Kings Hwy, Cherry Hill, NJ 08034
- Wild Birds Unlimited Sicklerville - 609-B Berlin Cross Keys Rd Sicklerville, NJ 08081
- Words Matter - 52 S. Broadway, Pitman, NJ 08071

The book is also available through the club's online store. To access the online store, [click here](#).

The Big Year Eco-Challenge

On January 1, a number of Nature Club members and other volunteers began a new project, "The Big Year Eco-Challenge". Over the course of this calendar year, they will survey (as time permits) five local parks and natural areas to identify as many species of plants and animals as they can find: Tall Pines State Preserve, Ceres Park, RiverWinds, Piney Hollow and Elephant Swamp Trail.

January 14, 2021

It is hard to believe that we are only two weeks into the Big Year Challenge as I feel like we have already made so many great discoveries! I have been finding so many new things at the Elephant Swamp Trail already this year that I did not observe last year during my extensive searches. Sometimes you read about something new and start looking for it at your site. It is amazing to then actually find it at your site. Last week I was flipping through one of our fungi books and read about Orange Peel Fungus which resembles orange peels scattered on the ground. While searching the Elephant Swamp Trail the next day, I came across a bright orange fungus growing on the ground and the resemblance to orange peels was striking. I was so excited that I started photographing it with my phone, then my camera. It was only when I got in close and flipped it over that I realized I had been photographing an actual orange peel. So much for my new species!

On that note, I would like to highlight a few of the other "actual" great discoveries we have made so far. Marilyn Henry found an interesting gall on False Nettle in Ceres Park on January 8th. It turns out that the gall was created by the *Boehmeria* stem gall midge. Marilyn's observation has been confirmed by gall experts on iNaturalist and is only the 42nd observation of that gall that has been entered into iNaturalist!

<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/67747928> Barb Bassett also found a gall at Ceres Park on January 2nd that I have been searching for along the Elephant Swamp Trail for months. She found a large, lumpy gall on Sand Blackberry that is made by a wasp called the Blackberry Knot Gall Wasp.

<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/67462809> Way to go Barb and Marilyn!

At Tall Pines, Nicole Lloyd posted a great photo of a Pileated Woodpecker on January 6th, which is a very nice find for that area. <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/67683417> If you haven't been following Nicole's observations, you may want to keep an eye on her moss observations. She is doing some great work tackling the mosses, which can be a challenging group to identify. I was excited to see some of the images that she is taking using a microscope of moss samples. Way to go Nicole! The Tall Pines team is also leading all teams with an impressive total of 9 observers submitting data to iNaturalist so far, nearly twice as many as any other site. They have a lot of eyes searching the Tall Pines site!

At Riverwinds, the Ceravolo family, Karl Anderson, and Gale Cannon have been submitting an impressive number of fungi, lichen, and plant observations. They are really finding some good scat...seriously...they keep posting photos of Coyote scat to make the rest of us jealous. <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/67684094> Gale Cannon's photos of Stalkless Cladonia on January 11th is only the 69th observation in iNaturalist for that species.

<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/67922700> Sharon Ceravolo submitted an observation of a Pine-oak Gall Rust on January 9th which means we should all be keeping an eye out for them on pines in other sites!

<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/67803296>

At the Elephant Swamp Trail, Bob and Debbie Barsotti met us briefly on the first weekend and then disappeared into the woods in search of nature. I haven't seen them much since, but I am very much enjoying seeing all of their updates on Facebook and all the photos they have been putting into iNaturalist. Already they are finding new things at Elephant Swamp that I overlooked last year. It is great to have a new set of eyes out there! Most exciting for me was their observation of a fungi, Giraffe Spots, seen on January 2nd.

<https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/67727127> I have not yet seen that particular species yet, but I'm keeping an

eye out for it now! Interestingly at Armleder Park in Ohio, Sandra Keller also found a Giraffe Spots fungi on January 7th. <https://www.inaturalist.org/observations/67727127>

A few of our sites are still just getting started or haven't yet come out of hibernation yet. Hopefully I will have more to update you on in the future. If anyone has any favorite stories or photos from the first two weeks that I didn't cover, please feel free to share. Great job so far everyone!

--- Jeff Mollenhauer

A **January Summary** covering the entire month can be found on the [BYEC webpage](#) on the GCNC website.

Each of our 2021 Newsletters will include an article about one of the species found during these surveys:

BYEC Species of the Month: Black Witch's Butter: Big Year sojourns continue to enlarge my understanding and appreciation for the natural world. Yesterday, Jeff and I found *Exidia glandulosa* at his site, which is known by the name "Black Witches Butter". A fairly common member of the "jelly fungi" group of mushrooms, BWB is a saprophytic or wood-rotting fungus that usually colonizes oak... specifically, dead branches still attached to the tree... though when the branch breaks, BWB is carried to the ground with it.

We often speak of "plant succession": the idea that certain pioneer species (birch, for example) are the first to invade a disturbed area but are followed by later tree species (oak, beech etc) which eventually form a climax forest. BWB is a "pioneer fungus". Its fungal network (the mycelium) is among the first to colonize a recently dead branch. The mycelium feeds on the vascular cambium layer just under the branch's bark, loosening the bark so that ultimately it falls away, allowing other organisms to begin their recycling work. Hidden by the overlying bark, we don't see BWB's mycelium. What we see... is its fruiting body... now that the mycelium is ready to produce spores: Black Witch's Butter.

BWB fruiting bodies are usually produced in autumn and winter. Each one is about an inch wide, shiny, black, blister-like... though they often occur in clusters. They are firm when fresh but can be distorted with age or wet weather. BWB is attached to the wood at its base. The upper, spore-producing surface is dotted with tiny warts or pegs (hand lens time). In wet, cool weather (its preference), BWB is firm, jelly-like but during dry spells it shrinks to an inconspicuous flattened form. This thin crust rehydrates quickly in rainy weather.

So how did BWB get its name? There are several ideas.

BWB occurs in Europe and the British Isles as well as in North America. In Eastern Europe, BWB sometimes appeared around the entrances of people's (wooden) homes, leading them to believe the house was "under a spell". It was thought that if you punctured BWB with a pin and allowed its "evil juices" to escape, the spell was broken. A contributing factor may be that BWB rehydrates quickly with the onset of damp, cooler weather: think... fall rains... with longer nights and shortening days, cool night-time temperatures. That's when BWB would rehydrate and reappear.

Among European Celtic people, there was no more sacred (or scary) time than sundown on October 31. That was a major hinge point of the year. It was seen as the first day of the New Year and the first day of the winter half of the year (the New Year began at sunset, because in Celtic belief, dark always comes before light). Spirits roamed the land... and it was now that Black Witch's Butter began to appear.

For me, getting to know Black Witch's Butter is much more than just being able to recognize and call it by name. Far more interesting is its life history... how it contributes to a healthy ecosystem... and the cultural history of how

people knew and used it through the ages. As the author Robin Wall Kimmerer wrote in her award-winning book Gathering Mosses, names have the power to call up stories and to connect us to the past.

We call this fungi, "Black Witch's Butter". But what name does Black Witch's Butter call itself? Perhaps if we take the time to look and listen closely over the course of a Big Year, we may get some idea.

--- Erik Mollenhauer



Club Notes:

- If you'd like to receive the newsletter electronically or receive more info about the club please email Karen Kravchuck at blackbirdsinging@hotmail.com or call 609-617-6693 (cell).
- 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 GCNC Newsletter, PO Box 563, Sewell, NJ 08080 by the 15th of the preceding month.
- The February Executive Committee meeting will be held online via videoconference on Monday February 8th. Please contact Karen Kravchuck for more information.

Please remember to help out the Gloucester County Nature Club while shopping online!



Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us have been shopping online a lot more lately. Don't forget that shopping at Amazon can also benefit the Gloucester County Nature Club at **NO extra cost** to you!

AmazonSmile is a simple and automatic way for you to support your favorite charitable organization every time you shop, at no cost to you. When you shop at smile.amazon.com, you'll find the exact same low prices, vast selection and convenient shopping experience as Amazon.com, with the added bonus that Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to your favorite charitable organization. You can choose from nearly one million organizations to support.

The AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5% of the purchase price from your eligible AmazonSmile purchases. The purchase price is the amount paid for the item minus any rebates and excluding shipping & handling, gift-wrapping fees, taxes, or service charges. You may even use your existing Amazon.com account for your purchases.

To shop at AmazonSmile simply go to smile.amazon.com from the web browser on your computer or mobile device. You may also want to add a bookmark to smile.amazon.com to make it even easier to return and start your shopping at AmazonSmile.