



"Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has." - Margaret Mead



A Red Knot in winter plumage makes you look twice. It is uncommon in winter, photographed January 19th at Barnegat Light. -Chip Krilowicz

March Meeting

On Monday, March 13, 2006 at 7:30 p.m. Audubon Wildlife Society will hold its monthly meeting at the Audubon Senior Center, Oak Street and Oakland Ave. Refreshment volunteers are: John Barry and Sandra Keller.

This month's program will feature a presentation by Fred Stine of the Delaware Riverkeeper Network. Fred will discuss Petty's Island, the Delaware Deepening, the Camden Greenway and other issues Riverkeeper is involved in

To find out more about the Riverkeeper visit:
<http://www.delawariverkeeper.org>



The Delaware River running into Philadelphia.

February 18th Field Trip Report

Barnegat Light State Park and Long Beach Island

Ten of us made the trip. There was a stiff land breeze, with snow in the morning and temperatures in the 30s. As usual for the Barnegat Jetty, the best birds were Harlequin ducks quite close in. Long-tailed ducks were also at our feet. Both species were showing their mating behavior. Other goodies at the Park and points South along Long Beach Island were Northern Pintails, Surf Scoter, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Red-breasted Merganser, and Common Loon. We had a total of 22 species.

- John Courtney

Members Garden Tour

We have quite a few gardeners in our club, with both small and larger gardens, some members have expressed the desire to show off their gardens and see what other members are doing. Therefore, we are planning to have a tour of these gardens. With this in mind, we would like members who might be interested in participating to contact Joan Ziegler in the next few weeks at (856) 428-1914 so we can start planning this tour. We have set the date for Saturday May 20th, but if a majority of the members feel another time would show off their gardens to a better advantage this day could be changed.

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Please send news items to Janet Goehner-Jacobs at awspublicity@aol.com

www.audubonwildlifesociety.org

Saturday, March 11th Field Trip
Salem County

Meet at 9 am. at Richman's Ice Cream on Route 40 and Old King's Highway. We will carpool to various spots in Salem County looking for waterfowl, meadowlark, snow geese, and white-crowned sparrows. Restrooms are available in Richman's and we will stop back close to lunch time. Dress warmly and bring binoculars, lunch, and a scope if you have one. Trip will be co-lead by Jean Gutmuth and Chris Herz. Questions: call Chris 856-546-5471 or Jean 856-546-9170

Directions Salem County field trip:

Take 295 South to Exit 4 (Route 48). Continue east on Route 48 until it joins Route 40. Continue east on Route 40, past Cowtown Rodeo (on right) to Sharptown (approximately 3 miles). There is a traffic light with a gas station and RICHMAN'S on the left side. We will meet at Richman's at 9 AM.

Cleaning up the Delaware River

Lowest rung on the food chain critical to health of the river and bay.

By Molly Murray, The News Journal, Feb. 16, 2006

Out on the oyster beds of Delaware Bay, Les Watling expected to find an aquatic community of dozens of living things. But he didn't. "That was our first clue that something was wrong," he recalled. "I remember picking oysters off one healthy reef.... There were giant copper nodules inside."

The copper accumulated in the oysters' tissue as the bivalve fed by filtering the bay water. It was in the early 1970s and Watling, then a graduate student at the University of Delaware College of Marine Studies in Lewes, was interested in the animals that live at the bottom of the food chain.

What he found was an ecosystem in distress -- water so thick with sediment that visibility was limited to about six inches, the signs of contamination in the oysters and a bottom-dwelling community that wasn't nearly as diverse as others in nearby waterways. He was part of a team that took the first comprehensive look at the animals that make up the base of the Delaware Estuary's food chain. No one since has taken such a close look at the unglamorous, but critical, creatures that dwell in the bottom sediments.

Some scientists believe it is time to take another detailed look at the Delaware Estuary food web, and nearly a dozen other key items. A new government report on the status and needs of the Delaware Estuary recommends revisiting the research, coordinating the research being done now and keeping better track of the progress of key efforts from wetlands restoration and habitat loss to monitoring for new and emerging pollutants.

The recommendations come from the Partnership for the Delaware Estuary and evolved following a workshop in 2005 in which scientists and environmental regulators were invited to gather and discuss the key issues facing the estuary.

Among the conclusions:

- Although the estuary is home to sprawling industrial and chemical businesses, few of them are partners in research.
- Researchers and resource managers need to do a better job working together and monitoring the results.

Key questions:

The report comes at a time when environmental regulators from Delaware, Pennsylvania and New Jersey have faced key questions about the bay -- from a federal plan to deepen the shipping channel, to a request to build a liquefied natural gas terminal, to a proposal to treat and dispose of wastewater from the neutralization of nerve gas.

Regulators still are grappling with the environmental fallout from the Athos I oil spill in November 2004, and there are habitat and fisheries management issues -- from reconstruction of the bay oyster reefs to management decisions on species from blue crabs to horseshoe crabs. There are concerns about wetland losses and worries about how to handle a growing list of pollutants from PCBs -- polychlorinated biphenyls, which are associated with reproductive and developmental disorders -- to pharmaceuticals and metals.

The Delaware is part of the National Estuary Program, a federal effort to address pollution concerns in key waterways throughout the nation. Delaware's Inland Bays also are part of the National Estuary Program. Back in 1996, state and federal officials signed off on a comprehensive management plan for the Delaware Estuary -- a document

that highlighted the concerns and made recommendations about how to address them.

But after that, said Kathy Klein, executive director of the partnership, "it wasn't clear who was really calling the shots." Then in 2004, the partnership and the Delaware estuary program joined forces. Bridging the gap has been difficult because four states are involved with differing interests in the estuary and there are regular changes in the political agenda, Klein said.

The government report is the latest effort to highlight the key issues facing the estuary. Danielle Kreeger, an author of the report, said she believes it can help prioritize how to spend a limited pool of scientific and research money. "I think that we will use it as a guidance document," she said. Kreeger said that not only are there four state's interests at play -- Delaware's, Pennsylvania's, New Jersey's and New York's, but the estuary falls in the middle of two regional divisions of the Environmental Protection Agency. And there are state agencies and regional commissions working on some of the same issues.

The idea with the report was "to take stock of where we stand," she said. Back when Watling was doing his graduate research, homeowners still were using detergents with phosphorous and the river still was plagued with low oxygen levels because of wastewater treatment plants. 'Things were pretty bad' Watling, who now is a professor of oceanography at the University of Maine School of Marine Sciences and a visiting professor of zoology at the University of Hawaii, said he was surprised when he started the research project in the Delaware River and Bay.

Watling had come to Delaware from California, and there was rich diversity of animals in the area just off the beach in the Pacific. As many as 5,000 species could be found in the intertidal zone, he said.

But in the Delaware Estuary, there were 350 species, he said. "We could tell just by looking at the water that things were pretty bad," he said. Oysters still struggle because of two diseases that have significantly reduced the population. But there are efforts, in Delaware and New Jersey, to try to rebuild oyster stocks. Kreeger said that once water quality started to improve, the spotlight shifted to the legacy of chemicals that taint the bottom.

The research on chemicals such as PCBs is excellent but the Delaware River is the second

largest oil waterway in the United States and there is almost no monitoring for hydrocarbons, she said. "How can we be doing such a good job and on the other side be so blind?" Kreeger said.

Wetlands disappearing:

And there are other key concerns. Over on the Chesapeake Bay, scientists are concerned about the decline in the underwater grasses that serve as nursery habitats for fish.

But in the Delaware Bay, those grassy habitats have never been as common. Instead, Kreeger said, tidal wetlands have played a key role as a sponge and filter and as a nursery area for fish and shellfish.

But wetlands have been disappearing. By some estimates, according to the report, only about 5 percent of the tidal freshwater marshes along the banks of the estuary remain. As many as 1,000 acres of tidal freshwater wetlands were lost during the construction of I-95 in Delaware, said David Carter, with Delaware's Coastal Zone Management Program. Cherry Island was wetlands, as was Fort Christina, he said. "We have lost a lot," he said.

The impact can be great -- more than just for fish and wildlife, Carter said. Because wetlands absorb water, they can help reduce flooding and they also serve as pollution filters.

The report points to wetlands losses and recommends better monitoring when there are efforts to restore wetlands. Carter said he agrees that better monitoring is needed. "We still have a lot to learn about restoration." For Klein, there also is the issue of changing the public perception of the estuary. Especially in urban areas, people look at the Delaware as an industrial river, Klein said. "This is a working river," she said. But people need to understand the importance of the wetlands, and they need to understand the food resources.

"What they see is an urban river," she said. "There are still huge problems." She points to the legacy of industrial pollution. But Kline believes this is a chance to bring scientists and environmental regulators together with a set of goals to improve the estuary. "It's going to take time and it's going to take a lot of money," she said. "All these things are coming together. The momentum has really increased."

Petty's Island wins reprieve

Posted by the Asbury Park Press on 02/9/06

Lisa P. Jackson, the nominee to be the state's environmental protection commissioner, says the redevelopment plans for Petty's Island "deserve reconsideration" and "will be one of my priorities." Hopefully, that means the South Jersey Democratic machine's push for a massive construction project on the island is not a done deal.

On Monday, Jackson said she plans to review the status of the island off Pennsauken in the Delaware River. Its owner, Citgo, offered to clean up the oil-contaminated land and donate it to the state as a wildlife preserve. In September 2004, the Natural Lands Trust board voted 5-to-4 to make Petty's Island a preserve, but the motion failed because none of the four state-appointed representatives voted in favor.

If Jackson visits the island, she should grab some local environmentalists to serve as her tour guides instead of the local political hacks. Minions of South Jersey Democratic Party boss George E. Norcross III would likely steer her toward the pockets of pollution, then hustle her back out. Environmentalists could show her the nesting eagles, the herons and other wildlife that inhabit Petty's Island. They also could discuss the potential for regenerating life on the property. That potential shouldn't include condominiums, a convention center and a golf course being pushed by the power brokers. Instead, the land should be reclaimed as parkland for citizens and as a preserve for the feathered and furry inhabitants that could flourish there if Citgo is allowed to proceed with the cleanup.

Jackson also should listen to historians, who can describe the island's colorful background. William Penn was one of its original owners and it was an American Indian trading post. The African-American Commission based in Camden has asked state lawmakers to support preservation of Petty's Island, which was both a slave-trading post and a stop on the Underground Railroad for slaves escaping to freedom.

Reversing the McGreevey administration's rejection of the Citgo offer would go a long way toward showing that Gov. Corzine's administration is not beholden to the power brokers who want to hand the land over to their political friends and campaign contributors.

The state spends millions of dollars to acquire land to be preserved as open space, making the rejection of Citgo's free land a disgrace. Jackson should take her new title to heart, and show that environmental protection comes before political pull.

The Owl Farm

Some of you may be familiar with the Pole Farm in Mercer County, so named because of the array of telecommunications poles that AT&T once planted there. Today, the poles are gone and the more than 800 acres are comprised of large, broken fields and second growth woods. The County has designated the space parkland and some of the habitat is being groomed for grassland birds; Meadowlarks and Bobolinks are residents. Some Meadowlarks have wintered there, dodging the half dozen or so Northern Harriers who also decided to stay over. But the bonanza this season has been the owls. Seven or so Short-Eareds roost in some scattered cedars near the main road through the park. Farther along in a shorter but tighter clump of cedars a lone Saw-whet is spending its days. Roosting on the ground and unseen until dusk is another group of birds. A few weeks ago, a regular visitor had checked on the Long-Eareds and the Saw-Whet. The sun had dropped. In the next few minutes this observer counted six Short-Eared owls skimming over the ragged fields as a Great-Horned began to call down the night.

-John Maret
March, 2006

Directions from South Jersey: the Pole Farm is officially known as Mercer County Park Northwest. Take 295N to 95S to 206N. Follow 206N to the light at Carter Road. Turn LEFT. Go to first light, Cold Soil Road, and turn LEFT. Follow Cold Soil a couple of miles past Blackwell Road and Van Kirk Road which enters on the right. After Van Kirk you'll see a peeling white barn which marks the Park on the right. Make a hairpin RIGHT just before the intersection with Keith Road. Follow the road to a crescent turn-out and park there. Walk ahead on the road. The Long-Eareds have been roosting in a sparse clump of cedars at the corner of the large field on your left and are easily visible from the road. Five birds were still there on Sunday, 2/26, and as many as seven have been counted. The road turns right soon after the Long-Eareds' roost then intersects with a gravel road. Go left another hundred yards and you'll see a shorter but denser clump of cedars on your left with a narrow, well-trodden path that leads to the Saw-

Whet. The bird habitually roosts in the clump at the end of the path but has also been found in the trees on the left going in. It was seen on Saturday, 2/25, but was missing Sunday, 2/26.

The Cat Owl

Somewhere along the way, I got the idea that I had a special relationship with Great-Horned Owls. I saw my first one when I was about 10 years old while exploring the woods near my new home. Suddenly, a huge bird glided down the slope in front of me, drawing the attention of a couple of crows. As I lifted my head to follow the owl and its pursuers through the dense woods I looked straight into the dark, round eyes of two fuzzy white chicks who were frantically bobbing their heads as they tried to get a good fix on me.

They had hatched in the hollow at the top of a sheared off tulip trunk. The tree was rooted at the base of the hill and from where I stood the owlets' sanctuary was at eye-level. I came back as often as I could until the chicks had fledged and gone off. There was a nest there for the next three seasons and then a winter passed without a brooding owl. Another year went by and, now in high school, I took a walk in late January to check on the tulip snag – still empty. I started to wander slowly around the top of the broad, rounded hill. After rambling about a half mile I suddenly saw what I thought was a rabbit sitting in the crotch of a huge beech tree. It quickly materialized into a Great-Horned Owl. Maybe that's when I gained the impression that I had a special relationship with the bird sometimes called a Cat Owl: I'd set out to find the new nest and my sense for the animal had led me straight to it. Of course, I had no idea if the bird staring balefully back at me was the same one that had nested across the ridge.

No matter. As with the other site, I had an eye-level view from the hillside into the great creature's domain, this time the abandoned nest of a Red-tailed Hawk. A little rock promontory gave me a very comfortable place to sit. I visited regularly and was able to get a sense of the owl's life. One morning, the corpse of a male Robin lay under the gaze of those huge, yellow eyes, on another a Red-wing. It's not hard to imagine the impression this bird made on me, a budding young nature lover. Large and grand, she sat enthroned in plain sight, the undeniable center of attention in the bare winter woods. I developed a great admiration for this seemingly indomitable creature that brooded eggs in the middle of winter, caught squirrels, rabbits and skunks in her fearsome

black talons. Her presence caused disquiet and alarm in other birds; she was life-threatening even to humans who would dare climb to her nest. Two more broods followed in the beech tree and then I was off to college, too far away to come home except at Christmas. I never found another nest in what I thought of as the Owl Woods; a winter storm eventually brought down the gigantic, ancient beech.

But the Cat Owl was always in my consciousness and I developed a peculiar sensitivity to the species. I seemed to be able to hear their calls while asleep, to sift their distant hooting from my dreams and wake briefly to listen before drifting off again. When I moved to Princeton I quickly discovered that I was living only a couple of hundred yards from a nest and once again I was able to gain an insight into the owls' lives. This was an experienced pair. Unconcerned by people walking the foot path that ran right below their nursery, they roosted during the day in a tall hemlock while their downy offspring bobbed around in the cup of an oak stump barely 12 feet from the ground. One year, I was able to follow their entire nesting cycle, from seeing the female calling softly to the male prior to mating to watching one of their fully-fledged young trying repeatedly to catch a not-overly-concerned gray squirrel months later.

I greatly enjoyed watching these birds for the next few seasons and having my sleep occasionally broken by the hooting of the adults or the screams of their young. I regained the closeness I'd felt for them years earlier. But my connection to the species was solidified in an unexpected and eerie way. One April I was driving to upstate New York before dawn. As I got on the Palisades Parkway about daybreak I had an idle vision: a dead Great-Horned Owl lay on its back at the edge of a road, wings folded peacefully at its sides. I stopped and placed the bird in a white bag.

An hour later I was on the Taconic Parkway. There, on the right shoulder, lay the owl. I was so rattled that I continued for a couple of miles before turning back to make sure I wasn't hallucinating. No, the bird was real, lying perfectly composed and undamaged, not a feather out of place. I wanted to bring it with me and opened my trunk to look for something to carry it with. All I could find was a white plastic bag.

I put the owl in my freezer for several weeks, bringing him out once or twice for photographs. One day, I placed him in a cooler and went to the administrative office of the Assunpink Wildlife Management Area. A

ranger examined him and told me my owl would probably be stuffed and used as part of an environmental program touring schools. I hope that's what happened and perhaps by now he's transmitted to some young person the same spark of awe and fascination that has kept me tied to the Cat Owl most of my life.

-John Maret March, 2006



Great Horned Owl, Bubo virginianus

Other Club Events:

Program: Burlington County Natural Sciences Club, BCNSC presents, "Tales of a Restoration Botanist" by Wayne Farren on March 8, 2006. BCNSC meets the second Wednesday of the month, September through May at 7:45pm in Medford Twp. Safety Building, Court Room Union and Jones Sts. (off Rt. 70) Medford, NJ. For more information on BCNSC go visit:

<http://oldsquaw.tripod.com/index.html>

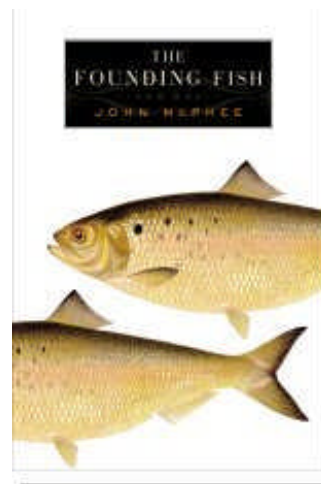
Program: Saddler's Woods Conservation Association presents "Using Native Plants Naturally: Planting Design Based on Plant Communities." Thursday March 23, 2006 7pm. Rohrer Camden County Branch Library 15 MacArthur Boulevard, Haddon Township, NJ. The presentation will include a slide show and talk focusing on native plantings and landscape restoration by John Nystedt, Director of Forest Management for Saddler's Woods Conservation Association. John is an associate at Andropogon Associates, Ltd. in Philadelphia, is a N.J. Certified Landscape Architect, and has 25 years of experience in landscape architecture and ecological planning. The presentation is free and open to the public. Contact Janet at (856) 869-7372 or janet@saddlerswoods.org or visit <http://www.saddlerswoods.org>

Nature Programs On TV:

Nature: Inside the Animal Mind

This three part series begins Sunday March 5th at 8:00pm on WHYY. Part two airs March 12, Part three airs March 19. This series explores what animals know and how they know it! To view a preview go to: <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/nature/preview.html>

NATURE airs in most markets on Sunday nights at 8:00 p.m. Please check local listings.



Good Books:

The Founding Fish, by John McPhee

The Founding Fish, is a braid of personal history, natural history, and American history. This spirited book provides a wonderful account of fishing for Shad in American rivers, especially the Delaware nearest to McPhee's home. I gave this book to my brother last year because he loves to fish and he had quite an adventure tracking the Shad runs on the Delaware! I highly recommend this book for those who love fishing or anyone who is interested in the historic role Shad have played in the Delaware region.

-Janet Goehner-Jacobs