

Westmoreland Conservancy
P.O. Box 446
Murrysville, PA 15668
contact@westmorelandconservancy.org



Calendar of Events

10/12/2003 9am Photography Hike on McGinnis
10/13/2003 8:45am Hawk Watch field trip with Dick Byers
10/19/2003 2pm Fall Color Walk at McGinnis
11/01/2003 9am PA Cleanways - Tarr Hollow at Old Wm Penn

Columbus Day Hawk Count

Dick Byers is the official counter at the Allegheny Hawk lookout every Monday. Monday, Oct. 13th is Columbus Day, which is often a holiday from school and work. Interested persons should meet at 8:45 AM at the Burger King Parking lot in Jenners Crossroads. It's on Route 30 just past Jennerstown on the right hand side as you approach the light at the 601 intersection. It's about a 1 hour 20 min. drive from Murrysville. Dick will be in a red Toyota pickup truck with a hawkwatch sign taped to the windows. Departure from this meeting place will be at 9 AM sharp. The lookout is another half hour away. Bring binoculars, lunch, and a folding chair to sit on. Stay all day or as long as you want. There is a portajohn at the lookout. If it is raining or heavy rains are in the forecast, the watch will be cancelled. Call Dick Byers for additional details at: 724-593-3543.

Neighborly Actions

When a rather large tree fell from the McGinnis reserve onto Mr. & Mrs. Senchur's property effectively blocking a side door and sidewalk (but quite fortunately doing very little damage), a group of volunteers got together to clean up the mess. Pictured from left are: Dave Blackmore, Katie Blackmore, Richard Wagner, Stanley Senchur, Shelly Tichy and Anna Senchur. Not pictured were Cary Bohl, Mount Fitzpatrick and Maury Hanes.

Pictured here are Pia van de Venne, Conservancy volunteer, and three scouts from Troop 206. Left to right are: Justin Hill, Keith Wyss (shown from the back) and Benjy Lombard. After a Troop workday in the Tomer Nature Reserve clearing trails and removing multi-flora rose (an aggressive invasive shrub), these scouts discuss invasive plants with Pia , learning why these noxious plants are here, why they are such a problem, and what is needed to get rid of them.

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Westmoreland Conservancy

An all volunteer, non-profit, 501(c)-(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

Meetings are held the **4th Wednesday** of each month at the Murrysville Library at **7:30pm**.

October 22nd
***November 19th**
***December 17th**

*** Rescheduled dates due to holiday conflict.**

The next Newsletter is scheduled for **January 1st, 2004**

Westmoreland Conservancy

Membership

Application

Individual.....\$10.00
Family.....15.00
Sustaining membership.....40.00
Steward.....100.00
Additional Donation. _____

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ **State** _____ **Zip** _____

Phone # _____

E-Mail address _____

WESTMORELAND CONSERVANCY NEWSLETTER

<http://www.westmorelandconservancy.org>

October 2003 Editor: Shelly Tichy (724) 325-5523 baghera@adelphia.net

The Westmoreland Conservancy participates in Murrysville's Summer Celebration 2003

Rescheduled from a soggy day in June, Murrysville held its 2003 Summer Celebration on Saturday, September 13th. Aside from a brief shower, this fall day was ideal. The event was well attended and the Westmoreland Conservancy booth was busy throughout the day.

Visitors were first attracted to the oasis in a field of tents, which was the Conservancy area. It was quite a large tent, surrounded by beautiful green trees, shrubs and flowers, all generously on loan from Plumline Nursery. An arbor decorated with ivy and small delicate lights invited people into the booth.

Once inside, there was plenty to do and see. Children flocked to the reptiles, provided by Dan Finnigan. Inside aquariums there were a variety of animals on display including an American alligator, several turtles, a huge iguana, tarantula, a black rat snake, pine and king snakes. The biggest draw, however, was Goldie- an eight year old, 50 pound, ten-foot long albino Burmese python. Goldie was docile and very patient as she allowed herself to be held throughout the afternoon; she was a wonderful ambassador of wildlife to the young people (although thankfully not Murrysville wildlife).

This year we hosted a "Hometown Photo Contest", which was publicized in the Penn-Franklin and in fliers posted around town. The contest was to be celebration of community and the photos were to have been taken within Murrysville, Export or Delmont and could have been of subjects ranging from nature to family pets. People seemed to really enjoy looking at the photos and choosing their favorites. We received a lot of positive feedback and will consider making this a yearly event. The winners, by category and place:

Student

- 1st: #64 Crystal Martin "I see you"
- 2nd: #37 Dan Graper "Autumn in Winter"
- 3rd: #36 Chelsea Graper - rabbit on garden path
- #55 Adam Millirn "Bags"
- #69 Crystal Martin "Sunrise Feeding:"

Adult

People and Pets division

- 1st #50 Leigh Graw "Growing Curiosity"
- 2nd: #29 Elise Francken "Game Day"
- 3rd: #46 Francis Lucas – two golden retrievers

Nature and Garden division

- 1st: #31 Eugen Bolch "The Four Seasons at Duff Park"
- 2nd: #26 Eugen Bolch "Rest stop at the Old Tree Cavern"
- 3rd: #27 Elise Franchen "Solitude"

Of course, we sponsor the reptiles and the photo contest for another reason too: to bring people into our booth and introduce them to the Westmoreland Conservancy, our purpose and our activities. Conservancy volunteers manned the area to answer questions. A large map

showing Conservancy properties was on display and free maps and newsletters were available. This year we proudly wore and displayed Conservancy merchandise with our new logo (designed by John Hapach, made by Log Cabin Embroidery) and provided order forms for anyone wishing to purchase them. (If you would like to own a Conservancy shirt, canvas bag, hat, or sweatshirt, you may do so by visiting our website and following the instructions.)

The success of this year's Westmoreland Conservancy tent is due to the many volunteers who worked hard to design and organize it, to put the displays together and take them down, and to man the booth. Thank yous go to: Katie and Dave Blackmore (who not only helped in the planning, but transported all the plants- twice! -once in June and again in September), Paul Bramson, Cary Bohl, Maury Hanes, Don Harrison, Noreene Ignelzi, Shelly Tichy, Pia van de Venne, Theo van de Venne, Richard Wagner and Cindy Werns. If we didn't see you this year, please try to make it out next year. Consider becoming part of the Summer Celebration team- it's an important outreach activity as well as being fun.

WC Summer Picnic

Good Food, Good Friends, Good Times!

This summer's Conservancy Picnic was held Saturday, August 2nd at the Lower Pavilion at Townsend Park. The pavilion by the pond was an idyllic setting for the family-oriented get-together. It's one that we'd like to see become an annual event.

The shelter was decorated with garden flowers and table coverings, and the covered-dish menu offered a full range of choices from bar-be-qed ham and sloppy joes to fruit and cake. To round out this sociable event were the games. Croquet headed the list, with a ring-toss and bean-bag toss present as well. To find out who won the ***Croquet Tournament of Champions***, you'll have to talk to Mount Fitzpatrick. There was even some fishing; always a family favorite.

In all, it was great fun! Let's do it again next year, with an even bigger turnout! More food, more friends, more fun!

Disturbing Events in the Old Forest*

(*This article has been reprinted with the author's permission)

By Chuck Tague

Succession: A predictable sequence of changes in species composition and structure over time in response to disturbance. Disturbance is a permanent and inevitable feature among the processes of nature.

Twenty years ago my curiosity about presettlement Pennsylvania attracted me to the Old Growth Forest at Heart's Content. Since then I've walked the trail through the old forest hundreds of times. I studied, observed, researched and photographed the forest. I stood in awe of the huge pines and hemlocks; admired the beauty of the insects and fungus. I peeked under logs at beetles and salamanders and wished I could scale the towering trunks like a Red Squirrel or soared over the treetops like a raven. I sought comfort and solace among the trees; the forest renewed my spirit. Beneath a needleless giant I mourned an old friend and contemplated the fragility of life. Most of all, over the years, I watched the forest change.

Some of the changes I witnessed were subtle. Others were as sudden and startling as a bolt of lightning. The one thing I've learned about forests is the only constants are the processes of nature: death, reproduction, disturbance, succession, incursion of new species, degradation of soils and nutrients, changes in balance and dominance. But as I watched the old forest, I've seen these processes altered, stalled and accelerated.

Twenty years is not long in the life of a forest. The forest at Heart's Content began shortly after the last ice age. Nor is twenty years long in the life of a White Pine that's exempt from the disturbing whims of lumberman. But, like a dying man's last days, those twenty years have been eventful, agonizing and precious.

Trails are part of any forest and trails of all types and sizes have always crossed Pennsylvania's forests. Native Americans that lived off the forest's resources maintained some of the trails. Other trails were migration routes of large animals. Still others were nothing more than the habitual pathways of local wildlife. The hooves and feet of passing travelers constantly disturbed these trails. The bare soil was subjected to erosion and flooding. Yet a rich and diverse plant life thrived along the trails.

Before the Europeans many flowers bloomed on the edge of the trails: trillium, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Canada Mayflower, Foamflower, Starflower and violets in the spring; asters and goldenrods in the fall. Under the dark summer canopy there were also trailside flowers. Most had white blossoms the size of a Quarter or smaller. Others had inconspicuous clusters of small green flowers. In July, as I walk along the interior trails at Heart's Content, I still find native flowers like White Avens, dewberry, Dalbardia, Dwarf Enchanter's Nightshade, the tiny twin bugles of the Partridgeberry, Indian Pipes and Sweet-scented Bedstraw. The last blossoms of Mountain Wood Sorrel stand among their shamrock leaves on moss-covered logs. Clearweed, a miniature nettle with a translucent stem, grows in clumps in moist shaded patches.

All these summer natives are short or sprawling perennials that thrive in rich, moist, shaded soils. Forest animals, especially mammals, disburse their seeds. Chipmunks and mice eat or cache the fleshy fruits of dewberries and Partridgeberry. The seeds of most of the trailside natives, however, effectively move up and down the trail by hitching a ride on the fur or clothing of trail-users.

Like everything else, the trailside plant community changed with the arrival of the Europeans. In 1997 I compiled a list of non-native plants along the trail through the old forest at Heart's Content. I identified fourteen flowering plants that would not have been there before Europeans and their tag-along organisms first walked the trails. I also found a suspicious plant that I could not identify. It was past blooming but obviously in the mustard family. I recognized it as a type of bittercress, in the genus *Cardamine*, but it wasn't in my Newcombe's Wildflower Guide nor any other reference I had with me.

With one exception the non-native plants were restricted to within a hundred yards of the parking lot and trail entrance. Most grew along the edge of clearings created by the death of large beech trees. Plantain is the exception. As long as I can remember, Broad-leaved Plantain, *Plantago major*, grew all along the trail through Heart's Content.

Indicator species are plants or animals that identify environmental conditions or predict changes in a habitat. Long before ecologists developed this concept, Native Americans recognized that plantain signaled imminent change. They called this path-loving herb "White-man's Footsteps". Wherever Europeans walked this little plant followed.

Plantain is familiar to all naturalists, herbalists, gardeners and suburban lawn slaves. The short-stemmed, foot-shaped leaves form basal rosettes that hug the ground. Leafless, whip-like flower stalks rise twelve to eighteen inches from the center of the rosette. Numerous greenish-white flowers with protruding stamens crowd around the stalk. Each flower develops into a small capsule containing as many as twenty seeds. The seedpods split in half when the seeds mature and the somewhat sticky seeds fall to the ground, or onto the shoe of a passing hiker.

Plantain came to the United States with the Europeans. It has long been used as an herbal medication to treat a wide variety of ailments. It's used as an antimicrobial, a laxative, an anti-inflammatory, an astringent for upper respiratory ailments, an expectorant and a topical application for insect stings, burns and hemorrhoids. The young leaves are used in salads and cooked as greens. Older leaves are only good for tea. The seeds can be eaten as a trailside nibble.

This year I revisited my list of alien plants and explored the other herbaceous plants that grow along the trail. I wondered if visitors to the old forest would think it peculiar to see someone lie on the ground beneath the ancient and majestic trees to photograph inconspicuous, ankle-high plants — garden-variety weeds so to speak. Few visitors, however, came by and of those that did the only ones that paid any attention to me were a curious Labrador Retriever and an out-of-breath woman who wanted to know if she was far from the parking lot. No one seemed to pay any attention to the trees.

In the deepest part of the old growth forest a spring bubbles from the hillside. The clear water swirls around a pool, over a log and descends the northern slope of the plateau. A primitive log bridge crosses the stream just below the pool. Light green Sphagnum moss grows along the pool, dark green moss covers the rocks and fallen logs. Hobblebush drape across the water. Yellow Birch saplings stand tall. Hemlock needles float on the water. It's a magical place; a temple of serenity.

On the trail, a yard or less from the bridge I found some plantain — and Dandelions!

Dandelions thrive in disturbance and disturbance comes in many forms. It's not surprising that Dandelions invade lawns and gardens. Gardeners are always tilling, hoeing, weeding, aerating and probing. Gardeners are by nature — disturbing. But gardeners are far from the only human forces of disturbance. I've found Dandelions growing in plowed fields, timber clear cuts, between sidewalks cracks and in washed out patches where drainage ditches overflow. If the sun shines on a few square

millimeters of unoccupied soil an adventurous Dandelion seed will find it. The ability of Dandelion seeds to float on their parachutes is incredible and with a little help from an unwitting human there's nowhere a Dandelion can't travel. In Iceland I found a Dandelion growing in the rubble of a volcano that had erupted less than a decade before. There were no other green plants for hundreds of yards. Even in the middle of a Peruvian cloud forest, on the stone ruins of the ancient city of Machu Picchu, I found a blooming Dandelion.

A Dandelion seed would need a bit of luck to find its way a half-mile into an old hemlock-beech-White Pine Forest, but it's definitely possible. Without disturbance, however, a Dandelion's chances of surviving there are about as likely as it surviving in an Icelandic Sedge Meadow or a Peruvian Cloud Forest.

Just up the trail I found a patch of Crown Vetch. Crown Vetch is a sprawling member of the pea family with clusters of lavender and white flowers. Scientists at Penn State University developed a variety of this European plant for erosion control. Since the 1960's it's been planted extensively along highways and excavation sites. In 1982 it was designated our official State Beautification Plant. It's also spread widely, even deep into the old forest.

In 2002, on a Wissahickon Nature Club outing to the Butler-Freeport Trail I again encountered the mysterious bittercress. Esther Allen identified it as Narrow-leaved Bittercress, *Cardamine impatiens*. This year at Heart's Content I confirmed it using *The Plants of Pennsylvania*, (Rhoads and Block, 2000). Rhoads describes *Cardamine impatiens* as "introduced from Europe; occasional in moist woods and slopes; scattered and spreading rapidly." In 1997 it was confined to a small clearing near the entrance. Now it grows all along the trail.

Altogether I identified 21 species of non-native plants, six more alien species than six years before. Although neither list was thorough or comprehensive, the number of introduced species and the number of individual plants of these species have increased. The numbers are not nearly as alarming as the distance the aliens are from the beginning of the trail. Six years ago the aliens were almost totally confined to the entrance area. Now they are along the entire length.

One reason the alien plants were able to move so far into the forest is that many of the old trees have died. Since 1997 some of the pines were struck by lightning. Several of the hemlocks died of old age. Disease has killed almost all the beeches. The canopy is much more open. The summer sun now shines where it has not shone for centuries. The moist, mossy floor is drier. The composition of plants is changing.

When a canopy tree dies in an old forest, a clearing opens. A thicket of brambles, shrubs and vines quickly fill the clearing. A grove of fast-growing trees like Black Birch, cherries or Hercules Club replace the thicket. Often a sapling of a shade-tolerant tree that struggled for decades beneath the canopy will shoot up, spread its limbs and shade out the competition. At Heart's Content this no longer happens. Instead a clearing becomes and remains a meadow of Hay-scented Fern, *Dennstaedtia punctilobula*. Along trails near the fern meadows Partridgeberry, avens, Enchanter's Nightshade, Mountain Wood Sorrel and other trailside natives can't compete. Edge and meadow perennials like Pokeweed, Deer-tongue Panicum and Common Milkweed replace them. Invasive aliens like burdock and thistles take hold.

I try to look at a forest in terms of its future. At Heart's Content I see gaps and clearings filled with Hay-scented Ferns. There is nothing between the ferns and the canopy and the tall trees are dying. The White Pines are one by one giving in to old age. The beeches are dying en masse. The Hemlock's

future looks bleak. What's the future of the old forest? A fern savannah? A tangle of Canada Thistle and other invasives?

Twenty years ago my curiosity about presettlement Pennsylvania attracted me to the Old Growth Forest at Heart's Content. I found a small glimpse of what was once a grand and glorious forest community. The old forest is not responding to disturbance as it did in the past. Where will a curious young naturalist go twenty years from now?

Heart's Content Scenic Area is a 120 acre preserve of old growth White Pine, Eastern Hemlock and American Beech. Located 12 miles south of Warren, Pennsylvania in the Allegheny National Forest it is administered by the U. S. Forest Service. To reach Heart's Content from Pittsburgh:

I-79 to first exit north of I-80, (Mercer - PA Route 62)

Turn Right off exit ramp (east on Route 62) through Jackson Center.

A mile or two past Jackson Center Route 62 turns to the left - go straight on PA 965. Follow 965 until it ends, 11 Miles.

Turn right, rejoining Route 62. Take Route 62 through Franklin, Oil City, Tionesta and East Hickory. Just north of East Hickory, the intersection of routes 62 and 666, turn right onto Kelly Hill Road. At the end of Kelly Hill Road turn right. Several miles up the road, it comes to a "T". Heart's Content Road is to the right. Follow it to the Heart's Content Recreation Area. The Old Growth Forest and Scenic Area are to the left, Camp Ground and hiking trails to the Hickory Creek Wilderness Area are to the right.

You may contact Chuck Tague at >bluejay@city-net.com<



Westmoreland County Bald Eagle Shooting Solved

Reprinted from PA Game Commission News Release #74

LIGONIER—Pennsylvania Game Commission Southwest Region Director Matt Hough today announced that the investigation into the illegal shooting of a mature bald eagle in Westmoreland County has been solved.

“Wildlife Conservation Officer Gary Toward did an absolutely tremendous job investigating this case,” Hough said. The injured eagle was found in Bell Township area by a local resident who reported the incident to the Game Commission. The injured eagle was taken to Tamarack Wildlife Rehabilitation Center in Crawford County. After a physical examination, including x-rays of the bird, revealed that it had been shot, WCO Toward immediately began a criminal investigation.

As a result of assistance provided to WCO Toward by the Pennsylvania State Police, Game Commission Southwest Region Dispatcher Garry Radar and the public, the individual who shot the eagle was identified as Shannon Stacey Binda, 36, a patrolman from Jeannette. Southwest Region Law Enforcement Supervisor John Smith offered praise to the public for its help. “This investigation began and ended with information provided to us by the public,” Smith said. Without that help, this case might never have been solved. Based upon an interview with Mr. Binda, WCO Toward and U.S. Fish and

Wildlife Agent Bill Anderson agreed that Binda would be assessed \$4,000 in fines and restitution. In addition, Binda waived his right to contest a three-year loss of hunting and furtaking privileges, and he forfeited his shotgun to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. He recently met with Game Commission officers and Agent Anderson at the Southwest Region office to settle the charges against him and plead no contest to violating the U.S. Eagle Act.

The injured male eagle has recovered from most of its injuries, but it cannot be returned to the wild because it has lost eyesight in its right eye. The wildlife center is searching for a home for the eagle, but unfortunately neither the Pittsburgh Zoo nor the National Aviary of Pittsburgh can take him at the present time. This male was part of a pair of eagles that had been maintaining an active nest site not far from where the injured bird was found.

The Pennsylvania State Police provided WCO Toward with helicopter time to make the successful search for the nest site, which showed two eaglets were in the nest. To reduce the increased food-gathering burden placed on the female eagle, Toward placed partially skinned road-killed deer in the vicinity of the nest tree. Helping the female at this single-parent nest became one of our priorities,” said WCO Toward. “At the time, she had two youngsters to take care of and surely needed any assistance she could get.”

Bald eagles are found throughout North America, most often around water where they catch and scavenge fish. Other carrion, and live, small animals also are among their prey. Eagles don't reach adulthood and begin nesting until age four or five. They nest in large trees near water, and normally produce one to three young per year. Adults will continue using and seasonally add to the same nest for years.



Pillsbury Appointed to State Committee

A committee, appointed by the governor has been formed to produce a manual for best management practices for storm water management. Management of this storm water runoff is crucial in protecting soils and waterways, *however* this practice is often ignored in many parts of the state. Early stages of site development is particularly damaging to the environment, when vegetation is stripped and rains easily take valuable topsoils away from the site and deposit them into streams, choking aquatic life. Proper storm water management design ensures long-term protection of these valuable natural resources. Jim Pillsbury, a hydraulic engineer from the Conservation District in Greensburg has been appointed to this committee, which is comprised of educators, developers and others from across the state.

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