



# Gloucester County Nature Club Monthly Newsletter

[www.gcnatureclub.org](http://www.gcnatureclub.org)

Nature Club meetings are open to the public

February 2022

**Program: Have You Read This One?**

Presented by: Members of the GCNC

**A special online live presentation of the Gloucester County Nature Club**

Thursday, February 1, 2022 at 7:00 PM

Program Coordinator: Rich Dilks 856-468-6342



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

**This presentation is free and open to the public**

When you read a really good book you want to tell your friends about it. Join members of the GCNC as we gather virtually to share and discuss some of the nature/environment themed books we have been reading. If you have read a book that has connected with you, here is a chance to briefly share that with friends too. Below are the ones we have picked out for discussion.

**Wilding: Returning Nature to Our Farm** by Isabella Tree

For almost 2 decades, Isabella Tree and her husband have been reversing the environmental damage imposed on their land in England, turning a failing industrial farm into an oasis for birds, butterflies, wildflowers and wildlife. In so doing, they demonstrated how to restore natural systems and how quickly that work can be done. Wilding is a story of hope... a welcome antidote to an era that has all the signs of a global environmental holocaust.

**The Slime Mold Murder** by Ellen King Rice

Hard science meets post-pandemic life in this ecological thriller set in the woods of the Pacific Northwest. Rice's multigenerational story combines a murder, slime mold research and backwoods encounters. Rice's latest novel is a whimsical whodunnit, both educational and entertaining.

**Electrify: An Optimist's Playbook for Our Clean Energy Future** by Saul Griffith (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2021)

The worldwide societal, governmental, and technological changes needed to limit human-induced climate change can seem overwhelming from a citizen's perspective. In his book, Saul Griffith argues that America has a realistic path toward using zero-carbon electricity for all aspects of our lives that currently depend on fossil fuels. He carefully explains the urgency of changing our national infrastructure now, since long-lived purchases like cars and furnaces will have baked-in environmental impacts for years to come. The good news is that an electric future improves the environment, greatly reduces the overall energy we use, and can be achieved without sacrificing our standard of living.

**100 Flowers and How They Got Their Names** by Diana Wells and illustrated by Ippy Patterson (Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill)

We see and enjoy the beauty of flowers. The leaves and the stems of some have been used for ages as medicine. But what about the roots — not the literal roots — but the origins of how we came to know these plants and how they got their names. The publisher describes it best: “Diana Wells delved deep into horticultural history, etymology, and lore to uncover myths, legends, folk beliefs, and stories of the intrepid botanists who searched the world’s far corners for new and unusual flowers.”

**The Nature of Oaks: The Rich Ecology of Our Most Essential Native Trees** by Douglas Tallamy

Oaks are a keystone species not just of the forest but of the web of life itself. No genus of tree supports more diversity of insect and bird life. Once you have traveled with Prof. Tallamy on his excursion through the ecology of oaks, you will never see these noble trees the same way again.

### **Potential Field Trip – Snow Fleas at Glassboro NWA**

**Date TBD; Depends upon conditions**

**Trip Leader(s): TBD**

OK, so this sounds more than a little cryptic. This is because the weather conditions need to be just right for this trip to take place. Join us for a walk Glassboro WMA to see snow fleas (a.k.a. springtails). The trip announcement could come at any time when over the next month or so when there is any snow on the ground. So please watch your email, the GCNC website, and MeetUp closely.

In the meantime, see <https://insectlab.russell.wisc.edu/2020/02/27/snow-fleas-when-a-flea-isnt-a-flea/> for more information on these fascinating arthropods.

### **Events by other Organizations: February 2022**

February 5 (Saturday) – **2022 Cumberland County Winter Eagle Festival.**

See <https://www.cumauriceriver.org/event/eagle-festival-2022/> for details.

February 18 - 21 (Friday - Monday) - **Great Backyard Bird Count.** Count birds in your backyard or other locations, submit highest daily species totals. Organized by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society. For more information: <https://www.birdcount.org>.

### **2021 Northwest Gloucester County Christmas Bird Count Wrap-up**

Thank you to all who participated in the Gloucester County Christmas Bird Count. On December 18th, we had 48 observers. We counted 96 species on the count. All areas were covered within the count circle. We got close to that magic number of 100 but it seems we just miss it every year and usually by missing different birds each year. Some make up for the ones we miss....but others drop out, somewhat of a trade off or ‘trade out’.

We had some all-time highs for some species:

100 Double-crested Cormorant  
219 Red-bellied Woodpecker  
27 Yellow-bellied Sapsucker  
6 Merlin  
3 Peregrine Falcon  
24 Winter Wren  
261 Carolina Wren  
20 Ruby-crowned Kinglet  
26 Hermit Thrush

Conversely we had no Brown Thrashers.

Thanks too to our area leaders for coordinating their zones. A special 'thank you' to those of you participating in your first Count! Please join us again next year.

Some additional 'compiler comments' on observations:

Canada Goose-#s high @8628.

Duck #s- seemed mid to low.

Vultures- almost as many Black Vultures as Turkey Vultures.

Sharp-shinned Hawks - only 2.

Northern Harriers- up, 12!

Merlin's outnumbered Kestrel's.

No Bobwhite or Pheasants again this year.

No American Woodcocks.

Belted Kingfishers seen by all areas.

No Red-breasted Nuthatches.

Brown Creepers - up, 21

Many American Robins benefitting from the invasive ornamental pears.

'River of Blackbirds' seen by Marie Hageman.

And 'write-in's:

Baltimore Oriole - seen by Dilks group.

Horned Grebe- seen by Shaw/Lizzi.

Please mark your calendars, this year's count will be December 17, Saturday, 2022. Hopefully by then we will be out from under Covid variants, we will have some decent weather for once, and you will all return for another Great Day beating the bushes for tweety birds! Much obliged! Thanks for navigating through our ever developing circle/county. This is one of the major reasons we do it to monitor and document our findings in the ever changing landscape. Til then.....

**Ron Kegel**, Compiler

Summation of the Count will be sent to participants. If you would like a copy contact me.

**NEW YOUTUBE CHANNEL:** We have begun posting full recordings of recent club programs for the convenience of members and the public. To find the club's channel, use [this link](#) or search for the club's full name within YouTube. Five videos are now available:



1. [Roger Tory Peterson and the Origins of the Modern Field Guide](#) (April 2021)
2. [Native Plants of South Jersey](#) (May 2021)
3. [Birding in Argentina](#) (September 2021)
4. [We Can't See The Forest For The Trees - Young Forests and Biodiversity](#) (November 2021)
5. [Edible Wild Plants](#) (January '2022)

As you often hear on YouTube, be sure to subscribe to the club's channel and "like" the videos so they will get recommended to more people! We will continue recording all online programs, and hopefully in-person ones as well, during this club year.

## **Nature Notes**

### **Natural Events for the month of February**

- Skunk cabbage flowers are emerging from the ground, in wetlands throughout the County. As they grow they generate heat, which melts the frozen ground around them.
- Alder catkins are swelling and will open on the first warm days.
- Melting snow may reveal the trackways of meadow voles, dug along the interface between the frozen ground and snow cover.
- Broom crowberry in bloom in the Pinelands.
- Mourning cloak butterflies emerge from hibernation on warm days.
- Killdeer and great blue herons return from the south as waterways thaw and snow cover melts.
- Chipmunks reappear around bird feeders.
- Best time for viewing tundra swans at Whitesbog and other Pinelands ponds.



### **Conservation Corner** by Bonnie Dann

#### **Help the Environment by Composting**

Composting is nature's process of waste management in which nutrients are recycled back into the soil by the decomposition of organic material. Household garbage and plant debris can be composted easily in your own back yard, with benefits for your garden and the wider environment.

One environmental benefit is the avoidance of greenhouse gases. Garbage buried in landfills decomposes anaerobically (without oxygen), a process that produces methane. Released into the atmosphere, methane is a major cause of global warming. Composting, on the other hand, causes aerobic decomposition and therefore does not produce methane.

Using compost in our lawns and gardens also improves soil structure—thereby reducing water runoff—and reduces the need to add chemical fertilizers that pollute our waterways and add nitrous oxide (another greenhouse gas) to the atmosphere. Micro-organisms in compost are also important in breaking down other organic material.

Essentially, composting requires a pile of organic material. There are four components:

- (1) "Greens" (grass clippings, kitchen scraps, eggshells, coffee grounds, etc.). Meat, fish, dairy products, and grease should be avoided, since they become smelly and attract animals.
- (2) "Browns" (leaves, twigs, shredded paper, cardboard scraps, wood chips).
- (3) Water. Keep the pile slightly moist.
- (4) Air. Periodically aerate the pile by turning it over with a shovel or pitchfork. (Those who are more ambitious might wish to use a rotating bin, or tumbler.)

The easiest method of composting is "cold" or "passive" composting. Essentially this involves leaving the compost pile to decompose on its own, with little or no attention. It typically takes at least six months—sometimes far longer—for a cold pile to decompose. With "hot" composting, the pile should be in a bin or enclosure about three or four feet square and at least three feet high, with regular turning over and watering. The object is to build and then maintain a core temperature of 140°-160°, which speeds up the decomposition process.

Once the compost has transformed into a crumbly brown humus, this "black gold" is ready to be added to your garden soil.

Rutgers Cooperative Extension Service has a helpful brochure about composting at:  
<https://www.nj.gov/dep/dwq/pdf/rutgershomecompost.pdf>

## An Oriole From Heaven by Alison Derenberger



I have heard of a match made in heaven, manna from heaven, and pennies from heaven, but never have heard of an oriole from heaven, but that's just what came to me on Sunday, January 16, 2021. I had been going through a rough patch since the death of both of my parents within a year's time. I was going through the motions of life; balancing a full-time job, life as a mother and wife, and tending to the affairs of my parents. I just wasn't happy and didn't see how I ever would be again.

That morning, I was standing at the kitchen window and noticed the most spectacular bird! It caught my eye because of its brilliant orange coloring and black and white wings. I took some pictures on my phone and immediately texted Ron Kegel, my go-to bird expert. Ron has graciously included me on several local bird counts, and continues to educate me about birds. I also posted the photo on a Facebook page, Birds of South Jersey. Between Ron and the people on the Facebook page, the bird was quickly identified as a Bullock's Oriole, a species that is native to western North America. Wow! What was this bird doing here? Things quickly got interesting....

The next morning I had a visit from Marilyn Henry. We stood in my kitchen and waited for the bird to appear. Sure enough, he didn't disappoint. Marilyn recommended sharing the bird on a rare bird website. We wrote down what the post should say, she posted it, and within an hour birders were camped out with their binoculars, scopes, and long-lensed cameras waiting to catch a glimpse of the bird. People came from Pennsylvania, Delaware, New York City, Maryland, Virginia, and as far as Massachusetts. I spent lots of time standing outside my house with the small crowd of birders who came to see the oriole. We traded birding stories and knowledge while waiting for the oriole to appear. One man traveled 2.5 hours from New York because this was the last American oriole he needed to see. Another was a self-proclaimed bird chaser and spends his time reading the rare bird alerts from all over the country and tries to see them. Sure enough, as soon as he saw the Bullock's, he took off running back to his car to try to find the Painted Bunting that was reported close by. People set up chairs and even sat on the roof of their car with their binoculars ready. One kind birder even left me sunflower seeds and trail mix on my front porch with a nice note thanking me for sharing the bird.

I found myself thinking of ways to try to keep the bird in my yard as long as possible. Every night I would be out re-filling my feeders in the dark. I wanted to make sure I had enough for the following day. I put out sliced oranges and containers of grape jelly on my platform feeders, hoping that would entice him to stick around. I would text with a friend while I was at work who uses E-bird to see if anyone had reported that they had seen it at my house. As soon as I got home, I would grab my binoculars and visit the crowd of people outside my yard. The bird has stayed! As of today, January 30, 2022, he still continues to visit my backyard feeders and delight me and my birdwatching friends.

People have asked me: What are you putting out in your feeders? Have you ever had orioles at your feeders before? I try to offer a variety of things such as, peanuts, safflower seed, sunflower seed, suet, and a fruit

and nut mix. I have never had an oriole at my feeders before, and have just started putting out orange slices and jelly.

So why did this bird choose my backyard? I don't know the answer. I do know that it has brought me moments of happiness that I desperately needed. It has allowed me to meet incredible people who share the same interest as me. It has helped me to think about the beauty of nature and how life can go on, even after something as devastating as the loss of two parents. It came to my yard at just the right time.

A poem by Victoria McGovern states: "Cardinals appear when angels are near. So go now, sit outside and drink your tea. Keep a look out for the little red bird. It is there, your loved ones will be."

I think sometimes angels appear as a Bullock's oriole.

### **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](mailto: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](mailto:sharkeyes@comcast.net) or GCNC Newsletter, PO Box 563, Sewell, NJ 08080 by the 15<sup>th</sup> of the preceding month.
- **Important Note:** Beginning this month, newsletters will have a From address of [newsletter@gcnatureclub.org](mailto:newsletter@gcnatureclub.org), instead of the personal email address. You may want to add [newsletter@gcnatureclub.org](mailto:newsletter@gcnatureclub.org) to your address book just in case your email thinks it is Spam.