



Mark Your Calendar:

Field Trip: Sunday, Sept. 10 Johnson Sod Farm.
8:00am. Lead by Ed Bruder.

Monthly Meeting: Monday, Sept. 11 7:30pm.
Presentation by Maya K. van Rossum, the
Delaware Riverkeeper.

President's Message

Welcome back from the summer and to a new year with AWS. We've worked to make the next 10 months interesting and enjoyable for you. Reaching out to local High School Science Departments to interest students in nature and environmental awareness is a goal set by your club's board this year. Please help and support our efforts when you can.

It's time to send in your annual dues. They've been maintained at previous years' levels and are a bargain considering the programs, field trips, and newsletters your club offers. I'm looking forward to seeing you in the coming months.

Pat Brundage

Field Trip: Johnson's Sod Farm
Sunday Sept. 10, 2006 8:00am.

The first field trip of the year will be lead by Ed Bruder to Johnson's Sod Farm. **Directions:** From the Audubon area, take Rt. 295 South to Rt. 42 South (towards Atlantic City). Exit Rt. 42 onto Rt. 55. Stay on Rt. 55 until exit #48 (Ferrell). Make right turn on CR. 641. Continue on CR 641 to T intersection at Rt. 77, about 5 miles (look for the windmill, helps on the way home). Make left on Rt. 77 to Johnson Sod Farm about another 9 miles on the left. Meet at the WaWa parking lot at 8:00am.

September Meeting

Our next meeting will be on Monday, Sept. 11, 2006 at 7:30pm at the Audubon Senior Center, Oak Street and Oakland Ave. The meeting will feature a presentation by Maya K. van Rossum the Delaware Riverkeeper. Please note that the meeting will start promptly at 7:30pm with **refreshments to follow the program.**

The Palmyra Cove Challenge

This year's fundraiser will be a birding event on Saturday Oct. 7th at Palmyra Cove. You can come out and see how many birds you spot, or you can pledge an amount for each bird sited. Last year approximately 70 species were identified. Raindate is Sunday Oct. 8th. For more information contact Merilee Heffron at (856) 854-0173.

Welcome New Members!
Susan & Warner Jarnagin
Moorestown, NJ



*A threatened species in New Jersey, this Cooper's Hawk on nest with young is a sight to behold.
-Photo by Chip Krilowicz.*

Observations Of A Cooper's Hawk
(Accipiter cooperi) Nest

Big Hill, Leisuretowne, Southampton, NJ Spring 2006
Big Hill (elevation 109 feet) is located in the center of a large retirement community off Route 70, two miles east of the Red Lion Circle (Routes 206 and 70). The hill is on the edge of the Pine Barrens, and is

relatively high compared to the land surrounding it with a commanding view North toward Fort Dix. At the top of the hill there is a small wooded area with nature trails and a picnic area which is never used. I often climb the North slope (which is quite steep) from my backyard and sit on a bench enjoying the view across Budd's cranberry bogs. My observations began on April 23, 2006, when I first sighted a female Cooper's Hawk carrying sticks to a nest about 60 feet off the ground near the top of a pine tree. On April, 26, a male was seen flying in with prey from the north. I did not see the exchange, but watched the female feeding about 10 feet off the ground while the male stayed in the vicinity. One April 28 Don Jones came with me to confirm the sighting, and we watched the first sign of incubation as the bird sat low with her tail extending over the rim of the nest and just her head visible. The iris of her eye was yellow, an indication of a juvenile bird. This was probably her first nesting.

Between April 28 and May 28 I observed numerous times while the female was incubating. Each time I approached the nest site the male would dart off and disappear completely. The female never moved at all. During this period I did see the male chasing crows away from the area. On May 29 I noticed the first sign of hatching. The female was sitting higher on the nest in a brooding position, and would occasionally stand looking down into the nest.

On June 1 while she was standing on the nest, a flock of grackles flew low over the nest and landed in the tops of trees behind me. She immediately launched off the nest, swooping low overhead, then perching low and close to where I stood. Even after the grackles left she stayed for a while, then flew back to the nest. I was left with the feeling that she also checked me out more closely while she was there. On June 11 I had my first glimpse of a downy head in the nest. Only one young was ever observed. Often when I visited the site the female was nowhere in my sight, but any time there was activity near the nest (such as a crow or turkey vulture flying too close) she would immediately come zipping back to the nest occasionally giving an alarm note. During the course of nesting I seldom heard any alarm notes. Apparently she was always hunting within sight of the nest.

On June 20, Chip Krilowicz and Jean Gutschuth visited the site with me and photographed the adult and young in the nest. While we watched, the male called from a grove of pines on the North slope. The

female left the nest and flew to the grove, returning to the nest with prey. During the entire nesting period I never saw the male approach the nest. On June 27 the male again called from the North slope and the female flew back to the nest with prey on which both she and the young bird fed. By this time the youngster was almost fully feathered, and after eating began exercising its wings and branching out in the same tree.

On June 29 I found the young about 50 feet from the nest tree. With a series of short flights, it returned to the nest where it apparently searched for remaining food. It picked up the tarsus of a small bird (with toes still attached) and seemed to play with it before swallowing it whole. (Note: during the whole process most observations of the nest were done with a 30 power spotting scope from a safe distance.) From June 29 to July 6 the young bird was seen branching out further and further from the nest tree, but staying in the area and often returning to the nest. On two occasions during this time the female would fly in and perch low and close to where I sat in plain view. It was a great experience as we studied each other. She seemed relaxed, standing on one foot. Her purpose, I believe, was to see if there was any real danger to her young. My purpose was to learn more about her life. On July 6 at 1pm the youngster was still hanging out in the nest. That was my last sighting of the bird.

Observed and reported by,
Augie Sexauer



*Japanese Stilt Grass, Rancocas Woods.
-photo by Sandra Keller.*

Japanese Stilt Grass threatens Native habitats

This sight greets me come late spring and summer as I bird places like Glassboro Woods and the Rancocas Woods where I took this picture on 8-19-06. I have only recently become aware that this sight is not good. It's Japanese Stilt-grass. This foreign

invasive plant species has been almost exponentially increasing in areas where it gets a foothold - or roothold so to speak. I have been talking with a biologist and a botanist on it and both suggest, although it hasn't been proven, that this Stilt-grass acts like the Garlic Mustard in that it completely changes the soil composition and hence prevents native flora from growing there anymore. Even White-tailed Deer avoid it! If people get to know it, perhaps we can prevent it from spreading further. When detected early, measures can be taken to control its spread and even eradicate it. If allowed to take hold, it isn't long before the picture above is all we see anymore. I have copied the following pertinent information from this web site:

<http://www.nps.gov/plants/alien/fact/mivi1.htm>

I encourage readers to check this site out to learn more about the Japanese Stilt-grass. Introduced into Tennessee around 1919, stilt grass may have accidentally escaped as a result of its use as a packing material for porcelain. Individual plants may produce 100 to 1,000 seeds that fall close to the parent plant. Seeds may be carried further by water currents during heavy rains or moved in contaminated hay, soil, or potted plants, and on footwear. Stilt grass seed remains viable in the soil for five or more years and germinates readily.

ECOLOGICAL THREAT

Japanese stilt grass is especially well adapted to low light conditions. It threatens native plants and natural habitats in open to shady, and moist to dry locations. Stilt grass spreads to form extensive patches, displacing native species that are not able to compete with it. Where white-tail deer are over-abundant, they may facilitate its invasion by feeding on native plant species and avoiding stilt grass.

NATIVE RANGE

Japan, Korea, China, Malaysia and India. It has a sprawling habit and grows slowly through the summer months, ultimately reaching heights of 2 to 3½ ft. (6-10 dm.). The leaves are pale green, lance-shaped, asymmetrical, 1-3 in. (3-8 cm.) long, and have a distinctive shiny midrib. Slender stalks of tiny flowers are produced in late summer (August - September). The fruits or achenes mature soon after flowering and the plant dies back completely by late fall.

Some management options are given online at the site above. Here again, detection and control early is most desirable. I will have more on various

control measures for foreign invasive plants at the end of this series of articles. As always, I welcome questions, comments, suggestions.

Sandra Keller
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Will The Vole Log Off?

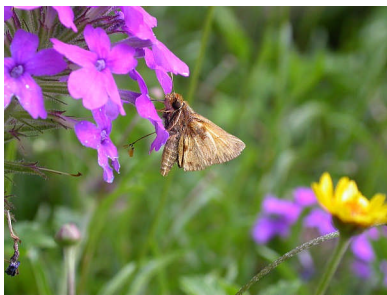
A path runs through the woods behind my office building and when I feel like taking a break, that's where I go. Not far within the trees is a narrow, muddy, ditch. Looking down at the place where the ditch runs under the path, I spotted a vole among the rocks. It was busy harvesting leaves from a jewel weed. It was shaped like a short, fat cigar and its bones moved under its dark, brown fur as it scurried about. Thoroughly engrossed in its task of stuffing new green leaves into a chamber among the rocks, the vole wasn't without worries: the end of its project could come at any minute from an attack by reptile, mammal, bird or a stone tossed by an office vagrant like me. Less than a hundred yards away was my building from which emanates the steady electronic hum of commerce. The occupants stare at screens and talk on the phone all day long, gathering and transmitting information, reading and sending e-mails. Millions upon millions of dollars are transferred back and forth and strategies to increase those millions are plotted.

The vole, needless to say, was oblivious to this activity and from the bottom of its trench, the building wasn't even visible, much less comprehensible. But it and the humans in the building were concerned with the same basics: food and shelter. This strange, little mammal confronted the problem of survival first-hand, gathering its leaves and putting them by, whether to sleep among or eat I couldn't guess, while its human counterparts labored several layers removed from the "natural" world. Of course, this is just one of the things that sets us apart from the vole and who among us would want to return to living in a burrow no matter how well-stocked with food or bedding? Yet, will the vole one day be as alien to us as we are to it and what might the consequences be?

We all use a computer to one extent or another for work or in pursuit of our interests. While it's easy to over-simplify, consider the current generation who seem to get most of their information and experience from a screen. How often I've seen kids, walking or sitting, completely absorbed in some hand-held device while life moves about them. The enormous vehicles that seem to be necessary today to transport

even the tiniest tot come equipped with one or more DVDs. Forget about looking out the window; the reality of leaving the house and taking a trip is all programmed by Disney. This isn't to say that there aren't awe-inspiring things for children to see by "logging on" or dropping a DVD into a machine. It's easy to argue that watching "The March of the Penguins" is far better than risking one's life in Antarctica over long months to witness what the French film team beautifully distilled for us in 90 minutes. But to what extent will technology replace real experience and what are the implications? Will it create such indifference to the real world that "conservation" will be synonymous with hoarding images in cyber space the way a vole hoards leaves? Will an electronic image of something be deemed as valuable as the thing itself? Will nobody visit the voles in person? I don't know if these are real concerns but the questions came to mind as I watched a small and industrious rodent go about the business of its life.

John Maret
September, 2006



*A Zebulon Skipper is nectaring on Homestead Purple Verbena. June, 2006, Rancocas Nature Center.
-photo by Sandra Keller.*

EPA Aims To Mow Down Small-Engine Pollution

The small engines on our lawn mowers are far less regulated than their much larger, automobile-powered cousins. As a result, they pump a lot more pollution into the air. With an estimated 52 million lawnmowers in America, these small engines contribute staggeringly to air pollution. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) estimates a new walk-behind mower spews out as much pollution in one hour as 11 new cars. And riding mowers can pollute as much as 34 new cars! So the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) proposed new rules to clean up lawn mower pollution. Some of the same technology that helped make large engines cleaner applies to lawn mowers too. Catalytic converters, for example, would reduce exhaust

emissions by as much as 80-percent. But you can do more on your own. Routine maintenance and tune-ups help keep engines running more efficiently and generating less pollution. Keeping mower blades sharpened also helps. If you buy a new mower, look for models with four-stroke engines. They are much more efficient than two-stroke engines and generate less pollution. You could even buy an old-fashioned manual push-mower. Before you roll your eyes, consider the following: Push mowers have come a long way since the days before powered lawn mowers. They are perfect for small lawns, or even for tight areas large mowers have a hard time reaching. Not only are they better for your lawn, but they are better for you! In addition to the reducing pollution (air and noise!), you can burn almost 500 calories per hour! No matter what you do, I hope you'll look at your yard work a bit differently next time you mow your lawn!

Fred Feiner, Communications Director
New Jersey Conservation Foundation

Nature Programs On TV

Beginning October 1, 2006, The Weather Channel will shed light on the science of global warming and other environmental issues with a new weekly series, "The Climate Code With Dr. Heidi Cullen." Airing at 5 p.m. ET each Sunday, the half hour show will examine the most pressing climate issues of the day.

Other Club Events:

Burlington County Natural Sciences Club, BCNSC presents, "Birding by Radar" by Dave LaPuma Sept. 13, 2006. BCNSC Meets the second Wednesday of the month, September through May at 7:45pm in Lumberton Leas Meeting Room, Lumberton, NJ. For more information on BCNSC go visit: <http://oldsquaw.tripod.com/index.html>

ATTENTION
Refreshments will be served after the meeting and programs this year.