# Gloucester County Nature Club

## MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

| Nature Club meetings are open to the public | October 2001 |
|---|---|

**REGULAR MEETING – Thurs., October 11, 2001 – 7:00 pm – EIRC, 606 Delsea Dr. Sewell**

**Bob Cassel, Program Coordinator, 478-2496**

**"Thursday With the Bluebirds" – Marie Hageman**

So many of us in recent years became delightfully acquainted with the bluebird. There are more of these beautiful birds in southern New Jersey, thanks to school and other groups placing nesting houses in proper locations. Our own enthusiastic nature club member, Marie Hageman, will present a program about her hands-on experience checking bluebird trails and continuing her monitoring of them. Also, Marie will incorporate a professional slide series provided by the American Blue Bird Society. Join us to learn more about one of our most endearing birds.

**FIELD TRIP –Sun., October 14, 2001 - 7 am – 10 am**

**Kris Mollenhauer, Field Trip Coordinator, 589-4387**

October 14 - Sunday -**Palmyra Cove**

Join us for an early morning walk and some fall birding. Palmyra Cove Nature Park is a 350-acre area of mostly state-owned land along the Delaware River, north of Pennsauken Creek and south of the Tacony-Palmyra Bridge. Habitats include dredge spoil areas in varying stages of ecological succession, remnants of original forest, floodplain, freshwater tidal marsh, and riparian intertidal zones. The area is administered by the Burlington County Bridge Commission. **Meet at the Timberline Shopping Center in Mantua Twp. at 7am. Bring binoculars and field guides.**

**Looking ahead:**

November 17 - Saturday 7 am **John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum, PA**

**Reminders:**

***Environmental Commission Conference***, Saturday, October 13, 2001 - 8:30 am – 1:00 pm at Engineering Building at Rowan University. Free and open to commission members and the public. Call 863-0330 to register.


***TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP!***

**A reminder that it is now time to renew your membership in Gloucester County Nature Club. Individual membership is $13, Family membership is $15. In order to continue receiving the newsletter and notice of upcoming activities and events, please renew now!! Memberships should be sent to the treasurer, Karen Kravchuck, 25 Barlow Ave., Sewell NJ 08080**

**Build a Better Bat House and Say Goodnight to Summer Mosquitoes**

Bats share the floor with spiders when it comes to inspiring fear among common folk (like most mammals, bats can get rabies, but less than 0.5% of them test positive for the disease). But it's clear to many people that bats play an important role in nature and are largely beneficial to humans around the world, their appetite for insects being only one of the services they provide.

Like birds, bats play a critical role in seed dispersal. For example, fruit bats in the tropics excrete seeds from the ripe fruit that they eat. They do this in flight, after flying some distance from the parent tree. The seeds, packed in their own fertilizer, then become new trees, regenerating the rainforest. Some bats also drink nectar from flowers and, like hummingbirds, bees and butterflies, pollinate the flowers. Saguaro and organ-pipe cactuses of the southwestern United States depend on bats for their pollination and survival. These cactuses, as nocturnal as the bats that service them, flower only at night and their configurations make it impossible for any other animal but bats to access the nectar.

But the most unparalleled contribution of bats is their insect consumption. A bat can eat up to 1,200 mosquito-sized insects every hour, and each bat usually eats 6-8,000 insects each night. Their appetite for mosquitoes makes a back yard more comfortable; some additional favorite prey includes crop-destroying moths, cucumber beetles, flies and gnats.

Unfortunately about 40% of bat populations worldwide are in danger of going extinct. There are several reasons for this. First, they are slow at reproducing. Most give birth only one pup a year, so it is difficult for them to rebuild populations. Second, most of them roost in large colonies. Like putting all your eggs in one basket, putting all your bats in one cave can result in disaster if the shelter is disturbed or destroyed. Bats that live in temperate climate zones, hibernate in caves or mines during the winter. During the winter, maternity roosts can house several million female bats and their young.

The biggest problem for bats is the loss of natural habitat. Many bats prefer to roost in dead or dying trees under the loose and peeling bark, or in tree cavities. Some prefer to roost in caves. Populations have dwindled. To learn more about bat education, conservation and research, contact the Organization for Bat Conservation (OBC) at www.batconservation.org or call 800-276-7074. Landowners can help reverse this decline by doing the following things.

1. **Leave dead trees on your property if they pose no hazard**. The provide homes for bats, birds and other mammals.
2. **Keep your yard as natural as possible**. Do not use pesticides. If you do, spray only during the day and keep it low to the ground. Plant trees and vines to provide roosting areas for solitary bats that use plants for camouflage during the day.
3. **Attract bats by planting herbs and flowers that invite night-flying insects**. Flowers such as evening primrose and sweet rocket release scent at night, which attracts insects and gives bats an easy meal.
4. **Provide a water source.** By adding a water garden or backyard pond, you will provide needed water for the colony, as well as birds
5. **Build a bat house**. Properly designed and sited houses provide alternative roosting sites for bats. Directions are given below.
6. **Teach others about the benefits of bats**.

## A Better Bat House

A bat house in your backyard, or several around your garden or farm, will provide bats a place to live. The bats will repay you by eating your insect pests. To attract and keep bats artificial shelters must simulate the bat's natural habitat through style and location.

Bat houses should be made of exterior plywood or rough cedar. The inside of the house should have grooves every quarter inch, or polyethylene plastic mesh on the front and back of the house. The house should be at least two feet tall and 16 inches wide with a three-quarter to one-inch opening. Use galvanized screws to assemble the house, and caulk it to keep the bats warm and dry. Adding a ceiling at the top of the house just below the roof and leaving a quarter-inch space about six inches from the bottom opening will create needed temperature variation. Be sure to leave a four-to-six-inch area below the opening to serve as a landing spot. You can increase your chances of attracting bats by using a nontoxic, dark paint on the outside of the house to make the inside warmer for maternity colonies raising young.

Placement of the house is critical. Bat houses should be at least 12 feet off the ground, face south or southeast, and receive at least six hours of direct sun each day. The house should face an open area with at least 20 feet of clearance, so the bats and come and go with east. Bat houses can be mounted on poles, garages, barns, chimneys, and trees. Be aware, however, that houses on trees are harder for bats to find and will take longer to become occupied if leaves obscure the house.

## Oaks Under Attack

State forestry officials say that a tiny bacteria may ultimately alter the landscape of many New Jersey communities if it is not controlled in some way. The bacteria is Xylella fastidiosa. Spread by insects, it causes a disease called bacterial leaf scorch, which blocks the ability of a tree to draw water from the ground. What BLS does is similar to the way hardening of the arteries blocks the passage of blood through the human body. The disease is capable of killing centuries-old oaks in three to four years. In Burlington, Camden, Gloucester and parts of Mercer counties, the disease has gotten to the point that it is affecting significant numbers of oaks. Communities and homeowners are left with not only damaged landscapes but staggering removal costs. Taking down a mature, 100-foot oak can cost more than $5,000.

There is troubling evidence that the disease is moving north. It has been found around bodies of fresh water: Lake Hopatcong and Lake Mohawk in Sussex County, Budd Lake in Morris County, and the old Middlesex Water Co. reservoir in Union County. Scientists are just beginning to research the disease's possible connection to insects that live near fresh water. The state is now in the midst of its first-ever survey to determine how far the disease has spread.

One of the major concerns for forestry officials is the potential effect on older communities where oaks are so much a part of the landscape. Of the estimated 2.1 million street trees in the state, a third are pin oaks, one of the more afflicted species. BLS has gone unrecognized for years because the most visible symptom, dying leaves, shows up in late summer. People tend to attribute the dead leaves to stress from the hottest, driest part of the year. But after the leaves begin to drop, a growing number of limbs die, until there is no life left in the tree. While deadly, BLS is not like Dutch elm disease. That fungus-caused blight would wipe out entire elm-lined streets. For reasons scientists don't fully understand, one oak can contract BLS while a neighboring oak does not.

Scientists know that the bacterium is spread by insects such as leafhoppers and spittlebugs, but there is much more they don't know, including how it moves inside the tree. The disease, described in detail on the state forestry's Web site (www.state.nj.us/dep/forestry/ community) seems to be posing more of a threat in populated areas. And the problem is not limited to New Jersey and oaks: Strains of the bacteria are killing sycamores and elms in Washington, D.C., and grapevines in California.

**Community Events**
The Nature Club is partnering with local environmental commissions to do joint exhibits/displays at community events. Please contact our Community Events Coordinator, Maria Keefe at kityblu@juno.com or 856-627-7010 if you are able to help or if you know of another event where the Club should exhibit.

**Executive Committee Meeting**: The next Board of Trustees/Executive Committee Meeting will be held on Sunday, October 7 at 7:00 pm at the home of Bob Cassel, 407 Heritage Rd. Sewell. Call Bob at 478-2496 if you need directions. We invite members to attend the Executive Meetings.

**Club News:** The Nature Club is always looking for ideas for future programs and field trips. Please contact the program and/or field trip coordinators with your ideas. For information about the Gloucester County Nature Club, call:
Brian Hayes, President 468-9272 Mimi Glass, Membership Chair, 589-6435
Information for next month's newsletter should be sent, by the 15th of each month, to:
Erik Mollenhauer, 606 Delsea Dr. Sewell NJ 08080, 582-7000 X128

Gloucester County Nature Club
c/o EIRC
606 Delsea Dr.
Sewell NJ 08080