

Celebrating 10 Years of Native Plant Outreach

By Anna Lehr Mueser, Public Relations Manager

On a recent afternoon, Melissa Nase, Manager of Land Stewardship, stood in the soft light of the greenhouse and transplanted *Dryopteris marginalis* seedlings. These native ferns are some of the more than 4,000 plants that will be for sale at the upcoming Native Plant Sale. This spring marks a special moment for the plant sale: 10 years of offering unique native plants to area landscapers and gardeners. The sale has grown each year since 2004; this year we expect to see over 800 visitors for the plant sale weekend.



Over the past decade, the Schuylkill Center has put tens of thousands of plants into gardeners' hands in our area, helping to rebuild our region's native biodiversity.

The plant sale and the Native Plant Nursery, built in 2006, provide a key opportunity to respond to the hazards of invasive plant species. Nase knows firsthand what this looks like: throughout North America, mile-a-minute weed, an invasive vine that has been spreading rapidly since the 1930s, has encroached into forests and fields outcompeting native plants for sunlight due to its fast growth and the way it chokes other plants. At the Center, Nase works with volunteers to restore the landscape, ripping out patches of mile-a-minute and reclaiming the forest, bit by bit, for the native plants that evolved here, in tandem with this specific ecosystem.

But the Native Plant Sale and Nursery also serve an educational purpose. Sean Duffy, Director of Land and Facilities, notes that the plant sale "has always focused on education." As visitors walk through the sale, staff members and volunteers share their knowledge, explaining the unique features each plant brings, and how it fits into the broader ecosystem. The sale itself is a way to educate the public about native plants and to contextualize stewardship work.

Native plants play a special role in their ecosystems: they tend to foster many more insect species than invasive and non-native plants, in turn providing a food source to birds and other wildlife. For example, oak trees native to our region support a remarkable 537 species of caterpillar, providing a crucial habitat for a huge number of insects. For comparison, ginkgo trees, a non-native plant brought to the Americas over 200 years ago, support only three types of caterpillar. Those caterpillars become a key part of a bird's diet, especially young birds in the nest; a tree that supports more caterpillars, supports more birds.

This is why native plants matter: they are an essential part of a healthy ecosystem, promoting biodiversity. Nase explains, "Over thousands of years, native plants and wildlife evolved and adapted alongside each other, developing interdependency and mutually-beneficial relationships in order to survive. Non-native and invasive plants disrupt these relationships, unsettling an otherwise balanced system." That balanced system, providing habitats for a large biological community, is crucial for healthy ecosystems locally, regionally, and globally.

The last few years have highlighted this crucial balance, and the risks of compromising it, in the form of the beloved monarch butterfly. Monarch populations are suffering a radical decline, with the number of butterflies that complete their annual multi-

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10th Annual Native Plant Sale

Members Preview Night: Friday, April 25, 4:00 pm – 7:00 pm

Saturday, May 3, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm & Sunday, May 4, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm

This year's sale will focus on monarch butterflies, a beloved pollinator whose populations have been declining dramatically. Learn more about how you can promote monarch butterfly habitats at the sale.



Director's Cut In Memoriam: Missing Bill Walkup

The Schuylkill Center recently lost one of its best friends when William Walkup passed away in December. One of our longest-served board trustees, Bill, a retired PECO executive, joined the board in 1974 after attending a seminar on business and the environment. He stayed on until 2009, a remarkable 35-year run. "He always cared about connecting kids with the environment," his widow Joan noted, "especially city kids."

Bill established an extraordinary partnership between SCEE and PECO, a relationship that continues today with the company's sponsorship of the Enchanted Forest gala. A true gentleman, many trustees acknowledge the role Bill played in mentoring them; over the years he took dozens under his wing. In 2010, Bill was presented the Henry Meigs Leadership Award, our highest honor, for his service to SCEE.

Fresh out of graduate school, I joined the staff here back in 1982, my first Philadelphia job. I remember talking with Bill many times then, so when I returned in 2011 as the new director, Bill and Joan were among the first people I reached out to—and re-connecting with the Walkups has been a joy. As we gear up for our 50th anniversary celebrations in 2015, it seems inconceivable that Bill won't be celebrating with us.

I was deeply honored and greatly surprised when Joan asked me to speak at the family's January memorial service, and am moved that Joan named SCEE as a beneficiary of gifts in his memory. At the upcoming Enchanted Forest in May, Joan and I will unveil a black cherry to be planted in Bill's memory in Founder's Grove. Blessed with abundant nectar-rich flowers, black cherries are an important food source for pollinators, the leaves sustaining hundreds of insects like tiger swallowtail caterpillars. The fruit is a critical food for many species of birds.

Just like Bill gave to us so generously over so many years, the wild cherry will give back to our forest for decades to come. Thank you, Bill. And Joan, you know we are here for you.

Mike Weilbacher
Executive Director

Reach Mike at mike@schuylkillcenter.org or @SCEEMike.



Bill and Joan Walkup at the 2008 Meigs Awards gala.

Enchanted Forest

Friday, May 16 | 6:30 pm

Tickets: Sponsor \$200; Patron \$150;
Guest \$75

Enjoy great local food, live music, and the company of good friends in our tranquil evening forest. To join us, contact Steve Wasserleben at 215-482-7300, ext. 117 or email steven@schuylkillcenter.org.

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Baby Squirrels in November: Unusual Wildlife at the Clinic

By Rick Schubert, Director of Rehabilitation, the Wildlife Clinic

Anyone who has worked on a farm in a temperate climate knows that winter is no time to take a break; wintertime is a race against the clock, reorganizing, repairing, cleaning, planning, and preparing for the upcoming busy season. Wildlife rehabilitation is no different. Although we take in injured adult wild animals 12 months a year, our business spikes in the spring, summer, and fall with the addition of orphaned and displaced neonates. Usually, winter is a slower time for wildlife patient intakes, but it's a critical period to spend getting ready for the onslaught that spring will bring.

In recent years, this trend has been shifting at the Schuylkill Center. We've noticed an uptick in the number of patients we get between November and March, as well as more unusual cases overall. It seems clear that, as weather patterns change, seasonal disruptions emerge in our wildlife populations.

This winter, we've treated a broad-winged hawk, usually in Argentina for the winter; four rare red-shouldered hawks, one with a fishing hook through its wing; and both bats and woodchucks out of hibernation despite the cold. And then there are the baby squirrels.

This year we received the latest litter of orphaned baby squirrels I've ever seen in 17 years of wildlife rehabilitation. They were dropped off on November 15 after the mother was struck by a car and killed, and I estimated their age at less than two weeks, meaning they were born the first week of November. I thought to myself, well, at least they're Scorpios, so they've got that going for them, but they were born quite out of season. In the northeastern United States, the gray squirrel has two litters a year, one in late winter and one in late summer. November is well outside the normal range.

We feed our baby squirrels a special milk formula four times a day. At our clinic, we have volunteers working every day from early morning 'til late at night from March to October. However, by November, most of our volunteers have taken a hiatus. This winter, there simply were not enough staffers to get the required feedings in. Wildlife rehabilitators being a hardcore lot, it was a familiar routine for me to schlep the animals back home and spend my winter nights bottle feeding them in my spare bedroom while my dogs and cats patiently waited outside the door for their turn to be fed – all the while keeping a clinical, hands-off, sterile approach to keep the squirrels from becoming tame. It's crucial that we not allow animals in our care to habituate to human contact.

Squirrel moms set their babies free at less than three months old, and the clinic doesn't do it much differently. However, squirrels make it through the winter partially by relying on cached food stores. By the beginning of February, our four winter baby squirrels were old enough to live on their own, and had all the necessary survival skills to make it, but the one thing they lacked was a secret stash of backup food to get them through the lean months. In these situations, wildlife rehabbers do a "soft release." We home the young squirrels in at a safe location where they have nest boxes and a food supply and release them there, and after they've acclimated, we stop feeding them. This winter, we were able to give a second chance to four of nature's most adaptable, tenacious, intelligent, and fascinating creatures. ■



Baby squirrels are fed with syringes with a tiny rubber nipple attached.



A fishing hook was found buried in this red-shouldered hawk's wing.

Support the Wildlife Clinic! Clinic Wish List

Donations can be left in the Visitor Center Lobby.
Please bring any of the following:

- Paper towels
- Latex gloves
- Newspapers
- Bleach
- Laundry detergent
- Towels, receiving blankets
- Dog and cat food (dry or canned)
- Gauze bandages



Native plants continued from page 1

generational journey to and from Mexico's Sierra Madre Mountains dropping by 90% in the past few years. These are dire circumstances for monarchs, and this moment illustrates why planting native plants matters so much. Native milkweed is the sole food for monarch caterpillars. With less milkweed available – due to genetically modified crops, heavy pesticide usage, and loss of hedgerows on many farms – there are fewer and fewer places for monarchs to lay their eggs and for the caterpillars to feed. Planting milkweed is a first step any gardener can take, something simple and easy which could have a profound impact.



Monarchs sipping milkweed nectar.

The Native Plant Sale is deeply rooted in the Schuylkill Center's educational mission to inspire meaningful connections between people and nature. Through engaging volunteers as well as landscapers and gardeners, we work to increase awareness and convey the importance of using native plants in our landscapes. Nase remarks that there is growing interest in the cultivation of

native plants, noting other similar sales in the area and increasing demand for the plants. A movement, it seems, is catching on. Each year, attendance at plant sales and the quantity of plants sold have steadily increased.

Nase is excited that the Schuylkill Center is a part of this movement, offering valuable knowledge as well as native plants for sale. But Nase's vision goes beyond providing high quality planting materials and native plants at the sales and for the Schuylkill Center's restoration work; she imagines developing a seed collection and propagation program, allowing

the plants grown in the nursery and used in restoration projects to originate right here at the Center. "Seed collection and propagation would allow us to fill a missing link in our growing process. It would contribute to the overall sustainability of our land stewardship program, cut our costs, and assist our restoration efforts." Make sure to look for Nase at the plant sale – she'll be the one carrying trays of *Dryopteris marginalis* seedlings. ■

Nature Rx: Connecting Health & the Natural World

By Gail Farmer, Director of Education

This year's third annual Richard L. James Lecture addressed new directions and opportunities for environmental education by exploring the link between nature and human health and well-being. Dr. Michael Suk, chief of orthopedic surgery at Geisinger Health, gave a compelling talk outlining the research that supports why being active outdoors, in nature, is integral to a person's long term physical, mental and emotional health. The lecture also publicly launched our new health and wellness programming: partnering with

Blue Banyan Yoga to offer yoga and meditation classes and Fit4Mom Chestnut Hill to offer Stroller Strides fitness classes.

Environmental education must include a deeper dialogue and understanding of how the environment impacts us.

Expanding our focus to explore how nature benefits humans allows us to build bridges across professional sectors, strengthening our efforts where our interests intersect. The day after the lecture, we convened a group of regional leaders to discuss how we can work together to improve public health by increasing education, access, and engagement in nature-based outdoor activity across the city. Representatives from the Health Promotion Council, the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Parks and Recreation, the National Park Service, the US Play Coalition, Philadelphia Declaration of Play, Drexel School of Public Health, and the PA chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics came together at the Center. We discussed challenges and opportunities for launching a collaborative initiative similar to models in other cities, such as the DC Park Rx or Boston's Outdoor Rx, where doctors

prescribe outdoor activity. The meeting was an exciting exploration of ideas and possibilities. The group is gathering again

at the end of March to continue to build the coalition and move a Philadelphia prescription initiative forward. Stay tuned as we continue to explore these pioneering collaborations.

For me, this is an exciting time to be working in environmental education because the scope of our relevance is rapidly expanding. The connections between green space and sustainable development, between early childhood development and nature, and between people's health and nature are game changers in terms of making the environment relevant to more people. Historically, the core of environmental education has focused on issues surrounding how we impact the environment. Today, environmental education must include a deeper dialogue and understanding of how the environment impacts us. ■



Regional thought leaders gather to discuss collaborations.

Naturalist's Notebook

A Look at Interpretive Birding in Springtime

By Gail Farmer, Director of Education

The earthy smell of the ground thawing and the welcome sound of birds singing fills me with anticipation for the arrival of spring and the migratory birds that come with it. Birding will become richer and more fascinating with the arrival of warblers, phoebes, tanagers, and more. I have been birding for close to two decades, but unlike many birders, I do not have a “life list” of the species I have seen, nor do I travel far and wide to see rare and difficult-to-find birds. In fact, when I bird, I often don’t get very far along the trail because what I enjoy most is watching individuals act out the drama of their everyday lives. One of the most observable and variable categories of behavior in songbirds is foraging behaviors – how they get their food.

Take the wood warblers: In a series of classic studies on foraging and competition in birds in the 1950’s and 60’s, Robert MacArthur demonstrated that wood warblers are able to reduce competitive overlap and peacefully coexist by exploiting different parts of a habitat. For example, the black-and-white warbler creeps along branches and tree trunks, picking and probing insects from the bark, while the worm-eating warbler specializes in probing dangling clusters of dead leaves or foliage for invertebrates. American redstarts, on the other hand, have relatively broad beaks with hair-like feathers along the base that make them very well-suited to aerial pursuit of insects. These unique foraging strategies essentially divvy up access to the food resources in a habitat, allowing a diversity of species to share that space. As a birder, this fascinating variety of behaviors keeps me constantly curious, questioning, and wanting to learn more.

Interested in exploring bird behavior? Join my **Interpretive Birding** workshop this spring, where we’ll dig deep into the “what,” “how,” and “whys” of what we observe birds doing in the field. ■



A male black-and-white warbler on his prime hunting grounds.



A worm-eating warbler searches for invertebrates in a clump of decomposing, dangling leaves.



Male American redstart ; you can see the hair-like feathers at the base of his beak that help him catch insects in flight.

Interpretive Birding

Two-part course: Thursday, April 10, 7:00 – 8:00 pm & Saturday, April 12, 7:30 – 10:30 am | \$30 M; \$40 NM

Education Director Gail Farmer begins with a lecture introducing behaviors you might see this time of year, followed by a morning of interpretive birding in the field. Must bring your own binoculars. *Pre-registration required.*

Water Wise Opening in the Gallery

Our upcoming gallery exhibition features the work of third grade students from The Philadelphia School, a Center City independent school educating children from preschool through eighth grade. The Schuylkill Center serves as the school’s “country campus,” their students coming here weekly for outdoor learning.

For this exhibition, the children explored a range of work and media around water, its function in ecosystems, and its importance to life. The students worked collaboratively to create large-scale felted murals depicting the water cycle. Students individually created apple scarecrows, sewing their clothes and figuring out how many grams of water evaporated from the apples that serve as the scarecrows’ heads. They also explored cyanotypes, walnut ink drawings, and botanical illustrations with watercolor pencils. Come see their creations, which will be unveiled in the gallery at Naturepalooza on April 26. ■

Opening at Naturepalooza!

Saturday, April 26, 11 am – 3 pm
See the students’ artwork and enjoy our family earth day celebration. Live music, nature walks, food trucks, art activities, and more.



Deenah Loeb, Chair of the SCEE Environmental Art committee, Nancy Agati and Amy Potsic, Kathy Wagner, President of the Board, & Christina Catanese at the Opening Reception for Frost.





Subaru Scholarship for Underserved Youth

By Steve Wasserleben, Director of Development

Thanks to the generosity of the Subaru of America Foundation, the Schuylkill Center announces the establishment of the Subaru Scholarship Fund, a fund that happily gives children from families currently homeless (or transitioning from homelessness) in Northwest Philadelphia access to our Day-Off and Summer Camp programs.

Children will be referred through a partnership with the Northwest Philadelphia Interfaith Hospitality Network (NPIHN). This scholarship expands a long partnership with NPIHN. "The children who have participated from Interfaith Hospitality have loved the time they spend with us; you can see it on their faces and in their enthusiasm," says Gail Farmer, Director of Education.

Our goal is to immerse underserved children in nature, as numerous studies show time spent in nature makes kids calmer, happier, even smarter. We hope that their participation in programs like Day-Off Camp and Summer Camp improves their physi-

cal health through outdoor exercise and boosts their mental health with reduced stress and improved mood.

"It makes our program for families experiencing homelessness so much stronger when we can extend the types of programs that are run by the Schuylkill Center to the people we serve," says Rachel Falcove, NPIHN Executive Director. "These opportunities truly widen each participant's world of possibilities."

These opportunities truly widen each participant's world of possibilities.

"Support from the Subaru of America Foundation seeks to ensure that all children, including those who are at-risk from families in need, have access to these vitally important, worthwhile programs that are life-changing for inner-city youth," says Sandra Capell, Subaru's Community Services Manager.

The Schuylkill Center thanks Subaru for establishing this fund, and looks forward to introducing lots of new kids to nature. ■

Volunteer Spotlight: Stephen Rawls

By Melissa Nase, Manager of Land Stewardship

Whether potting up plants in the greenhouse, or helping customers decide which native plants are best for their gardens at the plant sale, Stephen Rawls brings energy, passion, and a light-hearted nature to his work here at the Schuylkill Center. For the past seven years, Stephen has been a part of our work, volunteering with the land restoration program and in the Native Plant Nursery.

Stephen says his wife was the reason he initially got involved at the Center. She began vegetable gardening at the Organic Community Garden when the couple moved to the Andorra/Roxborough area 12 years ago. From there, his interest in native plants developed. As a retired school teacher, he cares about the educational mission of the Center, and about working to preserve and restore land. He says, "I am concerned about the degraded landscape and the threat to wildlife that it poses." Stephen's work doesn't stop when he leaves SCEE: he is an avid gardener at home and has successfully converted his yard to almost all native plants.

Stephen enjoys many things about the Schuylkill Center, including the staff and learning opportunities that he has had through volunteering. "Everyone is doing important, underappreciated work, so it feels good to be involved." We offer Stephen our heartfelt thanks for all of his contributions. ■



Two new ways to support SCEE:

eScrip:

Through the eScrip program Superfresh, PathMark, and Shoprite will donate 1% of your sale to the Schuylkill Center. Sign up at www.eScrip.com.

iGive:

iGive works with over 1,300 stores from Amazon to Woolrich each giving a certain % to the Schuylkill Center. Go to iGive.com, and choose from a variety of stores.



SCEE People

Welcome to Christina and Daphne

This February, we welcomed **Christina Catanese** as our Director of Environmental Art. Bringing a strong grounding in both art and science, Christina has a Masters in Applied Geosciences from Penn, complementing her BA from Penn in Environmental Studies and Political Science, and comes to us after a three-year stint as a physical scientist for the EPA, where she was managing digital communications related to water issues. On the arts side, she is a dancer, the founding member of Nova Dance Company, and creator and choreographer of innumerable dances, including one featured in the Fringe Festival.

In March, we were joined by **Daphne Churchill**, our new Education Intern/Monkey Tail Gang educator. Daphne received her Master's Degree in Social Work from the University of Pennsylvania in 2012. She will be dividing her time among multiple programing areas. ■



Daphne Churchill and Christina Catanese

How Do You See Nature? 2014 Photography Contest

This winter we held "How Do You See Nature?", a photography contest celebrating the opening of *Frost*. We invited community members to turn their cameras onto the remarkable winter we've shared. We were thrilled to see a great response, with over 150 entries. Three winners were chosen by a panel of Schuylkill Center staff.

David Sonnen's landscape (left) shows us a wintery world that is separate from ourselves and yet intricately linked to our history. The gentle light infuses the entire image with a sense of timelessness while the small parts of fencing that appear near the bottom of the image place us in the landscape.

The beautiful observation of nature demonstrated through Mikaela Reeves Larsen's photograph (center) draws us into the cold of winter while offering hope for spring. Those berries further remind of the stored food wildlife require to survive the winter, much as we turn to our own stored reserves: living on hope until spring arrives.

In Tyrice James' photograph (right), a brilliant sense of movement makes the image feel present and locates us within the nature we live with. The feeling of having captured a specific moment, as seen in the snow flying through the air, is deeply captivating. ■



The 2015 Golden Jubilee: Celebrating 50 Years!

We were founded in 1965, the first nature center in a large city. As we gear up to celebrate (amazingly!) our 50th anniversary with a series of special events and exhibits, we'll use Quill, Facebook, Twitter, and more to share our history.

Here, children in spring 1983 play with our Earthball, a 6-foot-wide leather ball used in many programs, including the weeklong school residency known as Sunship Earth and Earthfest, the 80's forerunner of Naturepalooza. This year's Naturepalooza is set for Saturday, April 26 from 11 am to 3 pm. Stay tuned for more jubilee updates in upcoming Quills, on our website, and in social media. ■

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NATUREPALOOZA!



April 26, 11 am – 3 pm, Free

A Philadelphia Science Festival Discovery Day event



Celebrate all things natural at our third annual family-friendly Earth Day festival. Live music, nature walks, live animal shows, a food court, games, participatory art events, and more.



*Members Preview Night:
Friday, April 25, 4 pm – 7 pm*

Plant Sale:
Saturday, May 3, 8:30 am – 4:30 pm
Sunday, May 4, 9:00 am – 1:00 pm

