



WESTMORELAND CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

<http://www.westmorelandconservancy.org>

January 2004 Editor: Shelly Tichy (724) 325-5523 baghera@adelphia.net

Hunting Solutions

With the onset of hunting season comes a recurring problem.... People have for quite some time had trouble knowing to whom to report errant hunters. Westmoreland Conservancy Properties with trails are all marked **NO HUNTING**. These are Wildlife/Nature Reserves, and are for the general public to walk and enjoy **AT ANY TIME OF THE YEAR**. Therefore, any person entering these properties with a weapon, be it gun or bow, is trespassing. The proper channels for handling this situation are: Do not approach the hunter. Get the license number of the vehicle and give that information to the Murrysville Police at **724-327-2111**. They will handle the trespass call, and will work with the Game Commission if any additional action is necessary. A very special thank you to **Rep. Joe Markosek** and the **Murrysville Police Department** for their help in this matter.

Fall PA Cleanways



Saturday, November 1st was our annual Fall clean up for PA Cleanways. Pictured from left are: Don Harrison, Cary Bohl, Katie Blackmore, Theo van de Venne and Mount Fitzpatrick. Richard Wagner was behind the camera. The Westmoreland Conservancy is proud to be a part of the PA Cleanways effort to keep Murrysville beautiful, and collectively gather trash and debris along the Old William Penn corridor each Spring and Fall. For more information

or to lend a hand, contact Clara Feibelman at 724-327-3454.

Westmoreland Conservancy Board of Governors, circa 1992



How many familiar faces are in this picture? This is a photograph of the dedicated people who first came together to form the Westmoreland Conservancy. Clockwise from top left are: Tamara Balliet (VP), Bill Ferguson, Donna Forsys (P), Fred Shirland, Daryl Downey (T), Jim Dunbar, Clara Feibelman and Ruth

Fowler (S).

This is the core group responsible for so much of the foundation of this Conservancy. The vision, the passion, and the sheer determination to help preserve the rural charm and appeal of Murrysville by acquiring and protecting the land was no small task. It was a dream realized by hard work and has grown into a respected organization.

Sadly, we've lost another member of our original group. Jim Dunbar passed away December 6th. Jim was instrumental giving the concept of the Westmoreland Conservancy substance and will be sorely missed by this community. A dear friend, Don Harrison delivered the following memorial:

IN MEMORY OF JIM DUNBAR

I got to know Jim through the Westmoreland Conservancy. We soon became good friends. Therefore, I appreciate the opportunity to say a few words about him at his memorial service.

Protecting the Lillian Kellman farm from development became a cause celebre for a small group of neighbors. Their efforts had two lasting outcomes: The Kellman Nature Reserve, and the Westmoreland Conservancy. Jim played a key role in bringing these events to fruition. He obtained a major grant from DCNR to help fund the Kellman farm acquisition, and one from the Mellon Foundation to underwrite the Westmoreland Conservancy.

In the mid-nineteen nineties, Jim secured a second grant from DCNR crucial to funding acquisition of the King Nature Reserve.

Jim continued to make contributions to the community and was named "Citizen of the Year" for 2001 by the Murrysville Star newspaper. Some of his endeavors were appreciated more than were others. But all were recognized as selfless gifts of time and energy. Jim helped organize FORM (Friends of Rural Murrysville) and served as its president. He was the driving force behind the commemorative bench for Fred Shirland that graces the portico of the municipal building. And he was the grantor of the elegant bird print by Roger Tory Peterson that hangs in the municipal library.

Jim was a determined trail maker and a vigilant guardian of wild-grape vines, especially in Kellman. And he loved to make blaze marks. The Conservancy has an on going project of identifying survey pins with small metal signs. This fall we were having difficulty in locating pins along a 1700-foot stretch of boundary in the King Reserve. Then we remembered Jim's blazings made years before. Although nearly overgrown but still visible, his blaze marks led us along the boundary to the missing survey pins. We recalled Jim saying with a happy grin after he had completed a blazing run, "Now isn't that a pretty sight!" or words close to it.

Jim became aware of his medical condition over a year ago. Despite the slim odds, he explored every avenue in the hope of improving his chances. Often he would say the devil is in the details. But in truth he loved to explore them. And he used that information to prolong his life for as long as he could.

Along the way, Jim developed a taste for Carr's Tea Biscuits. He liked them so much that for a time, local supplies were exhausted when he began buying them by the case. Suppliers quickly refilled empty

shelves to meet this new demand. Now they are probably wondering why all the Brits suddenly left town and what to do with stacks of stale tea biscuits.

Whether it was the tea biscuits or advanced medicine that kept him going, Jim had sufficient time to take care of the things that mattered most to him – the welfare of his family.

We'll miss Jim but we shall never forget him. I trust we can take comfort in the belief that he died with peace of mind knowing he had taken care of all those devilish details. -D. Harrison



Journal Entries

By

Dick Byers

Friday, Oct. 3, 2003. Temperature 29F. The ground is white with the first frost of the season. It killed all the leaves on my young ash trees and turned all the lower leaves on the tulip poplars brown. The maples and oaks were not so affected. We need warm sunny days and cool, but not freezing nights to color the leaves. Thus far we are not getting them. The high yesterday was 46.

Sun. Oct. 5, 2003. Clear. Temperature 39F and rose to 53F. There is .4 inches of water in the rain gauge from yesterday's shower. I counted 20 cedar waxwings feeding in the black cherry trees that are overloaded with fruit and watched a pair of red-bellied woodpeckers stash chestnut oak acorns in a tree cavity. Chipmunks are scampering up trees to cut down ripe acorns for their underground larder. Preparations for winter are evident everywhere.

Fri. Oct. 10, 2003 I drove to Laurel Hill State Park and hiked the Pumphouse Trail. I didn't expect such a delightful walk. The trail is well worn and fairly level. It passes through a maturing forest of oak, maple, beech, tulip poplar and cherry with spicebush, witch hazel and striped maple in the understory. It reminded me a little of the Squirrel City portion of Duff Park. I counted the rings of a downed oak that had fallen across the trail at 130, but these rings were 20 feet from the base, making the tree at least 150 years old when the wind felled it.

The trail passes a small lake created by a dam on Jones Mills Run. The waterfall over the dam is very picturesque with cascading steps into a narrow walled ravine. The lake shoreline contained some huge boulders that served as natural seats. Several people were fishing from them while two lovers enjoyed the peaceful fall scenery. The return to the parking lot on the loop trail was a little rough and crossed the stream in several places. I made a note that this would be a good place to look for warblers next spring.

Mon. Oct. 13, 2003 A beautiful fall day. The entire past week had just the kind of weather we needed, warm sunny days and cool, but not freezing nights. The leaves colored beautifully and are at the early maple leaf peak. The maples didn't turn quite as red this year, but the fire engine red blackgums filled in for them. This was truly a blackgum autumn.

This is the day I'm to lead a hawkwatch for Westmoreland Conservancy members at the Allegheny Front. Parking at this lookout is a bit of a problem. Because of this, the Allegheny Plateau Audubon Society, who owns the site, discourages groups from coming on weekends. Consequently, I scheduled the outing on Columbus Day, which some people have off, to give members a better chance to attend. I also delayed my starting time by a half hour to

give people a little more time to get to our departure point at Jenner Crossroads. I was disappointed that no one showed up, but perhaps just as well. Although the weather was beautiful and warm with 25-mile visibility the wind was wrong for migration and it was a slow day. The first birds didn't pass the lookout until 12:10 PM. This first group, however, was a nice trio consisting of a red-shouldered hawk (my favorite) with two northern harriers. The birds were climbing a thermal and interacting with one another. They rose high enough on that thermal to even escape binocular range and disappeared.

An immature bald eagle passed at 2:20PM and the total for the day was only 60 birds, mostly sharp-shinned hawks. We'll try again next year if I can get special permission to bring the conservancy in on a weekend.

Sat. Oct. 25, 2003 I hiked the West Penn Trail with the Todd Bird Club this cold autumn morning. Shotguns cracked continuously on this opening day of the general small game season while we looked for lingering passerine birds and waterfowl.

The birds were scarce. There had been little movement the previous night. The best find on our list was a flock of rusty blackbirds. Birders move very slow and at one point, since I was under dressed for the weather; I walked well ahead of the group to get warm. On a bridge over the Conemaugh River I noticed the Japanese knotweed on the far bank moving. A sizable animal was moving through. I raised my binoculars expecting a deer and focused on an adult black bear calmly walking through the weeds. She disappeared underneath the bridge. I alerted the others when they caught up to keep an eye out for the bear. We didn't see that animal again, but further down the trail Margaret Higbee noticed something dark along a pond shore. Len Hess put his scope on it and we had ourselves another bear, only this was a cub. Both animals had apparently been driven out of their daytime lairs by the shooting and commotion of the hunters. We always see something unusual on a bird outing, especially when the birds are not cooperating.

Mon. Nov. 10 An east wind and temperatures in the low thirties greeted me at the Allegheny Front Hawkwatch. The exciting action began at 9:30 with the passage of an immature golden eagle. Twenty-six more golden eagles and two bald eagles sailed by at close range before the days end, the record for one day this season.

Mon. Nov. 23 I wished I'd brought my camera to the hawkwatch this morning. The valley was covered with fog brightly lit by the sun, but the sun itself was hidden from my view by a low lying black cloud. Black sky above with a brilliantly fog-lit valley below made for very unusual scene and quite beautiful.

I hadn't checked my email the night before and was immensely surprised at the sightings on the record sheet from the previous day. Mark McConaughy and others had sighted 51 golden eagles, which shattered three previous records, the daily, the seasonal and the single day record for any of the 16 hawk lookouts in Pennsylvania. They must have been celebrating all day.

Sat. Dec. 6 I awoke to 7 inches of snow. The flakes in the rain gauge melted to .45 inches bringing the precipitation thus far this year to over 51 inches.

The Breeding Bird Atlas meeting I was to attend at the Powdermill Bird Banding office this morning is cancelled due to the weather. I went deer hunting instead and saw 14 does and a beautiful red fox in prime fur. Why did this have to be the year I didn't get a doe license?



Westmoreland Conservancy

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Editor's notes

We all enjoy reading Dick Byers' Journal entries. He sees so many wonderful things... has so much to share with us. I'm going to challenge our membership to look out your windows this year and share with us what you might see. Maybe you have an unusual visitor you could share with us. Did you walk out on one of the trails and see a Yellow-Bellied Sapsucker in the trees? Share your experiences and/or observations with us. You never know who else you might be encouraging.

There are no events scheduled this quarter. We do, however, encourage everyone to enjoy the Reserves throughout the winter. There is plenty of bird and wildlife activity to observe. Take pictures. If you send them to me, they can be part of an upcoming newsletter, or you can send them to our website to be posted. Remember the photo contest from the Murrysville Summer Celebration? It's never too early to be gathering entries for this one!

Remember that The April Meeting is our Annual meeting and Elections. We encourage everyone to attend our regular meetings, and especially to attend this one.

A few more items to plan for this Spring. One is the annual Membership dinner, which is still in the planning stages. Details will be in the April newsletter. Another is Murrysville's Summer Celebration. Hopefully, it will be a bit drier this year. Get started on your entries for another Hometown Photo Contest. Details for this event will be in our April issue, as well as in the local papers.

Watch for the Spring PA Cleanways date and for scheduled Reserve maintenance. We always welcome helping hands in removing invasives (multiflora rose, garlic mustard, Japanese knotweed) from our trails and to help keep them clear from debris and easy to navigate.

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Westmoreland Conservancy

An all volunteer, non-profit, 501c-3 Corporation dedicated to acquiring and preserving rural and rustic lands for the public good.

2003 Board of Governors/Officers

Officers: Cary Bohl: President

Mount Fitzpatrick: Vice President

Joanna Franz: Secretary

Cindy McCormick: Treasurer

Governors: Katie Blackmore, Paul Bramson, Dick Byers, Charles Conway, Don Harrison, Shelly Tichy, Richard Wagner, Theo van de Venne

The 2004 Annual Meeting and Election will be held Wednesday, April 28th. As always, the meetings are open, and we look forward to seeing you there. Meetings are held the 4th Wednesday of each month at the Murrysville Library at 7:30 pm.

January 28th

February 25th

March 24th

The next Newsletter is scheduled for **April 1st**.

Contact Numbers

Volunteers for **Walters Reserve** work on Wiestertown Rd., please call Theo van de Venne at **724-733-2770**.

Volunteers for **McGinnis Reserve** work on Hunter Drive, call Shelly Tichy **724-325-5523**.

For **PA Cleanways**, call Clara Feibelman **724-327-3454**.

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