

Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association

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WVWA Targets Waterfowl Preserve



Green Heron perched at Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve.
Photo by Jamie Stewart

Glimpsed from a train window or car rolling through west Ambler, mostly it seems like a curiosity. Ten acres of pond with birds bobbing on the calm water in the distance. But closer, viewed through binoculars, one is likely to see waterfowl rarely seen elsewhere in the Watershed or in the suburbs. Depending on the day, in among the Canada Geese and Mallards one can find Mergansers, Black Crowned Night Herons, Lesser Black Backed Gulls, Horned Grebes and more than a dozen other species of rare waterfowl.

Welcome to the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve, a natural treasure on the banks of the Wissahickon Creek, three blocks from downtown Ambler. In addition to the pond, the fifteen-acre parcel, which contains over 500 feet of the Creek, is an important link tying together WVWA, Montgomery County, and Whitpain Township open space. The Watershed Association wants this special site to stay natural forever, a place where wildlife and people both find refuge.

To make that a reality, last year the Watershed Association signed an agreement of sale to purchase the Waterfowl Preserve.

Originally constructed around 1930, the pond served as a source of water for fire protection and manufacturing in the nearby Keasby and Mattison plant. Today, decades after it was abandoned, the site is badly in need of clean-up. Following the expected acquisition of the tract this fall, WVWA intends to begin that process and to create a public area along the street from which people can watch the birds.

The Association already has received funding for site acquisition, clean-up and design of the public spaces from several charitable foundations including the Allerton Foundation, Marshall-Reynolds Foundation, Houghton-Carpenter Foundation and the William Penn Foundation.

New Conservation Easements Protect Water Quality, Open Space **page 2**

Late last year the Association completed work on three conservation easements that will protect land along the Wissahickon and tributaries as well as completing the protection of Gwynedd Wildlife Preserve.

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VOLUNTEER HERE

Environmental Education Volunteer Training

You can train to assist with the teaching of one, two or three environmental education programs which will be conducted during the months of April and May and into early June. Just call Ext. 13 to get information and to sign up. The programs and dates are:

Monday, April 4, 9:30 to Noon:

Wetlands & Watershed Training What is a wetland? How do you recognize one if you see it? Why is this important? You will learn the answers to these questions and how to teach the lesson "Wetland Metaphors" during this session. We will be teaching this lesson to all the 3rd and 4th grade students of the Hatboro-Horsham School District at their schools. This is the second year of working with them; your participation is crucial for its success. The children and their teachers were delightful to work with last year.

Wednesday, May 4, 10:00 to Noon:

Insect Detectives Training We will be teaching this program to all the 3rd grade students from the Cheltenham Township School District here at WVWA. They love this program and so will you! The training will focus on the outdoor parts of the insect lesson, featuring Integrated Pest Management.

VOLUNTEER FIELD TRIP: MURAL TOUR Date TBA. Time: 11:00am



Please Note: You may come to observe any lesson on the volunteer calendars. Just call Ext. 13 to RSVP.

New Conservation Easements Protect Land, Creek

As 2004 drew to a close WVWA worked hard to complete three conservation easement agreements that permanently protected roughly 27 acres in a natural condition. Aside from providing the area with additional open space, the easements will preserve natural areas along the Wissahickon and one of its tributaries, something that is key to maintaining water quality in the Creek.

The largest of the three projects was a twenty-two acre easement donated by Claire Betz. The project completed the preservation of Gwynedd Wildlife Preserve on Swedesford Road in Upper Gwynedd Township. Through a series of land gifts to the Natural Lands Trust beginning in the late 1980s, Jack and Claire Betz established the 230 acre Preserve. While the wildlife area is owned and managed by NLT, the Watershed Association also holds conservation easements on the land.

This most recent easement completes the protection of all of the Betz land on Swedesford Road. In essence, the document restricts use of the property to its present uses. The tract is the site of Mrs. Betz's residence which has historic, as well as

ecological significance. A portion of the Betz house dates to the late 1600s and was originally the home of the Evans family, the first settlers in Gwynedd. In addition, because the parcel is virtually surrounded by the existing Wildlife Preserve, ecologically it functions as an integral part of the Preserve.

A second easement, donated by Carolyn Rowan, establishes a permanent natural buffer along the Wissahickon on the Rowan property in Gwynedd Valley. The newly protected land is adjacent to property donated to WVWA by Morris and Anne Evans in 1990. Establishing these natural areas adjacent to the Creek is among the most important measures that the Association can take to protect water quality in the Wissahickon.

Across Plymouth Road from the Rowans, Saly Glassman and Allan Syphers took action to protect a tributary to the Wissahickon. By placing a conservation easement on their 4.5 acre property prior to selling it, Saly and Allan ensured that the tract will not have additional development and that natural areas will remain along a tributary of the Wissahickon that runs through the property.

SPECIAL EVENTS

Three Great Ways to Serve Your Watershed

With over 600 acres of land to maintain, the Association realizes that it needs lots of help to get its work done. What a hundred volunteers can do in a morning would take WVWA's staff weeks to accomplish. So if you can't wait to get back outdoors and soak up the sunshine, WVWA encourages you to participate in one or more of your Watershed Association's three wonderful spring events. People of all ages can get involved.

Serve the Preserve Day, Saturday, April 9

Usually a service project that takes place on one of WVWA's preserves, this spring Serve the Preserve is working in partnership with PECO Energy to plant a shade buffer under PECO's power lines along the Wissahickon, in Upper Gwynedd.

Creek Clean Up, Saturday, April 30

WVWA's traditional spring-clean up of the Wissahickon and its tributaries is a great event for Scouts, service clubs and children. They love getting right into the creek to haul out trash – and that's good!

The Wissahickon Birdathon, Friday, Saturday, May 13-14

Teams of birders scour the Watershed to identify as many different species of birds as possible within 24 hours. The average total is around 130 species!

Annual Meeting: April 21, 6:00 - 8:00 pm

This year will mark the beginning of a new tradition for WVWA. The Annual Meeting will no longer be a buffet-style dinner, but will be an hors d'oeuvres, beverages and desserts affair. There will be no slide shows presented by a guest speaker. Presentations will consist of brief updates by the Chairman of the Board of Directors and the Executive Director, award presentations to deserving organizations and the formal election of members to the Board of Directors.

Plan to attend this event. It is open to all members and their guests. Members will receive an invitation. If you have not received your invitation by April 8, please call the office, Ext. 10, and request one.

Sponsorship Support Goes Beyond the Event

Support from local businesses make WVWA's special events possible and helps WVWA's work of protecting the environment. The Association is very grateful for their support, and hopes that you will support them in turn.

Supporters of Serve the Preserve



- ¥ Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection
- ¥ The Partnership for the Delaware Estuary
- ¥ Merck & Co., Inc.
- ¥ C & D Technologies, Inc.

Supporters of the Birdathon

- ¥ Commerce Bank
- ¥ North Hills Country Club
- ¥ Wachovia Bank

Supporters of the Creek Clean Up



Movers Specialty Service, Inc.



- ¥ Colorcon, Inc.
- ¥ Blue Bell Rotary
- ¥ Russell Roofing
- ¥ Moyer & Son, Inc.
- ¥ Asher's Chocolates
- ¥ North Penn Water Authority
- ¥ The Philadelphia Cricket Club
- ¥ AQUA Pennsylvania, Inc.
- ¥ Whole Foods Market
- ¥ Ambler Savings Bank
- ¥ Sandy Run Country Club
- ¥ Commonwealth Agency, Inc.
- ¥ Catanzaro's Insurance & Financial Services

Calendar For April to September 2005

(Please call to pre-register your group)

APRIL

**Saturday, April 9,
9am-2pm
SERVE THE PRESERVE**

**Sunday, April 17,
2:00pm
TALES AND TRAILS: Miss
Rumphius by Barbara Cooney**
Miss Rumphius is a story of a woman's quest to fulfill her goals throughout her life. As suggested by the book, we will enjoy the blooming wildflowers that we find on a walk in the woods and do something to make the world more beautiful. Ages 5 and up. Members \$2; Nonmembers \$4

**Thursday, April 21,
6:00-8:00pm
ANNUAL MEETING** See page 2 for details. Look for your invitation in the mail.

**Saturday, April 30,
9:00-Noon
CREEK CLEAN-UP** Call Ext. 14 for your assignment.

MAY

**Friday, Saturday, May 13, 14
BIRDATHON**

**Sunday, May 15,
2:00pm
HENS & CHICKS PICNIC**
Extend your Mother's Day celebration with us. You will learn about mother birds, make a bird

craft and have a picnic snack. Preregistration required. All ages. \$5 per person.

JUNE

**Sunday, June 12,
2:00pm
A BEE'S LIFE** Have you seen the honeybee hives at WVWA? Are you curious about the social lives of bees?

Would you like to meet a bee keeper and find out how he works with these insects? Join us for this hands-on program to learn about these fascinating and beneficial animals and the job of working with them. Taste different kinds of honey too. \$4 per person, ages 5 and up.

AUGUST

**Sunday, August 14, 2:00pm
CREEK LIFE** Wade into the cool water of the Wissahickon Creek to discover the amazing animals that live there. We will collect insects, crayfish and fish and then view them on a television. Ages 5 and up. Members \$2; Nonmembers \$4.

Birding Classes

You can register for any or all of the birding classes by e-mail : wvwa@aol.com or by snail mail. The fee for each class is \$10. Participants in the Birdathon can attend free. All 4 classes are \$30 for WVWA members. Bring binoculars and field guides. Dress for potentially muddy conditions.

Saturday, April 9 - 8am - Meet at the Four Mills Barn, 12 Morris Road, Ambler.

Saturday, April 23 - 7:30am - Meet at Crossways Preserve - Cathcart Road between Morris Rd. and Township Line Rd.

Saturday, May 7 - 7:30am - Meet at Prophecy Creek Park - Entrance to the Park is on Skippack Pike across from Narcissa Road.

Saturday, May 21 - All Day Field Trip to Belleplain State Park in New Jersey. Details for the day and directions will be given to participants when they register. This will be a day trip, but you may want to plan ahead and reserve a motel room for Friday night or for the weekend. We will have a meeting time and place on Saturday morning.

To register, send your check made out to "WVWA" with a note giving the dates you will attend along with your full name, address, phone number and e-mail address.

Please consider participating in the Birdathon. We can assign you to an existing team or help you start a new one. Call Ext.15.

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feathers, keep it warm and safe while you look for its nest which is probably in the tree or shrub above where you found the bird. You can place the bird back in its nest. If you do not see the nest, or if it not safe for you to reach the nest, immediately take the bird to a wildlife rehab center. Call our office for the phone number of the one nearest you. Another possibility is that the bird is a fledgeling; it has feathers and is exercising its wing muscles preparing for its first flight. In that case, get all dogs and cats indoors and leave the bird alone. The parents will tend to it. And keep your pets under control so they don't create other problems.

WVWA is dedicated to preserving open space and helping help humans and local wildlife coexist. Call with your questions - Ext.13.



Archaeological Dig Dates

Join with our professional dig team to uncover hidden items that may have historic significance. These will be cataloged and added to the Mill's museum collection. You can help for any part or all of the days listed. Call for details.

T., May 24 (opening the dig site)
June: Th 2; T 14; Sn 26
July: Th 7; T 12; Th 21; Sn 31
August: T 9; T 16; Sn 28
September: Th 8; Th 15; Sn 25
October: Th 6 (closing the dig site)

Training Session for New Mill Guides

If you are interested in local history, like talking with people and are interested in volunteering, please consider training to become a new Evans-Mumbower Mill guide. Training will be held in April. Call WVWA, Ext.10, to get details and to sign up. Mechanical expertise is not crucial. Once training is completed, we request a time commitment of two Sunday afternoons per season, that is between April and October.

VOICE OF THE LAND

WVWA Begins Its First Wetland Restoration

WVWA has been awarded a \$40,000 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to restore a wetland along Sandy Run, the Wissahickon's largest tributary. The area is on Montgomery County parkland behind Brooke Glen Behavioral Hospital (formerly Northwestern Institute).

At present, this wetland is severely degraded. Nearly all the native wetland plants have been either eaten out by the large Canada Goose population or crowded out by Purple Loosestrife, an invasive plant. Both of these are serious problems that resist efforts to correct them.

When mature, each Purple Loosestrife plant, a tall wetland species

species to control. Although they are a native North American bird, and were once almost extinct, they have made a comeback that is actually too successful. They eat large quantities of the desirable native plants and defecate in and near the stream contributing to nutrient pollution in the waters and a possible source of disease. They have adapted to every effort to scare them off, and are still on the endangered list (oddly enough) which makes them illegal to hunt. WVWA will keep them out of the wetland by installing a grid of wire over the entire wetland for the first year or two. When they hit their wings on the wire they will fly off again.

Once the Association establishes some control over these challenges, it will begin planting native wetland plants in the ponded area and native trees and shrubs in the dryer areas. When the plants grow tall they will keep the Canada Geese out. Geese don't like feeding among tall plants because they can't see predators approaching, and that makes them nervous enough to go elsewhere.

By restoring the deep rooted herbaceous native wetland plants, we will improve both the capacity of the wetland to put stormwater back into the ground and its ability to filter pollutants out of the water. The restoration will encourage native predator insect populations, birds and bats to reestablish themselves in the area, which will reduce the numbers of mosquitos presently being produced by the wetland. By planting trees and shrubs on the bank of the Sandy Run Creek, which is next to the wetland, we will protect the stream bank from eroding, provide cooling shade over the water, and take up more of the nutrients that are polluting the Sandy Run.

Eagle Scout candidates or groups looking for a worthwhile community service project, contact Bob, Ext.14.

brought in from Asia for its attractive purple flowers, can produce from 2 to 3 million seeds, making it extremely competitive with slower growing natives. Pulling it out doesn't always work because its woody root system can reestablish itself if not removed completely. Researchers at Cornell University were able to find a beetle (sp. *Galerucella*) from the native range of Purple Loosestrife, which will eat it down to acceptable levels, and then reduce its own population to a maintenance level. WVWA will be using this new tool for invasive control for the first time on this project.

The Canada Geese are another tough

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

A Bird Crashed Into My Window: And Other Wildlife Phone Calls

“A bird crashed into my window and is down on the ground. What should I do?” This can end up tragically or happily. Worse case scenario: the bird breaks its neck and expires instantly. Best case scenario: the bird is stunned, falls to the ground, rests a few minutes and flies off. This recovery time is crucial for the bird. If the pet cat or dog gets it, there is little chance of the bird surviving.

We can prevent the window strike problem in a humane and relatively simple way. Install several plant hanger arms in front of the problem windows and hang 1” square size netting from these arms; this will keep the netting about a foot away from the window. When a bird flies towards the window it will hit the netting, will not get hurt, and will fly away safely.

“A fox is coming to my deck and playing with my dog’s toys. What should I do?” While delightful to watch, foxes are wild animals and should never be approached. One reason a fox might hang out near your house is that its food is there. You may be leaving your dog’s food dish out; that’s an open invitation. Another possibility is that there could be mice or rats or other pests around your property and the fox is doing its job as a carnivore, and helping you. Either way, you should pay close attention to what is attracting the fox and remove that possibility. Use a Havahart trap (WVWA lends them). Do not use poisons as they move into the food chain when the dead animal becomes food for scavengers.

“I saw an injured deer crossing my lawn. Poor thing looked like its leg was injured and she was suffering. What should I do?” This recent event is just one of many calls for advice WVWA receives. The PA Game Commission,

(610) 926-3136, might be able to send an officer to put the animal down, but sometimes they are not available and nature has to take its course. This is a sad thing, but please remember that an injured animal does not need your attention (unless you are a veterinarian coming to its rescue). Do not disturb the animal if it is resting; it may heal or it may not, but it can not benefit by being stressed by people approaching.

“A baby bird fell out of its nest and I don’t see the parents anywhere. What should I do?”

This is another frequently asked question. There are several possible scenarios here. First, if the bird has no

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