

Washington Crossing Audubon Society



The Crossing

The Crossing is the newsletter of Washington Crossing Audubon Society, a nonprofit organization and the local chapter of National Audubon Society. Correspondence should be sent to WCAS, PO Box 112, Pennington, NJ 08534. Visit us at www.washingtoncrossingaudubon.org.

SPRING 2012

PROGRAMS/MEETINGS

Meetings of the Washington Crossing Audubon Society are held on the third Monday of each month from September to May. At 7:30 PM, join us for a refreshment social; at 8:00, our program begins. Programs are held in Stainton Hall on the campus of the Pennington School. The campus is on Delaware Avenue between Route 31 and Main Street in Pennington; enter from Delaware Avenue between the brick lamp posts (across the street from tennis courts), proceed a short distance to an intersection, and turn right into the parking area. Parking is free. The walkway to Stainton Hall is evident at the end of the parking lot.

Wildlife in the Bedroom

Jenn Rogers and Tyler Christensen

Monday January 16

There is more to the Birds and the Bees than what your mom told you! Join us in exploring the bizarre and fascinating courting and mating behaviors of our native wildlife.

Jenn Rogers is the County Naturalist for the Mercer County Park Commission and has experienced first-hand some of the steamy secrets of wildlife sex. Tyler Christensen grew up studying insects and birds, and over the years he has seen some of the stranger ways in which insects and other animals procreate.

Jenn was the recipient last summer of a Washington Crossing Audubon scholarship to a one-week program for educators at the Hog Island Audubon Center in Muscongus Bay, Maine. Before her formal presentation, she has promised to regale her audience with a brief account of her experiences.

Forging New Paths

Alan Hershey

Monday, February 13 - 8:00 PM

NOTE: Meeting on second Monday

How easy it is to take for granted the simple footpaths we follow as we hike. A good trail may seem as if it was just always there. Alan Hershey will demystify how new trails come into being--the necessary conditions for new trails, route design, the digging and moving of big stones, the bridge-building, and the all-important maintenance that follows.

Alan Hershey is Chair of the Board of Trustees of D&R Greenway Land Trust, and New Jersey Trails Association whose website (www.njtrails.org) provides guides and maps for trails throughout central New Jersey. For seven years he has been organizing and leading volunteer crews to build and improve trails in our region. This persistent work has created a growing cadre of skilled trail-builders from teenagers to octogenarians. Those attending this presentation will have ample opportunity to be welcomed to their ranks.

Wildflowers of the Sourland Ridge

Rachel Mackow

Monday, March 19 - 8:00 PM

From spring ephemerals to the final blooms of autumn – Rachel Mackow’s presentation features her photographs of the native flowering plants of the Sourland ridge. She will focus on wildflowers that thrive in the Sourland’s mature forests. Rachel will discuss plant life cycles, pollinators, medicinal and traditional uses, and native plant conservation.

A photographer, writer and naturalist, Rachel Mackow resides on the Sourland Mountain ridge with her husband and son. Her photography has been exhibited and published internationally and locally, with exhibits at the Queens Museum, Phillip's Mill, Gallery 14, Princeton Public Library, the University of Pennsylvania and the National Library in Havana, Cuba. Her hand-tinted photographs were published in Harper's Magazine. She is a Land Steward for Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space.

Birds of the Sourlands

Sharyn Magee

Monday, April 16 - 8:00 PM

In her illustrated talk, Magee will emphasize the ecology, breeding strategies, and conservation of birds of the Sourland Mountains, concentrating on breeding neo-tropical migrants, which are species of high conservation concern.

Since her retirement from EAG Labs where she was a senior scientist, she has been doing breeding studies of Neo-tropical migrants at two sites in the Sourland mountains, Baldpate Mountain and Northern Stony Brook Reserve (McBurney Woods). She also volunteers at Hannah Suthers' Featherbed Lane bird banding station. She lives in Hopewell Township with her husband Charles and has two grown sons and two grandchildren.

Butterflies in the Garden State

Jim Springer

Monday, May 14 - 8:00 PM

NOTE: Meeting on second Monday

Springer's illustrated talk will include an overview of the diversity of the more than 100 species of butterflies found in New Jersey as well as their host plants and habitats. Many of the common species will be discussed as well as a number of the rarer specialties.

Jim Springer is the Vice-President of the North American Butterfly Association and responsible for several of its websites including www.naba.org. Jim has a strong interest in many aspects of natural history but especially that of butterflies and other insects in both the U.S. as well as other countries. His recent retirement as a research chemist will allow him to pursue this interest even more extensively.

FIELD TRIPS

For more information or notification of cancellation of field trips, call Field Trip Chair Lou Beck at (609) 737-0070; if the trip is described as co-sponsored with the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association (SB-MWA), advance registration is required. To register for such trips or to get more information on them, call SB-MWA at (609) 737-7592. There is no fee for most of our field trips; exceptions are noted in the trip description.

Return to Shark River

A field trip at 9:00 AM to Noon on Saturday, February 4, depending on the weather, led by Lou Beck and Mary Doscher.

The Shark River area, - about one hour away east on I-195 - allows us to visit a number of interesting habitats (bay, ocean, and fresh water ponds). We can compare the list of birds we saw in November with the birds that decide to stay for the winter.

Directions: Take I-295 to I-195 to Route 35, and meet at the Marina, Route 35 in Belmar. Bring lunch and beverage, and dress for the weather Call Mary at (609) 586-3185 one or two days prior to the trip date for time and directions.

Groundhog Day Celebration

A field trip on Saturday, February 4, from 10:30 AM to Noon; Families; (*\$5/person suggested donation*)

Celebrate Groundhog Day at the Watershed Reserve. Pennington by visiting several groundhog burrows with one of the Teacher-Naturalists and learning about the natural history of these furry weather forecasters. If the weather allows, we'll play a game about hibernation. Come dressed for wintry, muddy and possibly snowy walking conditions. *This program is co-sponsored by the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association.*

Round Valley Reservoir

A field trip at 8:30 AM on Sunday, February 12, led by Mark Witmer.

This popular recreational reservoir, located in northern Hunterdon County just east of Clinton and south of Route 78, occupies more than 4000 acres. The water is nearly 200 feet deep, making it one of the deepest bodies of water in the state. Round Valley is a popular

site for swimming, picnicking and boating in the warmer months, and fishing, hiking, and birding year round. Winter is the best season to search for gulls and waterfowl—including grebes, coots and ducks—visiting raptors, and nesting bald eagles that have made this location home for decades. Over-wintering owls sometimes roost in the conifers, and great horned owls nest here. Depending on the birding and weather conditions, we may combine our field trip to Round Valley with a visit to nearby Spruce Run Recreational Area or the Alpha Grasslands. The field trip will start at 8:30 am by the main boat launch, in the northwest corner of the park (i.e. about 1 mile north of the main entrance). For further information, directions, or notice of trip cancellation due to inclement winter weather, call Mark Witmer at (609) 730-0826.

Focus: Wintering Ducks

A field trip from 1-3 PM on Sunday, February 12, led by: Jenn Rogers, Mercer County Naturalist.

This walk will focus on Wintering Ducks. Meet at Spring Lake – Roebling Park (end of Sewell Ave., Hamilton). For information: 609-883-6606 x 112. (Cosponsors: Mercer County Parks, Friends for the Marsh, Washington Crossing Audubon, D&R Greenway Land Trust).

Woodcock Watch

A field trip on Friday, March 2, from 6:00-7:30 PM, Family (children 6 and older), \$5/person suggested donation.

Discover the local avian harbinger of spring, the woodcock, on a short hike on the Watershed Reserve trails with Education Director Jeff Hoagland. Join Jeff at dusk to watch and learn more about this bird's spring courtship dance and fascinating life. This program is co-sponsored by the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association. Please call the Buttinger Nature Center, 609-737-7592, to register and for directions.

Princeton Institute Woods

A field trip at 9:00 AM on Saturday, March 3, led by Lou Beck and Brad Merritt.

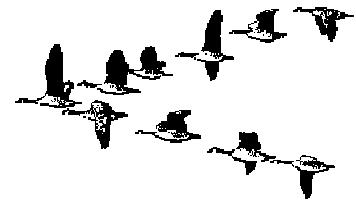
We plan to walk through these woods looking for wintering birds as well as other things that might turn up in a mature forest.

Directions: From Princeton take Alexander Street toward Route 1. At the bend before the canal turn right on West Drive. Go a short distance on West Drive and park near the entrance to the Rogers Wildlife Refuge. Contact Lou Beck at (609) 737-0070 if additional information is needed.

In Search of Skunk Cabbage

A field trip on Saturday, March 3, from 10:00-11:30 AM, Family, \$5 suggested donation per person.

Blooming late in winter, skunk cabbage seems to ignore the cold and welcome the arrival of spring. Join one of the SBMWA Teacher-Naturalists on this hike to meet this most unusual plant as well as search for other signs of emerging spring. This program is co-sponsored by the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association. Please call the Buttinger Nature Center, 609-737-7592, to register and for directions.



Winter Ducks (Revisited)

A field trip from 1-3 PM on Sunday, March 11, led by: Jenn Rogers, Mercer County Naturalist.

This walk will focus on Wintering Ducks. Meet at Spring Lake – Roebling Park (end of Sewell Ave., Hamilton). For information: 609-883-6606 x 112. (Cosponsors: Mercer County Parks, Friends for the Marsh, Washington Crossing Audubon, D&R Greenway Land Trust)

Assunpink Wildlife Management Area

A field trip at 8:30 AM on Saturday, March 17, led by Lou Beck and Brad Merritt.

This is the time to start looking for migrating waterfowl and other northern-bound birds in this productive local wildlife management area.

Directions: East on I-95 to exit 11, Imlaystown. North on Imlaystown Road 2.6 miles to parking area at Lake Assunpink. Contact Lou Beck (609) 737-0070 if additional information is needed.

Washington Crossing State Park

A field trip at 1:30 to 3:30 PM on Sunday, March 18, led by Wayne Henderek and Franta Broulik.

We will walk a few of the many trails in the park looking for spring migrants and resident birds in wooded areas and adjacent fields.

Directions: Washington Crossing State Park is located off of Washington Crossing – Pennington Road in Titusville, NJ. Enter the park and follow signs to the Nature Center. Park at the Nature Center parking lot. If additional information is needed, Call Lou Beck at (609) 737-0070.

Beaver Walk at the Marsh

A field trip from 7:00 to 8:30 PM on Friday, March 23, led by Joe Schmeltz.

Participants will be looking for beavers at Spring Lake, Roebling Park with former Mercer County Naturalist Joe Schmeltz. For kids, but all are invited. Under-age children must be accompanied by a parent or guardian. Contact / information: 732-821-8310. Meet at Spring Lake - Roebling Park (end of Sewell Ave., Hamilton). (*Cosponsors Friends for the Marsh, Mercer County Parks, D&R Greenway Land Trust*).

Directions: Coming from Trenton on South Broad St., turn right onto Sewell Avenue shortly after the Lalor St. intersection. Proceed to the end of Sewell Ave. (watch out for stop signs) and follow the dirt road to the left down the hill to parking area.

Mercer County Park Northwest

A field trip at 8:00 to 11:30 AM on Saturday, April 7, led by Sharyn Magee and Lou Beck.

This park was known for years as the AT&T Overseas Transmission Station, and is more familiarly known as "The Pole Farm". It is adjacent to Rosedale Park which is now part of the new Northwest Park. Come with us as we walk the paths and compare the flora and fauna to that of Rosedale.

Directions: From the traffic light at Manors Corner shopping center on Pennington-Lawrenceville Road take Keefe Road toward Princeton for 1.1 miles to the bend where it meets Cold Soil Road. At that bend, the entrance is on the left through a chain link gate. There is a white barn on the left inside the gate. Go straight

on the macadam road to the parking area. If starting in Princeton, take Cold Soil Road, go 1.1 miles past Blackwell Road to bend, look for entrance on right.

Build a Birdhouse Workshop

A field trip at 1:00 to 3:30 PM on Saturday, April 14, led by SB-MWA Staff.

Hike the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Reserve in Pennington with one of the Naturalists. We will examine several natural bird homes and discover some of the truly strange places birds will build their nests. Then build your own Eastern bluebird house with us, take it home and wait for new avian neighbors! Registration is required, call 609-737-7592 for more information. *This program is co-sponsored by Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association.*

Peace Valley Prowl

A field trip at 9:00 AM on Sunday, April 15, led by Lou Beck.

We'll walk the trails in this Bucks County park looking for waterfowl, raptors, and early migrating warblers.

Directions: Route 202 South toward Doylestown. Right onto route 313, proceed west for 4 miles. Left on New Galena Road, then first left onto Chapman Road. Go to the parking lot across from the Nature Center. Contact Lou Beck (609) 737-0070 if more information is needed.

Roebling Park - Gateway to the Hamilton/Trenton Marsh

A field trip at 8:00 AM on Saturday, April 21, led by Charles Leck, John Maret, Brad Merritt and Lou Beck.

Roebling Park is a Mercer County park adjacent to the Hamilton/Trenton Marsh. We plan to follow trails in this rejuvenated park and look for migrating warblers and marsh birds. If you have not been in this area recently, we think you will be surprised by the improvements in the park.

Directions: Coming from Trenton on South Broad St., turn right onto Sewell Avenue shortly after the Lalor St. intersection. Proceed to the end of Sewell Ave. (watch out for stop signs) and follow the dirt road to the left down the hill to parking area.

Spring Wildflowers

A field trip from 9:00 AM to Noon on Saturday, April 28, led by Mary Anne Borge and Aggie Naughton.

Meet at Bordentown Township's Northern Community Park on Groveville Road, located between Routes 206 and 130 in Bordentown Township. Call (732) 821-8310 for additional information if needed. *This trip is co-sponsored by Friends for the Marsh and D&R Greenway Land Trust.*

Garret Mountain Reservation

A field trip at 8:30 AM to 2:00 PM on Saturday, May 5, led by Brad Merritt.

Garret Mountain Reservation, a Passaic County Park, located just south of Paterson, NJ, can be an excellent spot in the spring for the songbird migration.

Directions: Take I-287 to I-80. Go east to exit 56A (Squirrelwood Road). Go to the stop sign and turn right on Rifle Camp Road. Go up the hill about 0.5 miles to Mountain Ave., which comes in from the left. Turn left on Mountain Ave. (look for an army tank and the reservoir on the left) and go 0.3 miles to the entrance to Garret Mountain Reservation. Go right up the hill for a short distance to a large parking area.

The distance from Somerville on I-287 and I-80 to exit 56A is about 40 miles. Bring a lunch. We may also visit Rifle Camp Park, which is adjacent to Garret Mountain. If additional information is needed, call Lou Beck at (609) 737 0070.

Hamilton Veteran's Park

A field trip at 8:00 to 11:00 AM on Sunday, May 6, led by Mark Witmer.

Join us for a trip to a popular recreational park in Hamilton Township. Veteran's Park has a nice diversity of habitat including a lake, streams, open fields, and woods; these support a diversity of bird life. In the past few years, wood ducks, tree and barn swallows, red-tailed hawks, cedar waxwings, orchard and Baltimore orioles, red-eyed vireos, scarlet tanagers, and indigo buntings are just some of the birds that have been spring and summer residents of the park. While we won't see all these birds, we should see many, along with some unexpected migrants, as spring migration season will be in full swing. Call Mark Witmer (609) 730-0826 if you have any questions.

Directions: we will meet at the north entrance to the park, which is along Klockner Road, just east of Hamilton Square-White Horse Road, across the street from Steinert High School. As you enter the park drive to the back of the parking area; we will gather there.

Birdathon 2012 is Coming – May 12

It may seem that winter will be here forever. But soon spring will come, the birds will start migrating and it will be time for the WCAS 2012 Birdathon. Our Birdathon is the bird watching equivalent of a walkathon. People who love birding and the environment convince birders and non-birders alike to pledge money for every species of bird seen by Birdathoners on Birdathon day.

It is easy to participate as a bird finder and/or as a sponsor. More information will be in the next newsletter.

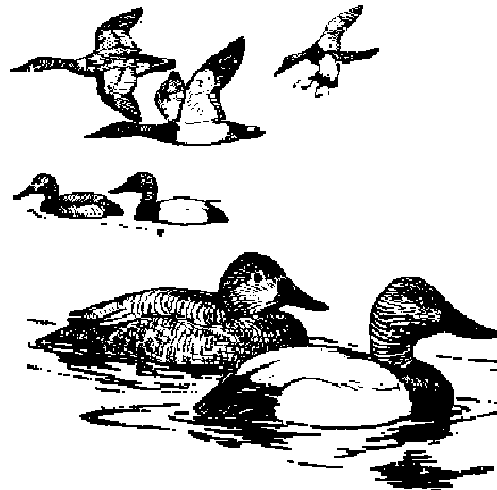
This is the only fund raiser for WCAS. The money collected goes for several of our educational and environmental programs such as:

- Audubon Adventures for 60 inner-city fourth - grade classrooms,
- Workshops and field trips for families,
- Monthly program meetings with informative speakers
- Hannah Suthers' bird banding on Featherbed Lane, Hopewell,

and much more.

Our goal for 2012 is to raise \$10,000.

Mark your calendars for Saturday, May 12th and come join the fun as a participant or as a sponsor. Pledge forms will come in the next Newsletter.



CONSERVATION

Get Ready for the Great Backyard Bird Count (February 17 – 20)

It's as easy as 1 – 2 – 3.

1. Count birds for at least 15 minutes on one or more days of the count.
2. Count the greatest number of individuals of each species that you see together at any one time.
3. When you're finished, enter your results at www.birdsource.org/gbbc/



The Great Backyard Bird Count, a very successful citizen science project of National Audubon and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, brought in more than 92,000 checklists in 2011, submitted by participants throughout the United States and Canada. Altogether, bird enthusiasts identified 596 species with 11.4 million bird observations. This huge body of data is extremely valuable for tracking populations and movements of birds in winter.

The beauty of GBBC is that you can do it from the comfort of your home, bundled up on a lawn chair in your yard, stationed on a bench in a park or schoolyard. You can even do two or more locations, as long as you submit separate checklists for each. Note: You must provide the ZIP code for the locale when you send in your data. This is a great activity for engaging children in observing nature over the long holiday weekend. They will quickly learn to identify and count the more obvious species such as cardinals, juncos and blue jays, but may need some help distinguishing the various sparrows. They will love sitting down with you at the computer (or you with them?) to submit their counts.

All the information you need to get ready for the count is available at www.birdsource.org/gbbc/ where you can also print out a local checklist. Get ready, get organized, get going! And, if you would like to share your experience or a special sighting with us, please

contact us by clicking on “Contact WCAS” on our website, www.washingtoncrossingaudubon.org.

Pat Sziber

Cats Indoors!

Well aware that I must be speaking to the choir, I want to remind cat owners to keep kitty indoors as spring and the nesting season approaches. Suggestions for acclimating and managing cats indoors are on www.abcbirds.org/cats

Hannah Suthers

Winter Bird Feeding Tips

Late winter can be the most trying time for birds. Though holly berries and some other fruits are not edible until they have undergone deep freeze, many other naturally occurring fruits and seeds have been picked clean. The heavy wet snows and nor'easters that come late in the season add to the stress endured by our feathered friends. Here are a few tips from one who is determined to outwit the howling tempest to make sure her “babies” have sustenance.

Stock up. Now is the time to have those 20-lb. bags of seed on hand in case you can't get to the store. Extra suet cakes and a tub of mealworms, too.

Clean off the snow. Keep a broom or brush near the door and clear the snow off the feeders as soon as you can.

The challenge of ground feeders. If your ground or platform feeder does not have a roof, you're going to have to battle it out with the snowstorm. Keep boots and broom or shovel by the door and, as often as needed, run out and clear the area. I put a bit of seed out each time I brush the snow away. Of course, for me and other working people, this is an option only on weekends and during snow emergencies. You might consider constructing a lean-to that will at least keep some of the area fairly clear.

Ice isn't nice. This is not likely to be an option for fussy housekeepers, but I toss mixed seed between our garage and the back door as an environmentally friendly way to safely traverse the ice that invariably accumulates on the patio. It's not their usually feeding station, but the birds quickly find the bounty. Any seed

not trapped by the mat by the door but tracked into the house is easy to clean up.

Get Fido in on the act. He'll never miss a handful of kibble and, besides, dogs have generous hearts. Moisten the dry food before setting it out. Bread, pancake and waffle scraps are okay. You might want to clean these items up before nightfall if you'd rather not provide a banquet for other wildlife.

Snow-day project. Gather pine cones and keep them on hand for the kids to goop up with peanut butter. Hang them where they can be seen from the house.

Early arrivals. Robins will be arriving from the south by late February, replacing their hardier Canadian buddies who have wintered here. First, they will clean off those previously-frozen holly berries. I've seen them do it in a day. When those are gone, and before the worms become active, they will need protein. Run out and buy another tub of mealworms and ask Fido for another donation.

Pat Sziber

CHAPTER NEWS

Holden Fund Grants

WCAS distributed \$18,680.00 in grants to several local and one international organization to carry out education and conservation programs. The grant committee had to make some tough choices between a very competitive group of proposals focusing on such factors as the ecological importance of the habitat being preserved or restored, educational impact, community involvement, and economic leverage. The grants were made possible by a generous bequest from Polly Holden.

The 2012 Holden grants are as follows:

- **Nicoya Peninsula Avian Research Station:** \$4,380 to support important science which will allow a better understanding of tropical bird demographics and habitat use of wintering Neotropical migrant birds. The banding station is an extension of Hannah Suther's Featherbed Lane banding station. As of 11/24, this project banded or saw thirteen bird species that breed in our area.
- **Life Net:** \$4,000 to support bird monitoring efforts at Loma Alta Ecological Reserve and bird

monitoring and stewardship at Reserva Las Tangaras.

- **Friends of Hopewell Valley Open Space:** \$5,000 restoration project creating a buffer zone to core Neotropical migrant forest breeding habitat in the most important remaining forested habitat in central New Jersey, giving the project a potentially large impact ecologically. The adjacent Baldpate Mountain is a source for some of our rarest breeding Neotropical species.
- **D&R Greenway:** \$2,800 to restore a suburban woodlot which is connected to the Institute Woods by a wooded stream corridor.
- **Friends of Rogers Refuge:** \$1,500 to restore the lower marsh in the Rogers Refuge adjacent to the Institute Woods.
- **New Jersey Audubon:** \$1,000 to develop a coordinated mechanism for young people ages 12 to 18 to meet with each other and bird watch together.

Applications for the 2012 awards are due Nov. 1. The guidelines are on the WCAS website.

Sharyn Magee

Hog Island Teacher's Workshop Scholarship Awarded

WCAS's Board of Directors awarded our 2012 Holden Scholarship Award for NAS's Teachers Workshop to be held during July at Hog Island, near Rockport, ME. This will be the 76th anniversary of the Hog Island programs.

Our recipient is Steve Timmerman, who teaches middle school science for the Pinelands Regional School District in Ocean County. He hopes to apply what he will learn at the workshop to augment his skills during the school year, as well as to the summer workshops he runs during summers.

Our scholarship covers tuition and expenses for attending the workshop, a value nowadays of close to \$950. Transportation and other expenses are the responsibility of the recipient. WCAS plans to offer a scholarship for the 2013 in September. Watch for the announcement at the end of summer.



Washington Crossing Audubon Society
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Pennington, NJ 08534

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Audubon Membership Form *Now you have choices!*

Chapter only membership: \$10 __ (basic) \$20 __ (supporting) *Enclose check payable to WCAS.*

You get Washington Crossing Audubon Society's newsletter, *The Crossing*, plus programs, field trips, and the opportunity to make a difference on the local level. WCAS gets to use the full amount.

or

National Audubon Society membership: \$20 __ (new members) \$35 __ (renewals)

Enclose check payable to National Audubon Society or fill out credit card information below.

You get full chapter membership (includes *The Crossing* newsletter), plus *Audubon* magazine, and the opportunity to support Audubon's work on national and international levels. WCAS gets back a share of the amount.

Additional tax deductible donation for WCAS: \$ ____ *Enclose check payable to WCAS.*

This and a NAS membership result in highest benefits for everyone. Please be generous.

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Mail to: Membership Chair, WCAS, PO Box 112, Pennington, NJ 08534 C0ZQ060Z