

Gloucester County Nature Club

MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

Nature Club meetings are open to the public

February 2002

REGULAR MEETING – Thursday, February 14, 2002 – 7:00 pm – EIRC, 606 Delsea Dr. Sewell

Bob Cassel, Program Coordinator, 478-2496

Mid-Winter Social: A Celebration of Special Places

Brer Rabbit had his “laughin’ spot”. What’s yours?



In deference to February being an uncertain month for snow and bad weather, the Nature Club is planning to have a potluck dinner as the main focus of the February meeting. Attendees should bring a food item of their choice to contribute to the evening’s fare. The Club will provide plates, utensils and cups. There will be no snow date, so if bad weather turns us away, plan on eating your contribution at home; otherwise, join us for the chance to sample a wide variety of dishes, and to get to know other Club members in this informal gathering.

The theme for the dinner is “A Celebration of Special Places”. Attendees are invited to bring pictures, paintings or stories of a natural place that is “special” to them, to share with the group. Your special place can be a site as large and as far as the Great Wall of China... or as near and as small as a tree in a woodland plot of Gloucester County.



FIELD TRIP – Sat., February 9, 2002 - Leaving 8:30 am from Timberline Shopping Ctr.

Kris Mollenhauer, Field Trip Coordinator, 589-4387

Cumberland County’s Second Annual Raptor Festival

Birds are nature’s most obvious envoys. We marvel at their power of flight. We delight in their colors and song. But some birds excite us more than others and few groups elicit more respect than raptors the “birds of prey.” In ancient times the forms of hawks and eagles were worshiped as deities. Today their images adorn the emblems of nation states and their names are borne by professional sports teams.



Few places can boast the number and assortment that are found in Cumberland County, NJ each winter. The region’s coastal marshes and bordering uplands are a stronghold for the burley Red-tailed Hawk, the striking Rough-legged Hawk, the forest-dwelling Red-shouldered, and the elegant, ground-cruising Northern Harrier. Watercourses like the Maurice and Cohansey Rivers attract dozens of wintering Bald Eagles and woodlots harbor the agile Cooper’s Hawk and Sharp-shinned Hawk. In winter, falcons like the colorful American Kestrel are a common, roadside attraction and even the feisty Merlin and powerful Peregrine are found here.

Cumberland County’s wealth of unspoiled, unpeopled natural areas offer birds of prey the privacy and prey they need. It is not uncommon for a skilled observer at a good vantage point to scan the marsh and bordering uplands and find 10 or 15 birds of prey in a single binocular sweep.



Field trips will be staged at various sites along the river and bay environs and presentations will be offered on the topics of raptors by such luminaries in the field as Clay and Pat Sutton. A wide range of exhibitors will be on hand, including rehabilitators with live raptors, and activities for the children. So mark your calendars for a day of "cool" fun. Open to all ages. Bring binoculars, field guide and lunch. Call Field Trip Coordinator to register, to car pool and for directions!

Upcoming Field Trips:

March 23: Sterling Hill Mine, Ogdensburg, NJ- tour of underground zinc mine with spectacular mineral fluorescence display

April 13: Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve

May 4: Bird Quest

June 13: Annual Picnic at Red Bank Battlefield Park

Environmental Info/Nature Notes – February, 2002

Gloria Caccia, Environmental Coordinator, 582-0980

Long-Discussed Fish Ladder Given New Look for Batsto

(abstracted from an article by Jack Kaskey, Staff Writer for the Press of Atlantic City)

For eons, alewife migrated up the Batsto River each spring, swimming far upstream to lay the seeds of a new generation. But for more than 200 years, the river herrings' migration has been stopped downstream by a dam at the Pinelands village of Batsto, a cluster of 33 historic buildings in Wharton State Forest.

In late March and early April, the fish often leap clear out of the water, sometimes flopping on the riverbanks in their futile effort to get past the dam. "At the height of their spawn, the river is boiling with them," said Michael Hogan, a nature photographer from Weymouth Township. The small, schooling fishes are an important forage food for larger fish, including striped bass, and raptors, such as eagles and osprey.



Hoping to rebuild alewife populations, federal and state wildlife officials are planning to build a fish ladder next year on the Great Egg Harbor River at Lake Lenape. But some officials in the state Department of Environmental Protection oppose a similar ladder that would allow the herring to get around the Batsto dam, saying that the project is not in keeping with the village's historic character. Batsto is listed in both the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places.

This year, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers redesigned the ladder with an eye toward minimizing its visual impact. The ladder is now proposed to be built almost entirely below ground, covered with the same dark-stained pine used in a bridge and nearby buildings. "All you'll see is a wooden walkway between the lake and the river" said Eric Schrading, a biologist with the wildlife service's Pleasantville field office.

The Office of Historic Preservation indicated that whatever design is implemented, it has to be sympathetic to the historic character of Batsto Village. A member of the NJ Marine Fisheries Council stated that the history of fish

ladders goes back to the 1600s, when stone ladders were installed so herring could get over gristmill dams, so there is a historic basis for this. Carlton Montgomery of the Pineland Preservation Alliance said alewife are as much a part of the history of the region as any manmade structure. "They were a part of the Pine Barrens natural system and above the dam they are not."

The Army Corps will file its final environmental assessment in January. If the plan wins approval, construction could begin as soon as the fall of 2002.

Watchdog Says North America Biodiversity Shrinking

Some 235 North American animals species such as the Monarch butterfly and northern codfish are threatened by pollution, human encroachment on their natural habitats and aggressive harvesting practices, says an environmental agency set up under the continental free-trade pact. A Montreal-based agency created under the North American Free Trade Agreement comprising the United States, Canada and Mexico, says the continent faces a "biodiversity crisis" in which threatened species could disappear. That harms evolution and depletes the natural environment humans depend on to survive.

A broad study report, released in January to the three governments, shows that over the past few decades, the loss and alternation of habitat has become the main threat to biodiversity. A significant proportion of the plant and animal species of North America is threatened.



The striking Monarch butterfly, which migrates from Canada to Mexico, faces a number of threats, including coastal development in California, deforestation of oyamel fir forests in Mexico and the use of pesticides on milkweed plants, its main food.

The report notes that some experts believe humans are "fishing down the food chain" in over-harvesting stocks such as salmon, cod, halibut and swordfish. That means catching fish that are needed to rebuild depleted species. Freshwater species such as crayfish, 48 percent of which are at risk, are even more vulnerable to extinction because they cannot escape to new ecosystems when their own habitats are degraded by pollution.

"At the turn of the millennium, North Americans are faced with the paradox that many activities on which the North American economy is based impoverish the environment on which our well-being ultimately depends," the report says. It notes that the poor are the hardest hit by environmental problems.

Janine Ferretti, executive director of the commission said in an interview that the United States, Canada and Mexico had made progress in creating refuges for wildlife, protecting species and gathering data on biodiversity. Much more was needed to reverse the degradation of biodiversity, she said, saying she hoped the commission's report, The North American Mosaic, would become a key resource for planning and policy-making. "It's a panoramic view of the state of the environment in North America and it's the first time that information from all three countries has been collected on such a broad sweep of issues," Ferretti said.

Mark Your Calendar!



Saturday, May 4: Gloucester County Bird Quest (Third Annual)

Monday, May 6 (7-9pm) The Raptor Project (back by popular demand!) – Pitman High School



Executive Committee Meeting: The next Board of Trustees/Executive Committee Meeting will be held on Sunday, February 3, 2002 at 7:00 pm at the home of Karen Kravchuck, 25 Barlow Ave, Mantua. Call for directions, 468-6536. Members are invited 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

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