



WESTMORELAND CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

<http://www.westmorelandconservancy.org>

July 2004 Editor: Shelly Tichy (724) 325-5523 newsletter@westmorelandconservancy.org



Dinner with The Westmoreland Conservancy

Tivoli's on Rodi Road in Penn Hills was the setting for the Spring 2004 Dinner with the Westmoreland Conservancy May 15th. Our very special thanks to **The Buttercup Florists** for donating the absolutely gorgeous table decoration, and to **Jennuine Cakes and Café** for the amazing cake! Also of note: Hank Kendall of FORM presented the Conservancy with a check to be applied to our Jim Dunbar Memorial at the Kellman Nature Reserve.

Our guest speaker was Dr. Walter Carson, an Associate Professor in the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Pittsburgh. His talk provided information demonstrating that overbrowsing by large populations of deer is the single greatest threat to the health, sustainability, and biodiversity of forests throughout much of Pennsylvania and West Virginia.

There was great interest and much discussion, given today's dwindling wildflowers and the explosion of the deer population within the shrinking habitat.

Following Dr. Carson's presentation, some of our members were awarded some special recognition certificates. **Noreen Ignelzi** was given "**The Dirty Gloves**" Award for her work with PA Cleanways in leading the semi-annual clean ups along Old William Penn Hwy. **Pia van**



de Venne: "*The Eradicator*" Award for her efforts in the drive to remove introduced invasive flora from our reserves and parks. **Doug Bauman :** the "*Web Wizard*" Award for his work on our beautiful new website. And the "*Teddy Bear*" Award was bestowed upon **Mount Fitzpatrick** for his ability to "Speak softly and carry a big stick."

Community Day 2004

Murrysville Community Day 2004 will be held Saturday, September 18th, at the Murrysville Municipal Complex on Sardis Road. Katie Blackmore is our chairperson this year.

PHOTO CONTEST NEWS

The Hometown Photo Contest held last year was quite a success! This year, we have decided to call this event the **Vernon Bachelder Hometown Photography Show**, in memory of a talented artist who taught many to see and share wonders through the lens of a camera. We are encouraging you to send us 5"x7" or 8"x10" reprints of **one or two** of your favorite original photos celebrating Community and/or Nature. (*No photoshop magic, please.*) **Subjects:** Murrysville & surrounding communities. Student or Adult **categories:** nature/wildlife/garden **or** family/community/pets. We will have them on display Saturday, September 18th in our booth. The general public will be voting for their favorite. Ribbons will be awarded at 3pm. Come in early to cast your vote. Send your photos to: **The Westmoreland Conservancy** P.O. Box 446, Murrysville, PA 15668, and make sure your name, age, address and photo title are enclosed.

An additional note: The Westmoreland Conservancy will participate in the Washington Township Fort Hand Festival at Kunkle Park on Saturday, September 11th.

Journal Entries

By Dick Byers

Thur. Jan. 8, 2004 This evening my wife and Len & Linda Hess and I drove up to a reclaimed strip-mine on the east side of Chestnut Ridge just before dusk to look for short-eared owls. I had seen Northern harriers there every time I drove through last fall. The northern harrier is the diurnal counterpart of the short-eared owl, so I figured short-eared owls would be there. The evening was cold and crystal clear. You could see the windmills along the turnpike to the south and the plumes from the coal-fired electric generating plants of both New Florence and Homer City to the north. We waited as the light waned in the middle of the strip-mine for the owls to appear. Just as we were about to give up Linda saw something flying toward us in a moth-like flight pattern. The first of two short-eared owls passed before us and silently flapped uphill toward a young stand of pine. What I had been suspicious of was now confirmed. Short-eared owls were wintering on top of the ridge. This is the 5th spot we have found them in Westmoreland County.

Mon. Feb. 23, 2004 18F. Wind SE 5 mph. I am the lead-off counter this chilly morning for the spring hawkwatch at the Allegheny Front. Although the road was plowed open two days ago, the wind had drifted it shut. I parked outside the gate and hiked the half mile into the lookout site and sat myself down on a log facing south. The wind was out of the east, the ideal direction for this site, so I knew I would see something despite the early date. The weather station receiver was buried beneath drifted snow, so humidity and barometric pressure did not get recorded. I had a thermometer and windspeed gauge with me. The temperature had risen to just a little below freezing and the wind in my face was bearable, not strong enough to make me uncomfortable. People probably think we hawkwatchers are a bit crazy for sitting on top of a mountain on a windy day in February. Perhaps we

are, but I was soon rewarded with the passage of the first two golden eagles of the season, an adult and an immature bird about a half hour apart. The immature passed low overhead and then circled me twice before moving on. I think he was curious about me. I also recorded six red-tailed hawks and three turkey vultures, only 11 birds, but not bad for so early in the season. My face was pretty badly sunburned when I left at 4 in the afternoon. Sunscreen slips my mind in February. I put a bottle in my pack when I got home so I wouldn't forget it next week.

Tue. March 2, 2004 Mark McConaughy photographed two greater white-fronted geese on the Conemaugh River yesterday while I was at the hawk lookout. This is only the second record for this species in Westmoreland County, the first sighting having occurred on March 12, 1996 on the Latrobe Reservoir. Hoping the birds would still be there I drove up this morning and arrived at 8 o'clock. After an hour search along the river I was unable to locate them, but was compensated by drake pintails, wood ducks, hooded mergansers and buffleheads.

Tue. March 23, 2004 Bob Leberman reported two greater white-fronted geese at Donegal Lake yesterday while I was at the hawkwatch. This is amazing. After 8 years, we get a 2nd and 3rd record just two weeks apart and both times while I was fulfilling my hawkwatch obligation. These birds were only five miles from my house. I arose early and began looking for the birds at 6:15 AM. After an hour of scanning the lake with a scope and tramping the marsh area and surrounding fields, I was unable to locate them. Had they continued migrating already? Wondering if they had flown to nearby Acme Reservoir, I drove over. As I pulled into the reservoir parking lot I saw a huge coyote prancing back and forth on the opposite shore in front of a dozen Canada geese, that he had apparently just chased into the water. He trotted back into the woods upon seeing me and I watched him intently through my binoculars. This is the best sighting I've ever had of a coyote in the open in good light. Previous sightings have always been glimpses of the animal moving through brush or in the dim dawn light while on deer stand during the hunting season. I was much impressed with the size of this animal. He looked as large as a wolf. I had the Canada geese in front of him for size comparison, so I wasn't seeing an elusion. Pennsylvania coyotes are much larger than their western counterparts and this specimen made no doubt of that. Most notable was his un-dog like gait into the woods. No one could mistake a coyote for a German Shepard. The manner of movement is entirely different. I can't quite describe it. The words stately or princely prance is what comes to my mind. What a striking animal.

Fri. March 26, 2004 Last night I went out around 9 PM and walked a quarter mile into the woods where I tooted the barred owl call a few times on my horn. Barred owls had nested in that area the past two years, but this past fall and winter I hadn't seen or heard a peep out of them. I used to be able to depend on one of them roosting in a huge cavity in a beech tree during the day on the other side of Route 711, but I hadn't seen any owl in it for nearly a year. Had the owls left the area or did something happen to them? I was going to find out. I continued to give the barred owl call about a minute apart for the next 10 minutes, but I got no response. Barred owls are usually quick to respond, so I figured they were nowhere around and began walking back to the house. Before I had gone 50 paces I heard the long drawn out yawl of a barred owl directly behind me. I turned and gave a quick reply. Instead, a second owl to my right answered with a "Who cooks for you all" response. Illuminated by the dim starlight I could just make out an owl silhouette 30 feet away in the trees and turned my flashlight on it. There facing me was a male barred owl. I say male because the bird didn't look large enough to be a female. In the owls, the female is about a third larger than the male. After a short conversation with him he flew left toward the female and the two of them let me know I wasn't wanted. I didn't linger there any longer. This is the beginning of their breeding season and I had found out what I wanted to know. The birds were likely going to nest and did not want another owl in the vicinity, so I disturbed them no more. They were still hooting when I reached the house 10 minutes later.

May 16, 2004 I learned a tidbit from Dr. Carson's talk at the Conservancy banquet last evening. A study had been done on the effect of deer density in which different concentrations of deer were each enclosed in an area of the same size. Tree seedlings were able to survive and grow at deer densities of 20 per square mile and lower, but not wildflowers. To save the wildflowers the herd must be reduced to 8 to 12 per square mile. I question if that low a density could be achieved with today's sportsmen who are accustomed to seeing lots of deer. Deer densities in the past few decades have been as high as 50-70 per square mile and even higher in the suburbs. Spoiled by seeing so many animals, many hunters would quit hunting if the herd came down to 12 per square mile – and you can't keep the deer herd low without hunters.

Editor's note

I'm challenging 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. The following story is shared by one of our governors:

In Any Walk With Nature...

I have been recently photographing a mother bird and her eggs. On two occasions after having discovered a bird's nest in the woods, I ventured to photograph the mother bird, eggs and nest, which was conveniently located at chest level. Telling myself to be careful not to get too close, I presumed that I would not inadvertently cause her to leave the nest. This was a risky endeavor, as others told me that the mother may abandon her eggs, but having discovered one cowbird egg in the nest I became more daring, deciding to remove the foreign egg from the Vireo's nest. Neither this event nor the actual photography in themselves, as I hoped, had any direct effect on the mother or her two remaining eggs that could be measured in a period of four days following. If all had gone well, then the effect would have been unobservable.

In general terms, the effect people have on nature beyond the immediate nuisance of the casual contact of mankind with nature, is perhaps best measured over large time frames. The friction caused by people unhinges itself over the ages and results in wild things being shy or afraid of us. We sometimes wonder why.

The mother peacefully roosted those next four days without my further interference. But after that period something happened. The mother was making uneasy noises from up in the trees. I wondered what was wrong and took a quick glance in the nest. The eggs were gone. I was appalled, quite upset really. I wondered what had caused the demise of the two remaining Vireo eggs? I searched the ground, but could not find them.

The mother is gone now, probably for good. If one were to ask what happened, I would have to honestly say, 'I cannot say, but I have my suspicions.' I believe that I, having observed the mother and her eggs, am indirectly responsible. If one were a detective looking for evidence, all that may be found would be circumstantial. And without delving into those circumstances surrounding this event, I believe that my observation attempts lead to the loss of those eggs. By observing I changed the interactions of nature. I won't be giving up on my observations, but in the future I think I'll be more careful, and perhaps buy a more powerful zoom lens, and most importantly, will keep my oaf fingers to myself.

"In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks" -- John Muir, one of the original founders of the Sierra Club

On this walk with nature, I learned an important lesson. Perhaps we ought to thoughtfully add one more note:

In any walk with nature, one disturbs far more than he knows.

Douglas A. Bauman

June 2004

Summer Picnic

Conservancy.....Outdoors.... When thinking of the term "conservancy", the outdoors generally comes to mind. What outdoor family activity defines "summer" better than "PICNIC"? So, the Westmoreland Conservancy would like to celebrate Summer with a Family & Friends Picnic on Saturday, August 21st at the Townsend Park Lower Pavilion. We will have full use of the trails and other facilities beginning at 1 PM, so come spend the day with us! Pot luck-style meal, call Clara Feibelman at (724) 327-3454 for suggestions. Come share a day of food, fun, family and friends. We all look forward to seeing you!

More About Membership

When visiting our website, you are invited to join or renew your membership either by printing the application and mailing it in, or simply by pressing the "PAYPAL" button. PAYPAL is a secure online bank. It works much the same as using your debit or credit card; all transfers are done electronically. It is not necessary to be a member of PAYPAL to use this option. The transaction will show up on your statement as PAYPAL/Westmoreland Conservancy.

For additional **Membership info**, call Clara Feibelman **724-327-3454** or visit our website at www.westmorelandconservancy.org

Westmoreland Conservancy

Membership Application

P.O. Box 446

Murrysville, PA 15668

Membership Levels

Individual.....\$10.00

Family.....15.00

Business membership.....40.00

Additional Donation

Name_____

Address_____

City_____

State _____ Zip Code_____

e-mail_____

Westmoreland Conservancy

P.O. Box 446

Murrysville, PA 15668

contact@westmorelandconservancy.org

2004 Board of Governors/Officers

April 28th was our Annual Membership Meeting and Elections. The results of that meeting:

Officers: President – Mount Fitzpatrick

Vice President – Katie Blackmore

Secretary – Shelly Tichy

Treasurer - Cindy McCormick

**Governors: Dick Byers, Doug Bauman, Charlie Conway, Theo van de Venne,
Don Harrison, Richard Wagner, Joanna Franz**

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.

July 28th

August 25th

September 22nd

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

Eagle Scout Projects



Scott Ackman of Boy Scout Troop #206 designed and completed the Pearson's Creek Walking Bridge in Potter's Corner as his Eagle Scout Project.

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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.



Schedule of Upcoming Events

*** Park Chat Walks: Call (724) 327-2100 to reserve a spot. Meet at Park or Reserve lot at 8:30 AM.**

July 21 *King Nature Reserve Park Chat Walk

Aug. 21 Conservancy Picnic at Townsend Park

Aug. 18 *Kellman Nature Reserve (Evergreen Road Entrance) Park Chat Walk

Sept. 11 Washington Township Fort Hand Festival (Kunkle Park)

Sept. 15 *Tomer Nature Reserve Park Chat Walk

Sept. 18 Murrysville Community Day (Murrysville Municipal Complex, Sardis Rd.)

Oct. 20 *Murrysville Community Park and Walter Nature Reserve Park Chat Walk

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