An Action Packed Summer

Everyone seems to be busy these days. Maybe it has always been that way. Either way, if you enjoy coming to Middle Creek and getting outdoors, there is likely something happening here that will pique your interests.

Whatever your outdoor interest, whether it be birds, mammals, plants, or streams, we have a program for you! Maybe you want to hear from scientists, naturalists, or even our state elk biologist. Maybe you like sitting inside and learning about research or enjoying an outdoor program that is more hands on. As many of you know, each month has an indoor speaker series on the second Wednesday of each month. On the other hand, our outdoor explorer series is also once a month, always on a Saturday. There is something to learn and enjoy for all age groups. All events are free and open to the public in these series. No need to RSVP.

For the last two years, we have been without the Wildlife Art Show. This year, it is back! So if you want to see wildlife without them fleeing so easily, come to the art show over a three day, August 5-7. Rain or shine, as the art show is indoors.

The Conservation Heritage Museum, which so many (including us here) have been patiently anticipating, will open to the public on June 25th for regular Visitors Center hours, 8am - 4pm. The museum tells the story of the creation of the Game Commission in the late 1800s after the unregulated exploitation of natural resources. A crazy time that today is difficult to imagine; a time when species like turkey, deer, and bear were almost extirpated. Many other species were gone from the Commonwealth. The museum tells the story of different aspects of the agency, hunting, and conservation that have changed and evolved over time.

For the third time, the Wild Goose Chase 5k run/walk will be at Middle Creek on August 27th at 9am, along the tour road. So runners can rejoice as well!

Further information for our scheduled events can be found on our Facebook Page (scan the QR code to the right), on our website, and on the last two pages of this newsletter. See you around this summer!
Meet our 2022 Summer Interns

Emily Ferraro

My name is Emily Ferraro, and I am a Wildlife, Habitat, and Education Outreach Intern here at Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area for the summer. Currently, I am a student at Shippensburg University studying Biology with a concentration in Ecology/Environmental Conservation. As an aspiring biologist, I am particularly interested in waterfowl, wetland ecology, and associated management. Middle Creek is the perfect place to gain experience with these personal interests, especially since I have future career goals of working with the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC) as a wildlife biologist. I am grateful to be working once more for the agency that does so much for Pennsylvania’s wildlife, habitats, hunters, trappers, and nature enthusiasts. Before “migrating” south to Middle Creek, I worked with the PGC in the Northeast region as a Wildlife Habitat Management Intern in the summer of 2021. While there, I learned many of the management tools that the agency uses to protect and support our state’s wildlife and habitats. I am incredibly excited to be spending the summer here at Middle Creek to gain experience working in unique wetland and grassland habitats with a diverse suite of wildlife! This internship has already been full of many great experiences and learning opportunities. I am looking forward to getting down in the muck with some ducks, working with grassland birds, and doing plenty more to support their habitats this summer!

Nick Minnich

My name is Nick and I’m so excited to be a Middle Creek Wildlife, Habitat, and Education Outreach Intern for this summer. I’m a rising senior at Messiah University currently studying Environmental Science. I’m a self-proclaimed “bird nerd” and have been coming to Middle Creek to bird since I was in grade school! I’m passionate about providing usable and undisturbed habitat to all of Pennsylvania’s novel species. Pennsylvania has a wealth of biodiversity and Middle Creek certainly showcases an abundance of ecological specializations, which is why I’m so fortunate to be working with the PGC here. My collegiate experience has granted opportunity to work with prescribed burns, stewardship plans, and wildlife population studies. My hope for the future is to find a position with the Game Commission as a wildlife/habitat technician so I can continue protecting PA’s vast biodiversity. When you come to Middle Creek this summer, be sure to say hello!
Reminder of Middle Creek's Habitat Creation this Summer!

Drawdowns will be back at Middle Creek late this summer, a key habitat management strategy that the lake and surrounding impoundments were designed to do! Drawdowns expose mudflats which often have lots of invertebrates hiding in them, which makes excellent food for species such as sandpipers, yellowlegs, snipes, killdeer, plovers, and much more!

This also allows some vegetation to grow due to increased sunlight hitting the newly exposed mudflats. When the water returns to higher levels, waterfowl, like ducks and geese, will often feed on the seeds produced by the vegetation. In the main lake high populations of non-native invasive carp make it difficult to grow native aquatic plants. More information to come on how staff are planning to combat this issue. Fortunately carp are not an issue in the other smaller impoundments on the property.

Middle Creek’s 50th Anniversary

Next year, 2023, will be Middle Creek’s 50th Anniversary. Yes, time does fly! It was October 7th, 1973 that Middle Creek Wildlife Management area was dedicated.

We are planning this year for next year’s celebration. We are starting off with a public patch design contest. Many collect the Game Commission patches and to commemorate our 50th anniversary, we are seeking out a design that will be used for both a patch and decal sticker.

 Designs must be submitted by June 30, 2022 and contest rules can be found on our website: https://bit.ly/3ubCky7

More information on the 50th anniversary will be forthcoming towards the end of this year.
Habitat diversity means diverse wildlife. Whether birds, insects, or mammals, it all relates to habitat diversity. Middle Creek has plenty of edge habitat which means many edge species are to be seen. One of the less exciting, due to its commonplace in the backyard, is the eastern cottontail. Although difficult to tell apart, we also have an Appalachian cottontail in Pennsylvania, as well as the larger snowshoe hare. Snowshoe hares are of course easier to distinguish in winter, but declining due to their white coats mismatching with a decreasing abundance and duration of snow in Pennsylvania.

Photo by Heather Whitworth

Summer is when reptiles and amphibians, or herps, thrive. Unlike birds, they don’t migrate, however they still face many human-caused threats. Like most American wildlife, a major danger is roads. Slow moving herps (particularly amphibians) are often unable to avoid speeding vehicles, especially when drivers are careless. Millions of herps are killed every year on roads, a number that is most likely under-counted. The public is increasingly considering wildlife crossings as a vital conservation measure, hopefully our infrastructure will reflect that in the near future.

Photo by Kristen Gates

Hazy mornings and hazy days. This spring has been very reasonable with mild days and cool nights, something we may take for granted in the future. You know you’re in for trouble when you get up in the morning and it is already hot and humid outside and it’s only 7 am. Many times this humidity is temporarily relieved when pop-up thunderstorms appear in the afternoon and bring in strong winds and rains. Usually, that means photography is over, at least for the day!

Photo by Nancy Reber

Editor’s note: a HUGE thank you to all who offered their photographs for this newsletter. There were many submissions and far too little space!
Where’d all the mud go? Work finished on the east end. Sort of.

The Cocalico Creek Restoration Project that spans across the east end of Middle Creek WMA and onto the neighboring property owned by the Martin’s has continued to move along nicely hitting all anticipated deadlines. If this is the first time you’re reading or hearing about the project please check out the previous Middle Creek In Motion newsletter addition (Spring 2022). All major earthwork in the floodplain was completed by the April 1st deadline which was established due to sensitive aquatic species present on the property in adjacent wetlands. As earthwork and final grading was completed, a 40+ wetland plant species seed mix was spread and those areas were then covered with a biodegradable erosion matting. The sediment that was removed and placed on the slope parallel to Shenks Mill Road was initially spread out to the best of the contractors ability. Due to extremely saturated soils and wet weather, these efforts were abandoned to give the soil time to dry out where it could later be properly regraded. This regrading should occur sometime this summer. Beyond the seed mixture, staff members from LandStudies planted hundreds of wetland plant plugs, as well as native trees and shrubs. Over the coming months this area will continue to green up as plant life starts to take hold. During those muddy periods hundreds of shorebird species comprised of solitary sandpipers, greater yellowlegs, lesser yellowlegs, and least sandpipers used the project site as stopover habitat to rest and refuel during their northbound migration to their breeding grounds in mid and northern Canada. If you see browned out and dying areas of vegetation in the coming months don’t be alarmed. This is due to both PGC staff and LandStudies doing selective targeted chemical treatments of invasive reed canary grass. Once again, keep an eye out and let us know what wildlife you see as these newly improved habitats continue to grow and evolve!

American Kestrel Research at Middle Creek

Did you know that Middle Creek is one of six globally important bird areas located in the state? Due to its specialized wetland and grassland habitats, over 110 species of birds call Middle Creek home during the summer breeding months.

Some species that spend the summer at Middle Creek are in significant decline, like Pennsylvania’s smallest falcon, the American Kestrel. The decrease in kestrels could be due to habitat loss, agricultural practice changes, natural cavity loss, among other potential causes. American kestrels have experienced a 13% lost between 1966 and 2013 according to the Pennsylvania Breeding Bird Atlas. The Pennsylvania Game Commission and Middle Creek staff have been collaborating with Hawk Mountain Sanctuary to try to answer the question of why kestrels have declined and what we can do to try to stop that trend. Game Commission staff have erected and currently monitor over 350 kestrel nest boxes in the Southeast Region to try to increase populations by providing local housing. (Continued on Page 6)
American Kestrel Research at Middle Creek (Continued)

Next comes monitoring those boxes as well as marking the chicks that are produced through the boxes. The marking process, called “banding”, places small metal bands with a nine-digit number on them around the bird’s lower leg to allow scientists to track the birds if they would be encountered by another bander or the general public. Some birds will be marked with equipment that will allow Hawk Mountain staff to track the birds until they disperse, or leave the area where they were born. Tracking the birds is just one part of the equation. Following up with habitat surveys to measure habitat growth around the box as well as prey availability are also conducted to determine why some boxes may be more productive than others. As of 2022, Middle Creek has 19 American kestrel boxes that help to contribute to the local populations of kestrels.

Interested in learning more about Hawk Mountain’s research on kestrels? Check out their website [here](#).

New Way to Contact the Game Commission, and Licenses Now on Sale!!

Recently the Game Commission switched over to a central dispatch system. Going forward, to contact the agency, you can call one of these numbers and they will direct you to the appropriate resource. For example, here at Middle Creek, we often get calls about injured wildlife. That would be a time to call 1-833-PGC-WILD.

And don’t forget, Applications for hunting licenses are now open and available, in-person or online!
Upcoming Events at Middle Creek

June 21 - September 22, 2022

June 25th from: **Conservation Heritage Museum is open to the public!**

This Saturday will be the long-awaited first public opening of the Conservation Heritage Museum! It will be open for normal Visitor Center hours.

**July 13th at 6:30 pm in the Middle Creek Auditorium: Pennsylvania Elk: 100 Year of Conservation**

This presentation will provide an overview of Pennsylvania’s elk management program, including a brief history of extirpation and reintroduction, the spatial distribution and estimated numbers of our elk population, and habitat requirements. Additional topics that will be covered include, disease management, current research projects, and frequently asks questions related to elk hunting in Pennsylvania.

**July 16th at 10:00 am: Raptors over the Ridge**

Join Hawk Mountain Educators and learn about our history and the longest running raptor point count survey that has been going for 87 years. We will explore the intricate landscape of the Kittatinny Ridge and how the unique landscape funnels thousands of raptors through during their fall migration each year. Additionally, learn about the 17 different diurnal raptor species that utilize this incredibly important landscape as some travel to South America for the winter. Lastly, discuss adaptations of raptors and why they make such important apex predators in several forest biomes. Wrap up with live animal ambassadors!

**August 5th (1 p.m. - 6 p.m.), August 6th (9 a.m. - 6 p.m.), and August 7th (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.): Wildlife Art Show**

After a two-year hiatus, the Art Show is back at Middle Creek! Meet Pennsylvania's most talented wildlife artists and their extraordinary artwork. Paintings and editions will be available for sale. The art show is hosted by the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Come spend a day at Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area Visitor Center.

**August 10th at 6:30 pm in the Middle Creek Auditorium: A Century of Bird Banding: Where We Started and Where We’re Going**

Biologists have been banding birds since the 1920s to understand species distributions and survival. While banding is still widely used to inform management, Global Positioning System (GPS) transmitters are also available to record bird movement at a finer scale. This presentation will review the origins and value of bird banding in the U.S. and introduce a Pennsylvania Game Commission project that is using modern GPS technology to study Canada geese.

**August 20th at 9:00 am: Plant Identification and Habitat Walk**

Join us on a hike along the Conservation Trail to identify the unique and interesting plants, both the good and the bad, that grow at Middle Creek and learn about their role in the ecosystem. You will also learn what plants can be grown at your home for the benefit of native wildlife and for conservation. Each plant often has a unique history and use for humans and many other wildlife species including mammals, insects, and birds.

**August 27th at 9:00 am: Middle Creek Wild Goose Chase 5K Run/Walk**

This will be the 3rd Wild Goose Chase 5K at Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area. All proceeds will benefit wildlife education and habitat management at Middle Creek. More information including how to register can be found here: [https://bit.ly/3sFuGuw](https://bit.ly/3sFuGuw)
Upcoming Events at Middle Creek

June 21 - September 22, 2022 (Cont.)

September 10th at 7:30 am and again at 1:00 pm: *Bird ID Hike with the Lancaster County Bird Club*

Join the LCBC for a birding adventure of your choosing that showcases a variety of the different habitats at Middle Creek! Start times will be offered at 7:30 am or 1 p.m.! Early risers can meet at the visitor center parking area at 7:30 a.m. for a walk-through habitat that will be conducive to spotting fall migrants — particularly different migrating warbler / migrating Neotropical species. The morning session will involve a leisurely hike of about 1.5 miles. A break will then be offered to permit attendees to enjoy about 1.5 hours for an on-their-own lunch or depart for the day. Individuals can then choose to continue with the fall migration birding adventure by meeting at 1 p.m. at the Willow Point Parking Area. New participants who are not early risers may also join the group at this time. The afternoon session will be more leisurely and involve a hike out to Willow Point starting at 1 p.m. to focus on resident waterfowl and heron/egret species followed by a caravan through the tour road with stops focusing on grassland birds. Fall migrants that could include warblers, flycatchers, thrushes, shorebirds, and hopefully a surprise or two along the way are likely anytime throughout the day. Bring a pair of binoculars! Spotting scopes will also be available to look through for the afternoon stop at Willow Point to get a closer look at birds on the lake!

September 14th at 6:30 pm in the Middle Creek Auditorium: *The PGC’s Kestrel Conservation Initiative: Teamwork Makes the Dream Work!*

Since 2015, the PGC has been ramping up their conservation efforts for the American kestrel throughout southeastern PA. This program will provide information about these small, declining falcons and highlight some of the accomplishments made and information learned from this study. The program will also help highlight the importance of teamwork in conservation projects such as this and explain how the success of this program has only been possible with the continued help of a dedicated team of partners and volunteers.

September 25th: *National Hunting and Fishing Day*

A great event for all ages and those who enjoy the outdoors, hunting and fishing. More info in the fall for this annual celebration.

Contact us! Have a question or comment about Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area? We would love to hear from you! Please contact us at middlecreek@pa.gov.