

# Gloucester County Nature Club

## Monthly Newsletter

Nature Club meetings are open to the public  
January 2003

### **\*\*\*\*\*Note Change of Meeting Place (this meeting only)\*\*\*\*\***

**Directions:** Kindle School is located at 211 Washington Ave, Pitman. Washington Ave connects Woodbury-Glassboro Rd (Rt 553), and Broadway (553A) several blocks north of the Colletown Shopping Center. Enter the doors at the left side of the (front) of the building.

**Regular Meeting – Thursday, January 9<sup>th</sup> 7:00 pm, Kindle School, Pitman**  
Bob Cassel, Program Coordinator, 478-2496

### **Exploring the Night Sky**

For thousands of years the night sky has been a source of legend and wonder, for young and old. With advances in modern technology, the amazing story of distant stars and unseen worlds continues to unfold. Join a medley of local astronomy enthusiasts as they guide us through the awesome spectacles that gild our night (and daytime) skies.

Dr. Steve Simmerman, an optometrist with offices in Sewell, is an adjunct Professor of Astronomy at Rowan University and an avid astrophotographer. Having traveled to distant lands to photograph solar eclipses, Steve will present some of his photographs and discuss the mechanics of solar eclipses. Weather permitting, Pitman resident Paul Kandle, an amateur astronomer with 30 years experience, will guide us outdoors with his 8 inch Celestron telescope. Erik Mollenhauer, supervisor of EIRC science and social studies programs, will journey through winter skies using his portable planetarium (Starlab); over the years Erik has done hundreds of Starlab programs for schools and audiences in the US, Russia and Japan.



### **Field Trip-Saturday, January 11<sup>th</sup> at 11:00 am, Conowingo Dam**

Kris Mollenhauer, Field Trip Coordinator, 589-4387

**Congregate with eagles!** Join us on a trip to Maryland's Conowingo Dam where winter birders can see dozens of Bald Eagles feeding on the fish just below the dam, along with gulls, ducks, herons and raptors. Conowingo has the most viewable gathering of eagles anywhere on the East Coast. The dam, a mile wide and 95 feet high, was completed in 1928 and provides electricity for 250,000 homes; its construction also destroyed what some have called the greatest fish highway in the nation. Best viewing spots are a birding platform below the dam and the edge of



the parking lot or the riverbank. It is entirely possible to see eagles without leaving your car. For walkers, a jaunt along the river will probably yield good looks at pileated woodpeckers and other winter residents. No cost to trip but this will be a day for long underwear and warm layers. Bring binoculars, field guide and lunch. Trip leaves from the Timberline Shopping Center on Woodbury-Glassboro Rd in Mantua at 11 am (car-pooling is possible). Please call Kris Mollenhauer to register at 589-4387.

### **Adventures from the Christmas Bird Count**

**by Maria Musciano-Keefe**

The alarm goes off three hours after I set it and I slide out of bed. I get dressed, gather my binoculars, bird ID book and backpack full of snacks. I double check to make sure I have enough water and Pop-tarts. I kiss my snoozing husband and son good-bye and I'm on the road by 3:30am. It's mid-December, rainy and I'm leaving the house in the middle of the night, it must be the Christmas Bird Count. I meet up with my group and we squeeze into the Forrester and we are off owling. Brian drives and Paula navigates the map by flashlight. Ed and Deb are with us. We end up pulling off to the side of a quiet road, as Brian says for one of the many times of the day, "this looks like a really good spot." As soon as we get out of the car, someone hears a Great Horned Owl. At that time all I hear is the creak and thud of the car doors and the swish of our winter coats. Another Great Horned Owl responds and with smiles on our sleepy faces, we eavesdrop on their conversation. "Who's awake?" "Me too!" Out of the corner of my eye a bird with a moth like flutter flies across the road and lands on a telephone pole. There is excited soft chatter as we share binoculars to catch a glimpse of the silhouette. Eventually, we move on. We all say how seeing the owl made getting up from our beds in the middle of the night worth the effort. We move onto other sites, listening to far away owls over the murmur of not far enough away highway traffic. We comment on how loud it can be in the dark morning hours. At another stop it's getting colder just as it does before daylight and we are all standing near a wooded area. A Screech Owl was calling, very close to us. Wait - another fluttering moth... it's the owl. Brian shone the flashlight onto it and it glared at us. Such an amazing little creature. Now, it was really worth getting up! Daylight is soon breaking and we have a long day ahead of us. Winding through our territory, counting all the feathered souls we see and hear. My skills are limited and I am always amazed when our fearless Christmas Bird Count leaders discuss how many Red Winged Blackbirds, Starlings and Brown Headed Cowbirds are in a flock above us, or when they are skillfully counting various sparrows, which to me still seem to be mostly little brown birds. It was a good day. Participating in a tradition, feeling the fresh air and being in the company of friends with a common bond. It was definitely worth getting up.



### **Conservation Notes**

Gloria Caccia, Environmental Coordinator, 582-0980

### **Buy Smart Wood**

When you buy wood products or products made from wood remember to look for recycled or alternative woods. You can also look for wood that is certified by the Forest

Stewardship Council. The FSC certifies wood follows wood from when it's until it reaches consumers. It allows us to choose wood that has been harvested in a sustainable way using safe methods. There is still a lot of old growth forest slated to be cut for timber and other products in North America, so it is important to only buy sustainable products.



### **Mercury Pollution**

Mercury exposure can cause damage to the brain and nervous systems. Children are most susceptible during the first five years of life. The main source of mercury pollution in our environment comes from coal-burning power plants, industrial processes, and incineration of products that contain mercury.

However, mercury is actually found in many items in your home. Mercury can be found in thermometers, thermostats, light bulbs, batteries, barometers, blood pressure gauges, toys, tilt switches (washing machines, top loading freezers, etc.), and cars. It is also found in nature. Mercury is dangerous to humans when mercury vapors are breathed in or it is consumed in food.

Items that contain mercury are not a threat to you as long as the mercury stays sealed inside. This means that when we dispose of these items we must do so carefully. In Gloucester County, mercury containing products should be disposed of on one of the 5 Household Special Waste collection days. For more information on mercury disposal see the next article.

A threat that may be more dangerous to you is when mercury enters the food chain through the water cycle and accumulates in predators at the top of the food chain as methylmercury. It concentrates in the tissues of creatures that consume it and it is found in large amounts in fish such as tuna and swordfish. You may want limit your consumption of fish and other foods that may contain mercury (especially pregnant women and children).



### **Other Hazardous Household Waste**



The improper disposal of hazardous waste can cause problems for the entire community. Never dump hazardous waste down the drain. Any product labeled “warning, caution, poisonous, toxic, flammable, corrosive, reactive, or explosive” is considered hazardous. This includes but is not limited to chemicals, paint, pesticides, car batteries, and ammunition. For information on getting rid of these or other products call The Gloucester County Improvement Center at 478-6045. The county will have five collection days. I will try to post the dates in this newsletter as soon as the 2003 dates are available.

The following article was written by a club member and columnist for the Gloucester County Times. It is reprinted here with permission from December 17, 2002.

**Keep Your Eyes Open for Wildlife**

**by Jim Six**

Man, this area is so rich with wildlife, I sometimes can't believe it. As many of you know, I have been a very big fan of vultures ever since I moved here 21 years ago. I was driving down the road early one morning when I realized I had just passed what appeared to be a bird that was the size of a dog.

My Closest Companion explained that we had just driven past a turkey vulture. Ever since, I have been fascinated by these huge birds that so many people are repelled by. Most think they're ugly, but not me, especially when they are in their majestic flight, gliding on thermals in circles high above us, looking for... well, looking for carrion, which is what they eat. For these homely birds cannot, do not kill. They depend on death by other means.

Farmers used to consider vultures, also called buzzards, as their best friends. A circling buzzard could tip off a farmer or rancher that he had an animal, a cow or horse or whatever, nearing death.

I remain fascinated by the big birds all these years later, although my fascination has expanded to include all birds of prey.

We have lots of buzzards in these parts, but we are also blessed with a great raptor population. Cooper's hawks live near Route 55 in Mantua Township, there are two families of red-tailed hawks living near the Deptford Mall, there are reports of bald eagles living in West Deptford Township and now there might even be a red-tailed hawk living near me.

Sunday, my Closest Companion woke me before 9. "Come see what's on the front lawn," she said with a smile. I went into our sitting room and there, less than 10 feet from my window, were seven vultures circling a dead possum on the lawn. There was another buzzard standing watch atop a telephone pole and a couple more on the roof of the house across the street. It was a vulture-lover's gift. Occasionally, one of the great black birds would fly up onto my roof, just over my head, passing within inches of my face, just outside the window glass.

I was thrilled and totally mesmerized. Suddenly, a shadow passed over the vultures around the possum and they all scattered - It should be said that turkey vultures are so non-aggressive as to be scaredy-cats. They can frighten each other away from food - as a red-tailed hawk swooped in to take his portion of the carrion.

The hawk landed and put a talon possessively on the possum, then stood on the carcass and started to eat. The buzzards, circled around him, looked like Sentinels, like Secret Service agents scanning the yard while the hawk ate undisturbed.

It was magnificent. You rarely get a chance to watch something as beautiful as a red-tailed hawk from this close.

Eventually, something frightened them all away.

That afternoon, the hawk returned to eat, alone. He was acting hinky now, looking all around him, wary of intruders. It occurred to me that maybe by happenstance those buzzards *were* acting as sentinels. He never looked up from his meal when they were standing there. He knew if they started fluttering, something was coming. If they didn't flutter, he was safe.

Sunday was a gift for someone like me.

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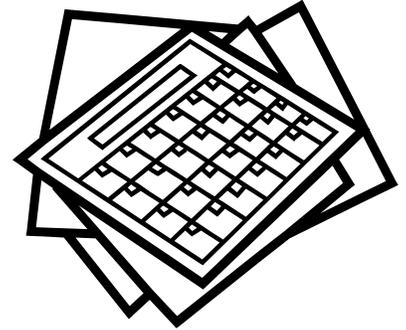
### **New Executive Committee Members**

The executive committee has enjoyed some growth in recent months. Our new secretary is Paula Dearlove. Community Events is now being directed by a committee of three- Jackie Partridge, Elaine Dzeima, and Bonnie Dann. Maria Musciano-Keefe is now handling publicity for the club. Thank you to all of them for their time and efforts!

### **Looking Ahead-**

#### **Field Trips-**

Sunday, February 16<sup>th</sup>- Bombay Hook, DE (driving loop)  
Sunday, March 16<sup>th</sup>- Silver Lake Trail Hike  
Saturday May 3<sup>rd</sup>- Bird Quest

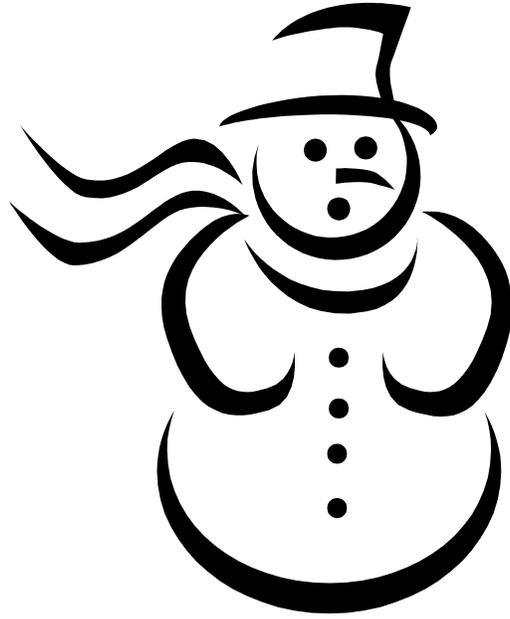


### **Crafters Wanted**

If you'd like to help other club members create nature related crafts at our February meeting please contact Marge Dolente at 384-6214. We are planning a Craft / Dessert Night. Bring a dessert and the whole family for a night of fun and crafts.

### **Club Notes:**

- Executive Committee Meeting: Sunday, January 5<sup>th</sup> at Karen Kravchuck's House- 25 Barlow Ave., Sewell, call 468-6536 for directions
  
- The nature Club is always looking for ideas for future programs and field trips. Please contact the program or trip coordinators if you have ideas or would like to help.
  
- For information about the Nature Club call Brian Hayes at 856-468-9272.
  
- Information for the next newsletter should be sent to Paula Hayes at [pnbhayes@aol.com](mailto:pnbhayes@aol.com) or 413 North Stockton Avenue; Wenonah, NJ 08090 by the 15<sup>th</sup> of each month.



Happy New Year!

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c/o EIRC  
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