



Dedicated to Community-Based Conservation of Natural Resources through Environmental Education and Outreach on the Eastern Shore of the Chesapeake Bay

SAVE THE DATE!

Announcing  
*Tour, Toast  
& Taste 2008*

An Elegant Country Evening  
at Historic Ratcliffe Manor

Benefiting  
Pickering Creek Audubon  
Center and Historical  
Society of Talbot County

Saturday, June 14, 2008  
6 p.m. to 9 p.m.

See page 9 for details.



*Connecting  
all generations  
with nature*

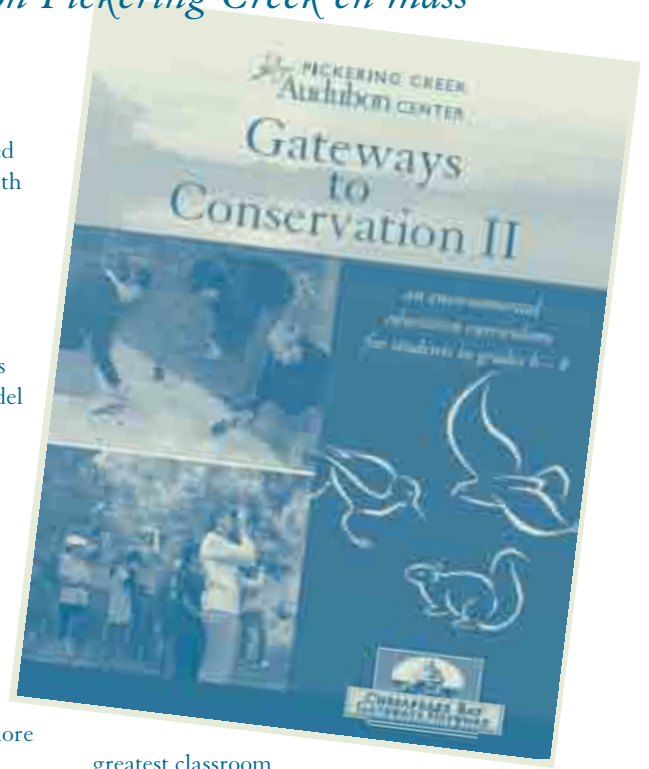
# Teenage Invasion

*Middle schoolers descend on Pickering Creek en mass*

Over the years, with the cooperation of Talbot County Public Schools and numerous supporters, we have provided thousands and thousands of school students with opportunities to explore the great outdoors at Pickering Creek. During that time, we have crafted, edited and refined our education programs, finally to the point of publishing a quality curriculum guide called "Gateways to Conservation" for grades 1-5 for nature centers and other "informal" educators to use as a model for their programs.

About seven years ago, Pickering Creek embarked on an effort to reach out to high school students as well with a program called the Audubon Watershed Experience (AWE). AWE aims to get high school students excited about science and math through outdoor activities such as bird watching and fishing which someday could become lifelong hobbies for the students. This program has met great success in Talbot County and Baltimore City and this year, thanks to one of the biggest grants we have ever received, Pickering will be able to expand the program into Wicomico County.

You ask, what about middle school? We have been periodically providing middle school programs over the years, however they have long been the hardest sector of students for Pickering Creek to reach due to the often chaotic school schedule that ensues for teachers when transitioning students from the "easy living" of elementary school to the "confusing and scary" high school life. During these critically formative years, when students are struggling to gain independence and at the same time, find grounding in the familiar, the woods and fields that they have been exploring at least two times a year since they were four years old vanishes from their learning schedule. They become more "plugged in," they find new friends, their interests change and their connection with nature often fades. The Pickering Creek staff has long viewed this gap as a detriment to the students' continuum of learning within the



greatest classroom available...the outdoors.

Having elementary school and high school firmly "under our belt," we felt it was time to take the opportunity to take a more organized approach to reach middle schools. First, we needed exciting lessons to engage a group that is often labeled as "hard to reach." For this we turned to the Chesapeake Bay Gateways Network which graciously provided funding to create a new curriculum entitled, Gateways to Conservation II. This curriculum is a continuation of our first through fifth grade curriculum and covers science topics such as erosion, paleontology, biodiversity and genetics. During the creation process we consulted some of our most important partners in the world, our local middle school teachers.

Next we put the grant-writing crew back to work to find funding to teach our new programs. Success! We are very fortunate to have received a

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# Welcome Mandy Smith-New Education Coordinator

By Bonna L. Nelson

Pittsburgh native, Mandy Smith, joins Pickering fresh from a 3 year stint as an environmental educator and manager of Latta Nature Center in North Carolina. Smith brings to the education coordinator position seven years of experience in environmental education and a passion for the outdoors.

As a youngster Smith's mother took her on nature walks and taught her how to select mushrooms, dandelions, and other such delights to eat in the wild. Smith credits her mother for encouraging her forest explorations and also for encouraging her to enroll in the horticulture program at Penn State to obtain a degree in a subject that had been a childhood interest. Smith holds a BS in Horticulture and an MS in Park and Resource Management/Environmental

Education from Slippery Rock University.

At Latta, Smith was responsible for the facility, staff supervision, school field trips and public programming on the 1300-acre nature preserve. Activities included lake kayaking and canoeing, protecting endangered wildflowers and coordinating the popular environmental Geo Caching program.

Geo Caching is a revenue-producing program that Smith would like to introduce at Pickering. It involves establishing hiking courses in wooded areas with marked coordinates and then using a GPS to navigate the trails which end with a cache of prizes.

What brought her to Pickering? "Five years ago I lived in Salisbury working for



the Maryland Americorp Program on conservation projects and environmental education programs on Assateague Island. I came to love the Eastern Shore area. Also, I wanted to be associated with the National Audubon Society, a well-recognized environmental conservation organization. And, I like that Pickering is located closer to my family and friends in Pittsburgh."

Smith, a "plant person," likes to work with medicinal plants and herbal remedies and is conducting a workshop in April on the topic at Pickering. Other interests include kayaking, camping, hiking, gardening, practicing yoga and meditation, dancing, and photography. She is living at the Shehan Audubon Sanctuary while looking for a place to call home near Easton. Welcome Mandy to the Pickering Family!

## Meet Our New Educators!

Students coming to Pickering Creek during the spring might not be seeking instruction in the 3 R's, but they will certainly learn a great deal about the environment from the 3 J's—Jen, Jenna, and Jean. These three folks who are Pickering Creek's new environmental educators bring with them an amazing variety of skills and teaching experiences.

Jen Nitz, for example, has taught both traditional and non-traditional students about such subjects as grizzly bears and the protection of buffalos in Yellowstone National Park. While Jenna Rackovan's subject matter would not seem so exotic to most of us on the Eastern Shore, she had to dispense with traditional classroom techniques and instead try innovative hands-on teaching methods, like catching crabs and exploring marsh trails, to keep her kindergarten pupils enthusiastic and attentive. Jean Roth, who spent whole days with her students in a residential ecology school in Maine, used a variety of subjects as well as guest instructors, like local lobstermen, to stimulate her students.

In addition to teaching experience, our new educators have first aid and water safety training, along with computer skills and knowledge of GIS (Geographical Information Systems) and GPS. Jean, who is



**The 3 J's—Jenna, Jean and Jen**

conversant in Spanish, has used photography as a means of immersing children in nature. Jenna has worked as a fundraiser, leading a highly successful effort for the Binghamton Zoo's Halloween event, and Jen has experience in growing an organic garden and in building "earth ships," sustainable houses made of tires with earth "rammed in."

Their education and work experience have led to extensive travel for all three. While at Gettysburg College, Jenna spent a semester at the Duke University Marine Lab participating in an intensive study of marine biology and oceanography at St. George, Bermuda. Jen, on the other hand, left her native Illinois and went west to Montana, Oregon, and California. Besides teaching, she tried her hand at such activities as training Karelian Bear Dogs and fighting wildland fires. Like Jenna, Jean traveled while at Penn State, spending a semester abroad in Alicante, Spain. Summer work during and after college took her to California to monitor the threatened flat-tailed horned lizard

and to the Shannon Point Marine Center in Washington where she worked as a National Science Foundation Research Intern.

Although the three educators share a dedication to the environment, their reasons for coming to Pickering Creek, as well as their future plans, all differ. Jean and Jenna, both of whom grew up in neighboring Pennsylvania, have been interested in the Chesapeake Bay since childhood. Jen, who did not have the same familiarity with the local region, came to Pickering Creek in order to learn about coastal wetlands, a new ecosystem for her. In the immediate future, Jean wants to take on the challenging teaching experience of the Teach for America program, possibly in New Orleans, and later to use her Spanish to teach in Spain or Central America. Jenna sees a career in marine biology in her future, but intends to continue sampling different environmental work experiences at present. Jen's goal is to work in a place where she can incorporate her knowledge as a naturalist with sustainable living skills.

Meeting with these three new educators for just a few minutes, it is hard not to become infected with their enthusiasm about beginning their adventure at Pickering Creek. As Jean said during a recent conversation as she pointed to Pickering Creek shining in the late afternoon sun, "It is so great to get kids to appreciate this!" Students who come to Pickering Creek to learn from these interns cannot help but do exactly that once they have met these three!

# The Bird Call

NEWS FOR AND ABOUT PICKERING CREEK VOLUNTEERS

## The Secret of LIFE

By Nancy Reybold

LIFE is the Legacy Institute for the Environment, a little known gem of a program for seniors and eventually-to-be-seniors concerned about preserving our environment. It only costs time, interest, and effort, and the reward is a motherlode of knowledge and understanding about our natural habitat. The goal of LIFE is to increase awareness and move you to become actively involved in the stewardship of our world and its flora and fauna.

### *LIFE at Pickering Creek Audubon Center: Spring Sessions*

We invite Pickering Creek volunteers to join us at the two sessions that will be held at Pickering Creek this spring. This is a great opportunity to experience LIFE to see if it's for you and to learn more about these topics!

Wednesday, April 2: "Birds and the Working Landscape: Insights into the Ecology of Delmarva" by Dr. Wayne Bell

Wednesday, April 9: Bird Conservation and Habitat and the Citizen Scientist by Les Roslund and Britt Slattery

My husband (Bill) and I heard about LIFE from fellow travelers at Pickering Creek, Erney and Margaret Maher, and decided to give it a try. There have been over thirty graduates of the Institute in its short four-year history.

From February through mid-April (12 sessions) our Fridays from 9:00 a.m. until 2:30 p.m. belonged to LIFE. (In 2008, sessions occur on Wednesdays from March through mid-April.) The programs were held at and featured three local nature centers: the Chesapeake Bay Environmental Center or CBEC—formerly Horsehead—in Grasonville, Adkins Arboretum near Ridgely, and our own Pickering Creek Audubon Center. Even if you are familiar with all of these centers, it is particularly gratifying to learn of their histories and missions from center staff and directors.

And learn we did—without tests or pressure—about birds, horseshoe crabs, environmental health, fish tagging, submerged aquatic vegetation, shoreline restoration, artificial reefs, the Tuckahoe Creek and Upper Choptank Watershed project, conservation landscaping, water gardens, native plants, manmade wetlands, and agriculture in Talbot County. Vital professionals of all ages, who are passionate about their endeavors and committed to spreading the word about protecting our natural world for future generations, instructed us in the morning and led afternoon stewardship projects.

If you are interested in learning more about LIFE, please contact Patty Campbell at 410.604.1661 or by emailing her at [pcamp@bayrestoration.org](mailto:pcamp@bayrestoration.org). You may also contact Pickering Creek Volunteer Coordinator, Beth Wasden, at 410.822.4903, x26, or by emailing her at [dwasden@pickeringcreek.org](mailto:dwasden@pickeringcreek.org).

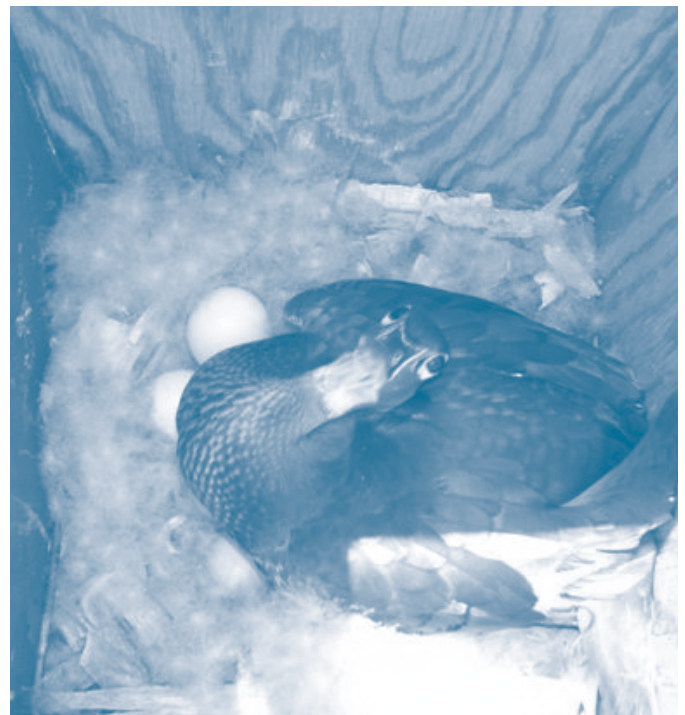
## Ducklings and Owlets, Oh My!

By Erney Maher, Board Member

Every year in early March, Wood Ducks migrate into Maryland from the southern United States. They look for a habitat of fresh water, old trees, and seclusion. The trees along the woodland trail at Pickering Creek have often been home to some broods of "Woodies," although the brackish water of the creek is not ideal for the ducklings.

The staff and volunteers at Pickering Creek have erected a nesting box trail of 24 boxes that follow the banks of the creek and extend around the farm pond and the wetland impoundments. Volunteers and staff monitor these boxes during the spring months to remove non native tenants, such as European Starlings, and to measure the acceptance and success rate of the wood ducks.

In 2007, 71 ducklings hatched from ten of these boxes. We had an interesting additional family: a pair of Screech Owls raised four owlets in one of our boxes. There was more exciting news from our newest impoundments, developed in 2006. On June 22, 2007,



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Photo by Dave Godfrey



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volunteer Les Roslund, while monitoring bluebird boxes, observed over 100 Wood Ducks, including at least 80 ducklings, utilizing this new habitat. We hope each year will build on these successes.

The 2007 volunteer monitors were Dave Godfrey, Dave Reinecke, Jim Thompson, Carolyn Helmsley and family, Erney Maher, and Beth Wasden, volunteer coordinator.

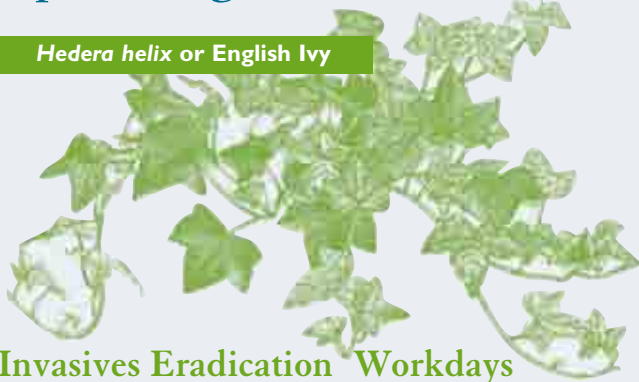
If you missed the February 16 orientation but would like to volunteer as a Wood Duck box monitor in 2008, please contact Beth at 410.822.4903, x26, or by emailing her at [dwasden@pickeringcreek.org](mailto:dwasden@pickeringcreek.org).



Getting Wood Duck boxes ready for spring.

## Upcoming Volunteer Events- Mark your Calendar!

**Hedera helix or English Ivy**



### Invasives Eradication Workdays

Saturdays, March 22 and May 17 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

The best two-hour workout in town. Trade the gym interior for the beauty and serenity of the great outdoors. We will be targeting and eradicating English ivy and periwinkle from the waterfront.

These workdays are perfect for those needing service learning hours, for family members who want to volunteer together, and for anyone who wants to get hands-on with some of the most infamous Bay invaders.

### All Dirty Hands on Deck Garden Training and Workday

Saturday, March 29 10:00 a.m.-4:00 p.m.

Get hands-on with Pickering Creek's Children's Imagination Garden as staff and volunteers lead a working training. We'll be pruning, digging, plugging, clipping, and pulling on an early spring Saturday.

### Volunteer Recognition Dinner

Saturday, April 5, 2008 6:00 p.m.

An old fashioned PIG ROAST with trimmings for all of the adults who contributed countless hours to the centers conservation and education efforts. For those about to rock, we salute you.

### LIFE Sessions at Pickering Creek

Wednesdays, April 2 and April 9 9:00 a.m.-2:30 p.m.

Curious about Legacy Institute for the Environment (LIFE)? Want to learn more about the ecology of the Eastern Shore, birds and their habitat, and the role of the "citizen scientist?" Join Pickering Creek staff, LIFE members, and guest speakers. Open to Pickering Creek volunteers and prospective volunteers.

### Earth Day Workday

Sunday, April 20 10:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m.

Celebrate Earth by spending the day outdoors with Pickering Creek staff and volunteers! Last year, over 80 of your neighbors helped us tackle the big jobs—including greenhouse demolition and construction projects. Join us this year, as we get things done with your help! You provide the enthusiasm. We'll provide lunch, goodies, work gloves, and service projects.

### National Volunteer Week

Tuesday, April 29-Saturday, May 3, 2008 TBD  
Spring is in the air. So is service. We invite Pickering volunteers, local businesses, organizations, and schools to get outside and to celebrate the spirit of service as we prep the garden for the growing season and perform other maintenance projects.

### National Trails Day

Saturday, June 7 Service project from 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.  
Full schedule TBD

What does a trail opening, a service project, and a paddle down Pickering Creek have in common? They're all part of our second annual National Trails Day!

### Dog Days Workdays

Thursdays beginning June 26 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

Summertime-forget about the cotton-and the weeds are high. Two hours of your time can make a huge difference in the summer. Every week, we'll perform different maintenance projects.

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Keep an eye on the Pickering Creek website for more information about these events and other upcoming events and volunteer opportunities. Contact Beth Wasden, volunteer coordinator, at 410.822. 4903, x26 or by emailing her at [dwasden@pickeringcreek.org](mailto:dwasden@pickeringcreek.org) to register for these events or for more information.

# Bring on the Birds!

Wouldn't it be wonderful if you could have a greater variety of bird species right in your own backyard? Aiming to attract and produce more birds is a goal that everyone can work toward at home, work, school or in the community. Pickering Creek's birding hot spot is a great example. The wetlands created in partnership with Chesapeake Wildlife Heritage that greet visitors beside Audubon Lane teem with teal, shovelers, and so much more. Wetland creation, forest development, and removal of invasive plants are some of the successful habitat enhancements at Pickering. Audubon's "other" Talbot County jewel, the Jean Ellen duPont Shehan Audubon Sanctuary in Bozman, is following suit with a host of habitat projects meant to bring in more kinds and numbers of birds, keep them coming, and inspire breeding and nesting.

The 950 acre Sanctuary already sports 250 grassland acres, 60 wetland acres, and 340 acres of mature forest attracting 200 bird species while supporting a wide variety of other wildlife, including some rare species. Recognizing that there is still tremendous opportunity to improve the site's habitat offerings, Audubon staff are working on an ambitious program of restoration, conservation and management measures. In the end, we'll have more experience to draw from; advice for local landowners seeking assistance; and a site with increased value to a greater diversity of wildlife.

Black Ducks, Killdeer, and Bald Eagles are already landing at the new 18-acres of shallow water non-tidal wetlands built within the peninsula called Wells Point. This first stage of a larger habitat complex was completed in November with partners Ducks Unlimited, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), the Waterfowl Festival, and Maryland Department of Natural Resources (DNR). Two separate wetland cells straddle the road for viewing by car. Visitors are encouraged to wander beyond the road to discover the creative features of this wetland and the wildlife enjoying it. The smaller pool will hold six inches of water at its deepest during the wetter months, tapering to mere moisture on one end. The other section is inviting to birds, turtles, and amphibians as it meanders between two former agricultural fields, creating wetter pools and puddles as well as drier spots. A set of mounds rising above a foot-deep "moat" is planted with 200



**Two months of heavy equipment work shaped the fields into the desired puddles and mounds.**

native trees and shrubs. Wood Duck nest boxes, installed by dedicated volunteers, will help increase the annual brood. Herbaceous plant life was jump-started by adding 64 species through seeding and planting more than 2,000 plants over a few very wet, muddy volunteer days. These plants—many of which offer beautiful blooms, nectar and seeds—are growing inside an eight-foot tall deer enclosure, also installed with volunteer help. Though wildlife benefit is a main goal, we need to see if keeping the ample deer herd at bay will produce better results. Don't miss the "sculpture garden," very large segments of downed trees set in the ground to provide bird perches, turtle basking, and shady hiding spots under water.

Though the construction has turned the area temporarily into a giant mud pit, it is exciting to envision how beautiful the new wetland will be once the plants are fully established, by summer. The presence of water is up to Mother Nature, but we can use the water control structures to stop up the drain or allow water to run out. Spring drawdown of the water level should bring a variety of shorebirds flocking to exposed mud; summer will highlight wading birds; while fall and winter pools will attract waterfowl.

New buffer areas at Wells Point will help stabilize soil, filter runoff, and create more habitat. Six acres along Leadenham Creek, recently planted with 4,100 tree seedlings, are helping to keep the creek clean; with an additional four acres of tree buffers planned. Surrounding all sides of the wetlands will soon be enhanced meadows, with a variety of native grasses and wildflowers to attract pollinators (butterflies, moths, bees, and hummingbirds). An adjacent nine-acre tidal marsh is being restored by controlling Phragmites. Two wildlife food plots planted with sorghum will provide extra singing perches, plus ground level openings birds.

The Sanctuary's vast grasslands, created years ago, are undergoing newly focused management practices, supported by DNR. As with many landowners maintaining grasslands for conservation, Audubon has experienced common challenges in keeping these fields in prime condition for bird use. Grassland birds need shorter grasses with spaces between the plants at ground level for movement and nesting. Over time, grasses spread and grow thicker, so management is aimed at thinning to provide the needed structure. Prescribed practices include mowing, burning or turning over fields on a three year rotation. Although burning produces the most desirable effect, weather conditions are not always favorable for burns and some years are missed, leaving thick, rank fields less useful for birds. We are testing thinning practices on different parcels of grasslands at the Sanctuary, and some fields will be replanted with a new mix of native plants. Results will be compared, in terms of growth of plants and response of birds. Staff and volunteers are monitoring vegetation, birds and other wildlife, looking for intended plant structure and increases in birds rarely seen here, like Grasshopper or Vesper Sparrows, and even more of those species we see annually, such as Eastern Bluebirds and Eastern Meadowlarks. With results showing the most successful practices, we will be better able to recommend the most feasible and effective measures to landowners looking to improve their own conservation actions.

Everyone is invited to come out and enjoy the new habitats. The scope of the work in itself is something to see, and the promise of improved birding and wildlife viewing is exciting. Each season will bring new surprises!

For more information or to volunteer your time, call the Shehan Audubon Sanctuary at (410) 745-9283.



## Family Programs

Please call Pickering Creek at (410) 822-4903 for more information.  
Registration is suggested but not required.

### Totally Turtles

Tuesday, April 8 6:30-7:30 p.m.

Members: \$2 Non-members: \$5

Location: Main Office

Learn all about the turtles of Pickering Creek. Come and discover the exciting facts about our local land and water turtles and meet some of our turtle friends. Find out why its so cool to have a shell.



### Geocaching

Tuesday, April 15 6-8 p.m.

Members: \$5 Non-members: \$10

Location: Main Office

Ages 12 and up Max. 7

Geocaching is a growing hobby in our area. We will be using GPS (Global Positioning System) Units to find hidden caches throughout the nature preserve. We will also learn the basic essentials of map and compass. All equipment will be provided.

### IMBD: Birding and Canoeing

Saturday, May 10 7:30-11:30 a.m.

Members: \$15/adult, \$8/children 12 and up

Non-members: \$20/adult,

\$12/children 12 and up

Location: Main Office

Ages 12 and up Max. 12

Celebrate International Migratory Bird Day cruisin' Pickering Creek via canoe. You will learn some basic paddling and bird watching skills. Then we will head out to catch a glimpse of the early rising migratory fowl. Registration ends May 7, 2008.

### Nature at Night Program Series

#### Astronomy on the Dock

Thursday, April 3 7-9 p.m.

Members: \$10 Non-members: \$14

Location: Ecology Classroom

Join Jerry Truitt from the Delmarva Stargazers for an introduction to the April night sky.

Using telescopes we will take a close-up look at the Orion Nebula, the Beehive star cluster in Cancer, the Pleiades cluster in Taurus, and M81 & M82 Galaxies as well as the planets Mars and Saturn. This is an excellent opportunity to ask all your astronomy questions while spending an informative evening on Pickering Creek's new dock.

#### Nocturnal Animal Adaptations

Wednesday, April 30 7-8:30 p.m.

Members: Free Non-members: \$5

Location: Garden Classroom

Bring the family to Pickering Creek to learn about the many adaptations that characterize nocturnal animals. Catch food like a bat, identify scents like a fox, and listen quietly for owls and the other night sounds of the woods. Join our naturalists for a safe night hike and experience Pickering Creek after the sun sets.

#### Moonlit Paddle

Wednesday, May 16 7-9 p.m.

Members: \$15/adult, \$8/children 12 and up

Non-members: \$20/adult, \$12/children 12 and up

Location: Garden Classroom

Ages 12 and up Max. 12

Experience the moon reflecting off the waters of Pickering Creek during this amazing opportunity to canoe at night. We will paddle out together at sunset and enjoy a moonlit evening on the water. Explore the waterways in a whole new light and observe bird activity only characterized during these evening hours. Registration ends May 14, 2008.

## Adult Programs

### Herbal Remedies 101

Thursday, April 17 6-7:30 p.m.

Members: \$10 Non-members: \$15

Location: Garden Classroom Max. 15

Learn about the medicinal properties of plants known as "herbs" with a plant walk around Pickering's own herb garden. We will view and discuss native herbs as well as the more commonly known culinary herbs. You will get to make an herbal remedy or two and enjoy some herbal tea. \*Please bring a small jar for one of the herbal remedies and a mug to try some teas. Registration ends April 14, 2008.



## Come out and explore PCAC!

### Directions to PCAC From Easton

- take Route 50 West
- take a left at the stoplight by the airport
- take the immediate right on Longwoods Rd. (Rt. 662 North)
- follow Longwoods to Sharp Rd. (this will be a left hand turn)
- take another right onto Sharp Road (the sign will say to Presquile & Sharp Road)
- follow Sharp Road until you see the Pickering Creek sign on your right. Turn right onto Audubon Lane. 410.822.4903

## Food Fight 2012:

# A Talk about the Food & Farm Bill with author Dan Imhoff

May 20, Noon-1:30 pm  
Oxford Community Center

AND 4:00 pm-5:30 pm  
St. Michaels Library



Join us in Oxford or St. Michaels for an informative discussion about the Farm Bill. The Farm Bill is perhaps the single most significant land use legislation enacted in the United States, yet many citizens remain unaware of its power and scope. With subsidies ballooning toward \$25 billion dollars per year, the Farm Bill largely dictates who grows what crops, on what acreage, and under what conditions—all with major impacts on the country's rural economies, health and nutrition, national security, and biodiversity. As debate and wrangling over the 2007 Farm Bill rolls on and we prepare for the 2012 Farm Bill, Food Fight offers a highly informative and visually engaging overview of legislation that literally shapes our food system, our bodies, and our future.

Dan Imhoff is a researcher, author, independent publisher, and homestead farmer who has concentrated for nearly 20 years on issues related to farming, the environment, and design. He is the author of numerous articles, essays and books including *Food Fight: The Citizen's Guide to a Food and Farm Bill*, *Paper or Plastic: Searching for Solutions to an Overpackaged World*; *Farming with the Wild: Enhancing Biodiversity on Farms and Ranches*; and *Building with Vision: Optimizing and Finding Alternatives to Wood*.

Dan is the president and co-founder of Watershed Media, a non-profit publishing house based in Healdsburg, California. He is the president and a co-founder of the Wild Farm Alliance, a seven year-old national organization that works to promote agriculture systems that support and accommodate wild nature. For ten years, he has been the co-host of a monthly Farm and Garden radio show on Mendocino County Public Broadcasting with his long-time friend, biodynamic apple farmer Tim Bates.

## Great Tastes for Great Causes!

### Upcoming Festival to Benefit Pickering Creek

The 6th annual St. Michaels Food and Wine Festival, which is being held April 25-27 is an exciting celebration of food and wine. The festival's beneficiaries are Pickering Creek, the St. Michaels Food Bank, and Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum, as well as several food industry scholarships. The Festival has contributed \$36,000 to the Pickering Creek's education programs over the past three years. Please attend to show your support and enjoy some great wines!



Wednesdays, 1:30-2:30 p.m. Max. 12

Experience nature through hands-on activities, hikes, crafts, and much more! Tiny Tot programs are for children ages 3-5 years and accompanying adult. Fee is \$5 per child and free to Audubon members. All programs meet at the Garden Classroom

### Signs of Spring March 26

Come out with your tot to Pickering Creek and enjoy the first week of spring! We will take a hike through the field, forest, and wetland to investigate the many signs of spring. Before leaving we will have a chance to pot a plant to bring home and watch grow.

### Migration Adventures April 9

Turn your eyes to the sky and witness the amazing bird migration at Pickering Creek with your tot. All birds are adapted to live in different habitats and often travel south when the temperatures get too cold. We will make binoculars and then head out on a birding adventure to learn about where birds migrate and the importance of our local wetlands.

### Earth Day Explorations April 23

Celebrate Earth Day with your tot through an exploratory nature hike designed to reveal the wonders of nature. As we hike we will discuss some unusual facts about plants and animals while picking up any trash we find along the way. Later we will talk about recycling, reducing, and reusing as we create innovative art from discarded materials.

### Busy Busy Bees May 7

Brush up on your buzzing skills as you and your tot learn about life in the hive through interactive games. Learn about different types of bees and the various roles they play in the cooperative world of bees. We will investigate how bees use flowers to make honey and even make our own tasty honey treat!



### Farm Fresh Food May 21

Food takes an extensive journey from the farm before it reaches our plates. Many of us don't even know what celery looks like before we see it in the grocery store. Bring your tot and be prepared to get a little dirty in our vegetable and herb gardens as we witness (and sample!) food growing right out of the ground. Veggies never tasted better!

### Magical Metamorphosis: Caterpillars to Butterflies June 4

Bring your tot to the blooming gardens of Pickering Creek to learn about the life cycle of a butterfly. Wiggle like a caterpillar, hatch from a cocoon, and fly like a butterfly with your own colorful, homemade wings. Learn and understand that all things go through significant changes as they grow from babies to adults.





# “Spring Optimism”

*Can virtue be gone?  
When apple blossoms blow  
Like snow  
Across the lawn*

*Can much be wrong?  
When catbirds bravely swing.  
And sing  
Their sweetest song.*

*Can dreams be dead?  
When tender seedlings rise,  
Surprise  
The sleepy head.*

*Can love be o'er?  
When mating robins rest  
On nest  
Above my door.*

*With nature's blossoming,  
Such things come every spring.*

from *Delaware Poems* (1943)  
by Gilbert Byron



Jacque Baker talks with students about Byron.

Photo by Royce Ball

## Back to Byron

Sharing a July 12 birthday with naturalist Henry David Thoreau, Gilbert Byron was born in 1903 in Chestertown, Maryland. Mr. Byron has left a legacy as a poet, essayist, novelist, and teacher, and his house, located at Pickering Creek, serves as a potential means of sharing that legacy with all generations.

Mr. Byron essentially lived his entire life on the Delmarva Peninsula. From the late 1930s until a few weeks before his death in 1991, he chronicled, documented, and celebrated the people and life in, on, and around the Chesapeake Bay region.

He was among the first to recognize and lament the adverse ecological impact “progress” effected on the Bay, as evidenced in his 1942 poem “Chesapeake Change.” His 1962 letter to a Baltimore newspaper initiated activity that resulted in the establishment of the Chesapeake Bay Maritime Museum.

Mr. Byron lived alone for nearly 45 years in the small house he built along the banks of Old House Cove near St. Michaels. It was here that he did most of his writing. His unique lifestyle and his dedication to the craft of writing are almost as much a part of the Chesapeake Bay and Delmarva culture and heritage as is his subject matter.

Following Mr. Byron’s death, through the generosity of the St. Michaels—Bay Hundred Foundation and the Talbot County Board of Education, his house was removed from its original site. It was then stored in sections until it was relocated to the Pickering Creek Audubon Center. The house is undergoing restoration and preservation and is intended to serve as a tangible link between conservation efforts and the literature of nature and conservation—the subject of much of Mr. Byron’s writing.

The majority of exterior renovations are now complete thanks to a great group of volunteers. The major steps remaining to complete the restoration of the house are:

- Installation of insulation
- Applying wall, ceiling and floor covering
- Permanent installation and trimming of windows and doors
- Restoration of the front porch and side entrance
- Construction of a deck to access the house

Pickering Creek needs volunteers with the specialized knowledge required to accomplish these steps, as well as unskilled laborers to help complete the restoration project. If you would like to assist, please contact Pickering Creek’s Volunteer Coordinator, Beth Wasden, at 410.822.4903, x26.

We invite current Pickering Creek volunteers, members, and visitors to attend the first annual Gilbert Byron Day on July 12. We will celebrate Mr. Byron’s works and life as we explore the inspiration of the natural world on writing. Pickering Creek and the Gilbert Byron Society will provide more information about this very special event as the date approaches.



# Tour, Toast & Taste 2008

Pickering Creek Audubon Center and the Historical Society of Talbot County will host their second joint fundraising event, Tour, Toast & Taste, at Ratcliffe Manor, Easton, MD, on Saturday, June 14, 2008, from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Strolling the grounds, guests will enjoy delectable wines, taste delicious hors d'oeuvres (Ken's Creative Kitchens of Annapolis), enjoy light entertainment, view vintage automobiles and participate in the main event of the evening - purchasing a variety of intriguing dinners/events that will be offered by Board members and friends of both organizations and will take place over the coming year. On board this year to host dinners are Bill Corace, Steve Hershey, Norma Redelé, Richard Tilghman and Carolyn Thornton, just to name a few. Exciting items will also be available at the live auction.

Cost of the evening at Ratcliffe Manor is \$125 per person. Dinners for purchase will be priced individually and sold the evening of the event.

Volunteers from both nonprofits intend to recapture the excitement of the era of rumrunners, flappers and Great Gatsby at a place that from the beginning epitomized class and elegant country living.



Ratcliffe Manor (c1757) stands among Talbot County's great mid-eighteenth-century houses. In a history of colonial mansions, John Martin Hammond observed that Ratcliffe Manor spoke "simply of gentility and good living." By the 1920s, prominent residents on the Eastern Shore embraced the "Country Life Movement" epitomized by the elegant forms of hospitality that defined the social swirl enjoyed at the great country estates. One architectural historian considers Ratcliffe to be more distinguished than the majority of buildings built at the time. It is a superb example of colonial Georgian architecture.

The term "Georgian" refers to an English monarch of the period, but it has become part of the American architectural vocabulary. It is used to describe buildings with facades that are symmetrical and well ordered, have double-hung sash windows,

and gable or hipped roofs. Ratcliffe Manor stands among the higher-style Georgian residences on the Eastern Shore. Like Myrtle Grove, Plimhimmon and Wickersham, Ratcliffe represented the great houses constructed by great men who built their fortunes during the era of the rise of the merchant-planter class.

According to Glen Uminowicz, Director of The Historical Society of Talbot County, the grounds at Ratcliffe with the great house serving as a backdrop, provides the ideal setting for an evening event benefiting the Historical Society of Talbot County and the Pickering Creek Audubon Center.

Tickets for Tour, Toast & Taste are \$125 per person in advance. To purchase tickets or for more information about the event, call (410-822-0773), or visit either [www.hstc.org](http://www.hstc.org) or [www.pickeringcreek.org](http://www.pickeringcreek.org).

## We thank our Lucy & John James Audubon Society members for their support!

**L**ucy & John James Audubon Society members support Audubon and Pickering Creek's goal of Connecting People with Nature through superb outdoor educational experiences, citizen science, and bird conservation. Society members have given a minimum gift of \$1,000. Gifts support a variety of community based education and research programs focused on improving the environment for the benefit of humanity. Each level of membership has different benefits, all Society members receive invitations to unique stewardship events.

### Raptor \$10,000-\$25,000

Mr. Paul Tudor Jones  
Mrs. Dorothy Metcalf  
Mr. and Mrs. Ira Ringler  
Mr. and Mrs. Antoine van Agtmael  
Mr. Bruce Wiltsie

### Waterbird \$5000-\$9,999

Mr. and Mrs. Paul Elicker  
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Seip  
Dr. Peter Stifel  
Dr. Stuart Strahl  
Ms. Mary Tilghman  
Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Wyman

### Songbird \$2,500-\$4,999

Mr. and Mrs. John Akridge  
Dr. and Mrs. Howard Hughes  
Mr. and Mrs. Thomas Lane  
Mrs. Norma Redelé  
Mr. and Mrs. Richard Tilghman

### Hummingbird \$1,000-\$2,499

Mr. and Mrs. John Bayliss  
Mr. and Mrs. Franz Burda  
Mr. and Ms. Tucker Dalton  
Mrs. Debbie Geisenkotter & Mr. Richard Worsham  
Mr. and Mrs. Bryson Goss  
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Mr. and Mrs. Richard Welch

# Living with Wildlife

by Susanna Scallion

“What is that horrendous smell?” I asked the night before my husband left for his week-long ski trip in March of 2007. Great—a skunk.

In the following weeks, strange noises came from under the house, but we still couldn't tell what was living under the house. It made noises like a puppy, was invisible as a mouse, and smelled. We took comfort in the fact that it didn't smell all the time. When we heard little coughs we smiled. Growls made us worry—there must be a mate.

While my husband sat on the porch eating lunch one day, a Red Fox emerged from under our porch, about 5 feet from where he was sitting. The fox looked at Mark, and Mark looked at him. It was then and there they both knew they were happy to share space—safety for one, entertainment for the other.

After a month of smells, yelps, grunts and growls, the father fox continued to enter and exit the den (our crawl space) to feed his family. He became comfortable with our house and our presence. He sat guard at the front of his den (and ours) throughout the day. It was like having a watch dog.

Finally on April 15th, we had babies, or so we felt like it... the babies were about a month old when they emerged for the first time from the den. Six small, dark brown, and somewhat mole like kits. What a sight to see while eating dinner.

Four days later they were fuzzy, tiny



foxes. They stuck close to mama while papa hunted, until mama was ready to take a break and share hunting duties. Luckily for the new family bunny, muskrat, and snake populations at Pickering were plentiful, and everyone got something to eat. Though a definite 'pecking order,' meals were always big enough and frequent enough, that all six kits were healthy.

Every day until June, the kits frolicked in the yard and the hay bales surrounding our house. They began their day with 5 AM chases across our front porch, and spent the day practicing pouncing, batting each other and jumping all over mama or papa. The day ended with a few dusk-lit meals and mama fox screeching to get them back into the den.

When July came, the five kits (quietly down from six) got bolder and moved across the driveway to a culvert. They became loyal

subjects for photographers and visitors. Humans became a bigger threat than other wildlife. Many times, humans didn't seem to understand that these cute animals could very well sink their sharp teeth into human appendages, so we joined the parents in their 'scoldings' to remind people and the kits to keep the 'wild' in wild.

They made it tough to get anything done, much less enter and exit my home or do yard work. My evenings were spent looking out the windows; I was awakened by thumping paws running across my porch; and there were droppings and body parts of prey scattered on my porch. Goodness knows how much excavating was done underneath the house, or what damage was done to the foxes eardrums when we vacuumed. What I do know is living with them for a season was fantastic.

Beyond learning about the life cycle of a fox, I got a snapshot of parenthood—worrying about their safety and health, being thrilled when they discover something new, being second fiddle to them, looking forward to seeing them after work and being relieved when they're safe and sound in the den each night. The side lessons included: Foxes musk frequently; a four foot black rat snake provides an entertaining meal for six young fox; and raccoons cannot safely sneak past a fox guarding its den. They grew up and now we miss them—is that another snapshot of parenthood?

## The 48 Hour Match

In December, 2006, Pickering Creek Audubon Center received a \$50,000 challenge grant from Tom and Alexa Seip of Easton to renovate the outdoor environmental classroom and pier which were in need of repair. Through the generous outpouring of strong and loyal community support the match plus additional funds to maintain the new pier was raised within 48 hours.

Marine contractors, Dissen & Juhn, Corp. of Stevensville, Maryland, began the renovation in mid-October 2007. The renovation was completed in mid-December 2007. This spring, adults and students will be back on the dock fishing, learning about crabbing, oysters, waterbirds and the science and beauty of the Chesapeake Bay, our magnificent watershed.

The Outdoor Environmental Classroom and dock are critical elements in giving children at Pickering Creek an up close and hands-on experience with nature. Nothing compares to the excitement on children's faces as they catch their first fish from the dock, as they see and touch the small creatures who inhabit our waters, or when they observe the waterfowl and birds that soar over the creek.

If you would like to receive additional information regarding



charitable giving opportunities at Pickering Creek Audubon Center please call Rita Osgood, Development Officer at 410-822-4903.



# Blue Skies, Buckoo Bluebirds

By Les Roslund

The crops and the crabs may not have enjoyed the drought in 2007, but the bluebirds certainly did. Les Roslund, volunteer and Bluebird Monitoring Chief, recaps the wild and wonderful 2007 bluebird season at Pickering Creek.

This was an all-time record year for bluebird fledging. There were 51 nesting attempts by bluebirds (meaning a nest was built and at least one egg was deposited.) From these, a total of 166 baby bluebirds fledged. The previous record was in 2006 when 122 baby bluebirds fledged. Weather must have suited them well. Perhaps wet weather gives them problems since it was pretty dry throughout the nesting season this year.

Tree Swallows also did quite well, with 27 nesting attempts and a total of 131 babies fledged. The record stands at 139 fledged in 2006. Nearly all of the boxes got some use this year, even the ones along the remote sides of the field north of the small stream-fed pond. One box on one of the loops even fledged three clutches of bluebirds.

For the first time, the “pairing” of boxes seemed to work. We introduced the pairing amongst the new boxes in hopes of letting tree swallows and bluebirds both nest at the same site. At the paired site, each species is supposed to defend the site against more of its own species but allow the nesting of the other species. We have three such sites in the vicinity of the wetland ponds. At some point during the season, all three sets had both boxes simultaneously in use, just as planned.

Monitors Don Mahon and Barbara Lundkvist both provided great help through the first nesting cycle of the spring. I greatly appreciated their assistance. That was the period when things were most active. Don had mostly bluebirds. Barbara had both bluebirds and tree swallows.

Predators were not bad this year. Monitors had to clear out a few house sparrow nests, and I believe house wrens destroyed some of the eggs of some of the bluebird nests. Additional species using the boxes included Carolina Chickadee (one nest, 6 fledglings) and House Wren (one nest, 6 fledglings.)

There was one quite unusual incident. I believe the bluebirds at one nest site threw out an active tree swallow nest, including throwing away the eggs and driving off the



Photo by Bonna Nelson

adults, in order to make way for a nest of their own. In my ten years of monitoring, I have never previously seen that behavior.

Finally, I attribute some of the success of the bluebirds to a diminished level of agriculture going on throughout the property. In prior years, a few of the nests closest to the agriculture fields would have all babies die shortly after the herbicide application just prior to planting time. This year that did not happen. Perhaps the dryness helped or the timing of the herbicide application did not catch the baby birds in a vulnerable stage.

I really do not know the cause of the deaths of the babies in the previous years. It could have been directly from the herbicide itself, or it could have been a secondary effect—of the parents dying or of the sudden death of the grasses leading to loss of their insect food—or it could be that the herbicide gets onto the insects, and when those insects are eaten by the young or the parents, the result is the death. Anyhow, such losses did not seem to occur on our loops this year.

It was a very interesting and productive year for the birds at Pickering Creek in 2007.

If you are interested in becoming a bluebird monitor during the 2008 season, please contact Beth Wasden, volunteer coordinator at 410.822.4903, x26, or by emailing her at [dwasden@pickeringcreek.org](mailto:dwasden@pickeringcreek.org).

generous three-year grant from the Chesapeake Bay Trust to reach all of the middle school classes in Talbot County.

With such great financial partners we were almost ready for the teenage invasion. The only step left was to get the teachers on board, so we quickly set up meetings with the middle school teachers from Easton Middle School, St. Michaels Middle School, Saints Peter and Paul and The Country School. During these meetings we introduced the curriculum, demonstrated some of the activi-

*So, with all of our homework complete, we are hoping that our wetlands and forests and fields will soon be buzzing with the sounds of learning and laughter from an older, wiser, more mature crowd—the Middle Schoolers!*

ties and answered questions the teachers had about fitting our programs into their lesson plans. Since the teachers were involved in the original writing process of the curriculum, we could easily ensure that our lessons fit smoothly into what they are already required to cover. Teachers then received their choice of the book or CD version of the curriculum.

At the Maryland Association for Outdoor and Environmental Education Conference held in February in Rocky Gap Maryland, the Gateways to Conservation II curriculum was presented to a group of more than 20 classroom teachers and environmental educators from across Maryland. The focus was on how to utilize the lessons in a variety of classroom and outdoor settings. Educators at the conference were eager to explore how they could use our lessons to teach key concepts related to the organisms and ecosystems of Chesapeake Bay.

So, with all of our homework complete, we are hoping that our wetlands and forests and fields will soon be buzzing with the sounds of learning and laughter from an older, wiser, more mature crowd - the Middle Schoolers! And we eagerly await three years from now, to see the benefits of programming for grades 6 through 8 when we see them in the high school.



As spring's chill is still upon us who can help but to start daydreaming of summer? And around Pickering Creek summer means EcoCamp! It's time to register your camper for another great year of EcoCamp fun! We have six themed action-packed weeks lined up for the summer. And for our veteran campers, EcoCamp All Stars will be a camping adventure unlike any we've ever tried. With every new adventure we add to camp, we have to also remember the old traditions like Watermelon Hunt, Gold Rush and Dodgeball. Not sure what these are? Just ask any of the hundreds of happy, dirty, tired kids that leave camp each year and they will be thrilled to explain. Add a few field trips, guest artists, musicians and a hay wagon to the mix of hands-on learning and games and you have the perfect mix of EcoCamp excitement.

EcoCamp is for students who will be entering 2nd - 6th grade in the fall of 2008. We also have a junior counselor program for older students that allows them to earn volunteer hours in exchange for their help at camp. And of course with all of these energetic young people we need several energetic college aged counselors to facilitate the fun. Camp registration forms can be down-

loaded from our website or mailed directly to you. Please contact Kate Rogers for information about becoming a camper, junior counselor or counselor at [kr Rogers@audubon.org](mailto:kr Rogers@audubon.org) or 410-822-4902 ext 22.



### *Wild Water 1* June 30 - July 3 (4 day)

Become a wetland warrior as you decorate your face and hands with oozy, goozy wetland mud. Cool down while exploring Pickering Creek by canoe and then by helping us sink a canoe!?! And of course get ready for a wet and wild relay race!

### *Earth Art* July 7 - 11

Discover how to use natural materials to make paints, paper and even beautiful music! Collect a variety of natural objects to use in making muddy, mossy masterpieces. And let the Clay Bakers show you how to make and decorate your very own clay sculptures!

### *All Creatures Great and Small*

**July 14 - 18** Join us for a week of animal adventure. Learn all about Pickering's resident creatures and how to care for them. Explore the creek, wetlands, and forest in search of wild critters of all shapes and sizes. Visit a local farm to meet and greet lots of furry and feathered friends.

### *Wild Water 2* July 21-25

So good we have to do it twice. Don't worry, it won't be the same, but everyone will get lots of time to play in the creek, sprinkler, wetlands, and even a bit on dry land. Those who attend both water weeks will advance their canoe skills and take an all day adventure.

### *Going Green is Great* July 28 - Aug. 1

Come learn some fun and easy things you can do to care for your backyard, your community and even your planet. Wacky experiments, cool games, a fun field trip and all the usual camp craziness will make this an unforgettable week!

### *EcoCamp All Stars* Aug. 4 - 6 (3 day)

Join us for three days and two nights of wild, wacky fun with a mix-up of all of your favorite games and activities. To register you must have attended another camp this summer or in the past and you must be willing to stay for the overnights.

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