

Gloucester County Nature Club

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Nature Club meetings are open to the public

December 2000

REGULAR MEETING -Thurs., December 14, 2000 - 7:00 pm – EIRC Building, 606 Delsea Dr. in Washington Twp. (next to the Dairy Queen)

Bob Cassel, Program Coordinator, 478-2496

Program - “Tuning Your Ears: The Calls and Songs of Gloucester County’s Winter Birds”

Birds communicate in many ways, and sound is one of the most important. Songs and calls not only tell us of the presence of birds, they also allow us to identify species, and something of their behavior. Skilled birders often identify more birds by using their ears than they do with their eyes. With the onset of winter, many NJ birds have left for the tropics, leaving fewer species behind: the winter residents. If you want to learn bird calls, learning the winter residents will provide a foundation that can be built upon when migratory birds return.

In our December program, a group of Nature Club members will share their experience at recognizing the calls and songs of 25 winter resident birds common to Gloucester County. Participants will be given an (auditory) pre-test so each person can privately determine the extent of their knowledge. The main program will then use computer software and activities designed to help you identify and remember the calls. The final part of the program will be an auditory post-test (again, private) so each person can see how much they have learned. This program will improve your knowledge of backyard visitors, and heighten the skills of Christmas Bird Count volunteers.

FIELD TRIP -Saturday, Dec. 16, 2000 – Gloucester County Christmas Bird Count

Call Bob Cassel at 856-478-2496 to be assigned to a team

Listen – with the first streak of dawn, for the hoo, hoo-hoo, hoo, hoo of the Great-horned Owl. Yes, there will be early birds and early birders on Saturday, December 16th at the annual Gloucester County Christmas Bird Count. Then, as evening approaches, you’ll probably hear the Carolina Wren adding a cheerful good night as it seeks one final moth of the season for its supper. That’s only two of a long list of birds that teams will see or hear during their day in the field here in Gloucester County. Teams led by experienced birders will be accompanied by folks who are anxious to learn and enjoy a day outdoors in unique parts of our county. Last year we found 85 species and 23,388 individuals; 38 people participated and we hope for an even larger turn-out this year. Join us for the whole day, or only the magical hours of early morning . . . or only the afternoon . . . all teams will gather together at day’s end hot soup, and to report results and special sightings. This is the 101st year of this nationwide census coordinated by National Audubon.

*To look upon that landscape in the early morning. . . is to lose the sense of proportion.
Your imagination comes to life, and this, you think, is where Creation was begun.*

- N. Scott Momaday, Kiowa Indian and Pulitzer Prize Winner

Upcoming Field Trips: Saturday January 13: Conowingo Dam, MD

Congregate with eagles! Join us on a trip to Maryland's Conowingo Dam where winter birders can get a good look at dozens of Bald Eagles and thousands of gulls feeding on fish just below the dam. Many ducks, herons, and other raptors along the river below the dam add to the excitement. Conowingo may well have the most viewable gathering of eagles anywhere in the East Coast.

Friday, Feb. 9: Full Moon Walk

Walk through the woods on a (full) moonlit evening here in Gloucester County. Enjoy the tree silhouettes and moon shadows. Listen for owl calls.

Environmental Info/Nature Notes - December, 2000

Gloria Caccia, Environmental Coordinator, 582-0980

West Nile Virus May Threaten Birds More Than People (adapted from an article by Cat Lazaroff)

For the first time, scientists have confirmed that the West Nile Virus can be transmitted from bird to bird, without a mosquito intermediary. The new finding suggests that controversial attempts to control the spread of the disease with pesticides may be ineffective. The study also raises the specter of an epidemic of bird deaths across the continent. It had been thought that the virus was only transmitted through mosquito bites.

American crows seem particularly susceptible to West Nile Virus. In the experiment, 16 crows were housed in a 16 foot by 20 foot flight room with 12 foot ceilings. The birds shared food and water and sat on common perches. The room was cleaned daily. Nine infected birds died within five to eight days. Four healthy or "control" birds died from the virus five to eight days later.

Even though the research is significant, it means more to the wildlife community than the public health community as the threat of humans contracting the virus directly from birds is slim. But anytime someone finds a dead animal, regardless of whether a dead bird or a neighborhood pet, they should avoid handling it, or use gloves or a plastic bag turned inside out to protect your hand.

The virus turned up in North America for the first time last year, when more than 30 people in the New York City area became infected, and seven died. Most of those infected suffered relatively mild, flu-like symptoms. Those that died contracted encephalitis, an inflammation of tissues around the brain that the virus can cause in people with depressed immune systems. The virus has already spread quickly, with dead crows and other birds carrying the virus confirmed in Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, and North Carolina. At least 60 birds species have been affected, and while the majority have been the American crow, other rarer species have also been found with the virus, including great horned owls, several hawk species and the bald eagle. About 30 horses have also died from West Nile Virus this year. Domestic and wild animals are also affected, including bats, cats, raccoons, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks and skunks.

Several states are now spraying aerial pesticides to control mosquito populations. This tactic has been criticized as dangerous to birds, other wildlife and humans. Aerial spraying also kills many non-target insects, reducing the available food for birds and other insect eaters. Yet scientists acknowledge that aerial pesticides cannot completely destroy mosquito populations. Now that biologists have confirmed bird to bird spread of the disease, conservationists charge that there is even less basis for pesticide spraying. "The fact is this is a new virus, we didn't know what to do with it," said Linda Farley of American Bird Conservancy. "All we're asking now is that we slow down and weigh the positive and negatives before we start spraying everywhere."

The finding also suggests the virus could spread across the continent faster than previously predicted. Although cold winter weather provides a temporary respite from mosquito bites, even winter may not keep the disease from expanding into new regions of North America. It is suspected that English sparrows may help to harbor the virus throughout the winter. These sparrows, which were introduced from Europe more than a century ago, appear to be immune to the virus, perhaps because they were exposed to the disease in their evolutionary past in the Old World. But they can carry the virus, which can remain active in the sparrow's bloodstream for up to five days. During that time, a mosquito that bites an infected sparrow may pick up the virus and carry it to a new host. If the sparrows, which tend to feed and roost in large flocks, can also spread the disease between themselves without the mosquitoes' help, they could harbor the virus indefinitely, Farley warned. "If it were to spread in that manner in this species, that would be very significant," she said. The American Bird Conservancy is urging the federal government to expand monitoring of wild birds for West Nile Virus, so that researchers can determine whether bird populations are suffering because of the disease.

Announcing the Gloucester County Environmental Commission Conference - January 20

The Gloucester County Nature Club is sponsoring a countywide environmental commission conference, the first of its kind in a long time. The conference will be held on Saturday, January 20 from 9 AM to 1 PM at the Deptford Municipal Building at 1011 Cooper St (near the intersection of Cooper and Rt 47/Delsea Drive). The conference is cosponsored by many local environmental commissions including Deptford, East Greenwich, Franklin Twp, Mantua Twp., Washington Twp, Wenonah... and others pending. The purpose of the conference is to encourage a dialogue between local environmental commissions about common issues and concerns, and to provide information on several topics of immediate interest here in Gloucester County. Short presentations by individual commissions will be followed by a panel presentation. Panel members will speak about open space in Gloucester County, the countywide endangered species/biodiversity project, and a new countywide watershed management project. Sign-in and refreshments are from 8:30-9 AM. **Pre-registration is required.** To pre-register, persons should call 856-582-7000 x110 and request a registration form (please leave your name, address, phone number). Or you can email your request to anner@eirc.org (again, give your contact information) and the registration form will be emailed to you. **Nature Club members and members of the public are welcome to attend.**

ENDANGERED SPECIES PROJECT CORRECTION - In an earlier issue of the newsletter, the *Gloucester County Wildlife Diversity and Habitat Protection Project* General Training Workshop at Rowan University was incorrectly listed as Dec. 9. The actual date of this event is **Sat. Dec. 2** from 9 am to 12 pm at the Rowan University Student Center (Room 221). Volunteers are needed to conduct surveys on endangered species in Gloucester County. Pre-registration is required, so call Melissa Craddock at 609-777-4136 or Steve Paturzo at 609-292-1231.

The weather outside may be frightful, but birding on the Web is delightful!

- ❖ <http://birdsource.cornell.edu/cbc/index.html>. A link on the Cornell Lab of Ornithology web site takes you to the National Audubon Society Christmas Bird Count site which features details about the 2000 count and reviews the Christmas count database about bird population changes over the years.
- ❖ www.birdsource.org/gbbc. site of the annual Great Backyard Bird Count, held in February and sponsored by BirdSource, a project of Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Learn the importance of this backyard bird count and access the data gleaned from past years.
- ❖ <http://museum.gov.ns.ca/mnh/nature/winbirds> site of the avian section of the Nova Scotia Museum site you see a variety of tips about watching birds in winter. The site offers access to a carousel of 41 bird species pages, with ID tips, behavior, feeding habits.
- ❖ www.birder.com A jumping-off spot for nearly anything you need about birds and birding, where you find links to five topics: Birding, Scientific, Fun & Games, Birder's Mall and Bookstore. Each topic includes a host of sections containing links and informational pages.

Executive Committee Meeting: The Executive Committee Meeting will be held on Sunday, December 10th at 6:30 PM at the home of Erik & Kris Mollenhauer, 309 Roosevelt Ave. Pitman NJ 08071.

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