

The Pandemic's Impact on the Schuylkill Center

THIS SPRING'S PANDEMIC has unquestionably rocked each of us while sickening hundreds of thousands of people across the planet, with thousands tragically perishing. It has thrown the whole world upside down, including the Schuylkill Center.

As we write this—and you know the situation changes daily—we are closed, and our staff is working from home, awaiting signals from city and state officials that it is safe to reopen.

As heartbreaking as it is, we have canceled our programs through the end of April, sadly one of our most active public programming months of the year, with our Naturepalooza Earth Day Festival and the Spring Native Plant Sale anchoring the month. “April is the cruellest month,” wrote T.S. Eliot in a wildly different context, but that line begins his classic “The Waste Land,” a title that echoes our somber mood right now.

Also in April, we were all set to celebrate the 50th anniversary of 1970’s Earth Day with an art exhibition, our family festival, a special tree planting, and a Youth Climate Action Summit, all of which have fallen by the wayside.

As Executive Director Mike Weilbacher notes on page 2, our trails remain open for you. Please practice appropriate social distancing while on the trails and give those around you at least 6 feet of space—one turkey vulture’s wingspan, to be exact. Please keep our trails and nearby

roads safe by parking appropriately in designated lots. And remember to leave pets and bicycles at home so as to not disturb our wildlife.

We understand that all of us are facing uncertainty right now. The truth is that continued closures and cancellations have already put us in a serious financial situation. If you are in the position to [make a donation to the Schuylkill Center](#) or [renew your membership](#), you will be doing an incredible service to all who are benefiting from our 340-acre nature preserve during this unusual time. Thank you so much.

We will keep you updated as things change. You can also view our latest updates by [subscribing to our weekly email](#) and [visiting our COVID-19 Blog](#).

Thank you again for your support of the Schuylkill Center. Be safe and take care.

BELOW: THE TROUT LILLY IS A SPRING EPHEMERAL FLOWER NATIVE AND IS FOUND IN OUR HABITAT





director's cut

OUR FOREST IS OPEN, GET YOUR NATURE RX

IN THIS UNIQUE AND CHALLENGING MOMENT, everyone's stress levels are through the roof, worried about friends and families across the country and around the world. If you are seeking shelter from this viral storm, you've likely already discovered one: nature.

Because time spent in nature, immersed in greenery, is remarkably healing. And the Schuylkill Center offers 340 acres of healing.

Inhaling just one breath of the pine scent in Pine Grove, one of the first features you'll meet when you walk our trails from the Hagy's Mill Road parking lot, lowers your blood pressure, literally. Numerous studies show that pinene, the chemical that gives pine its characteristic odor, is calming for us. In fact, the Japanese practice "forest bathing," visiting especially evergreen forests to sit quietly and drink in the healing scents. You can, too.

But seeing green does this to us as well, and leaves are now popping everywhere, cloaked in an impossibly bright green, my favorite green of all time.

Bird song, amazingly, is calming too, say those studies, and our forest overflows with robins, blue jays, chickadees, titmice, cardinals, mourning doves, and now spring's parade of warblers and other migrants. Listen for the wood thrush, the most melodious singer in or forest, soon to return, and your blood pressure will immediately calm.

People are also biophilic—we love and are drawn to other living things. Our turtles are back basking on the edges of our ponds, woodchucks are again wrongheadedly trying to cross Hagy's Mill Road near the ballfields, and foxes and deer can be seen scampering through our woods. These are healing sights, too.

And our forest is expansive enough, our trails numerous enough, that you can easily practice the 6-foot distancing you need. Just be mindful of the tight parking lot on Hagy's Mill—or park at the Port Royal ballfields where there is more room, and walk in from the Hagy's Mill corner of our property.

There are only so many Netflix specials you can stream. Given that research shows greenspaces elevate our mood, alleviate anxiety, lower depression while lowering blood pressure, and even offer a good cardio workout, come for a walk, and get some nature Rx. 🌿

Mike Weilbacher, Executive Director
mike@schuylkillcenter.org
@SCEEMike on Twitter

STAFF

Leigh Ashbrook, Preschool Teacher
Esther Baker-Tarpage, Environmental Educator
Andrea Barrish, Reception
Nathalie Borozny, Preschool Teacher
Patty Boyle, Development Assistant
Carlisle Quinn Brooke, Environmental Educator
Christina Catanese, Director of Environmental Art
Casey Darnley, Director of Development
Rebecca Deegan, Environmental Educator
Rachel Baltuch Dobrowski, Environmental Educator
Eduardo Dueñas, Manager of School Programs
Patti Dunne, Environmental Educator
Liz Ellmann, Wildlife Rehabilitation Assistant
Kim Empson, Environmental Educator
Sasha Freeman, Environmental Educator
Christiana French-Franco, Preschool Teacher
Alison Gibson, NaturePHL Programming Coordinator
Stephen Goin, Director of Land & Facilities

Aaliyah Green Ross, Director of Education
Rose Hammerman, Preschool Teacher
Stephanie Hammerman, Preschool Teacher
Emily Harkness, Assistant Director of Early Childhood Education
Michelle Havens, Gift Shop Manager/Office Manager
Beth Hornberger, Environmental Educator
Liz Jelsomine, Exhibitions Coordinator
Beatrice Kelly, Registrar
Amy Krauss, Director of Communications
Paulina Le, Volunteer Coordinator
Katie Lutzker, Preschool Teacher
Susan Marcossan, Environmental Educator
Jomer McFarlane, NaturePHL Nature Navigator
Paige Menton, Environmental Educator
Rebecca Michelin, Director of Wildlife Rehabilitation
Marjorie Mogell, Preschool Teacher
Anthony "Ent" Natale, Environmental Educator
Shawn Riley, Land & Facilities Crew Member

Elisa Sarantschin, NaturePHL Program Coordinator
Kerry Sayland, Environmental Educator
Alexis Sellers, NaturePHL, Nature Navigator
Emily Smulowitz, Program Coordinator
Chris Strub, Assistant Director of Wildlife Rehabilitation
Donna Struck, Director of Finance & Administration
Alana Tartaro, Preschool Lead Teacher
Michael Verla, Kindergarten Teacher
Sandi Vincenti, Director of Early Childhood Education
Ann Ward, Kindergarten Lead Teacher
Mike Weilbacher, Executive Director
Amy Whisenhunt, Assistant Director of Individual Giving
Sam Whittaker, Land & Facilities Crew Member
Seraiah Yelverton-Robinson, Preschool Teacher
Drew Rinaldi Subits, Land Stewardship Coordinator
Alice Urbiel, Environmental Educator

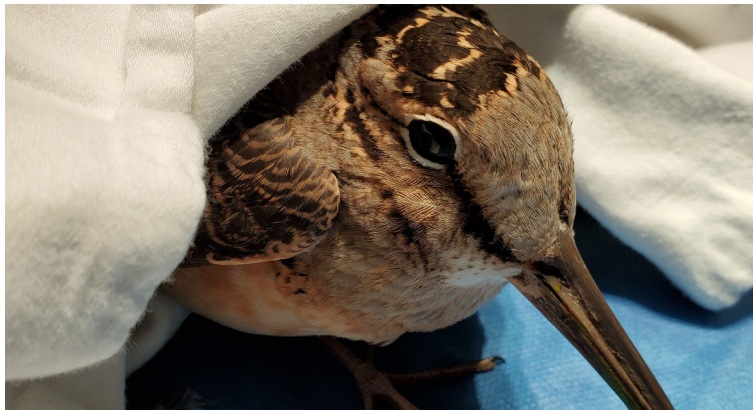
from the clinic

By Rebecca Michelin, Director of Wildlife Rehabilitation

WITH NEW “SHELTER-IN-PLACE” MANDATES FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE, all of us are spending more time at home and outside; this means more opportunities for interactions with wildlife!

Each day, our 24-hour wildlife clinic hotline gets busier fielding calls about spring babies and injured adult wildlife so here are some quick tips to avoid common wildlife conflicts. Before mowing the lawn, carefully check the area for cottontail nests. You may never see the mother rabbit, as she only returns twice a day to feed her young. Rabbit nests are easy to miss as they are little more than shallow depressions in the ground covered with dried grass and fur. As you do your spring cleaning in your attic or garage, keep your eyes open for squirrel nests, and try not to disturb them if possible. Remember, even if a wild baby has been touched or their nest disturbed, a mother will not abandon her offspring. We want to ensure all baby animals are raised by their mothers and not brought to the clinic unnecessarily, so please call us if you come across babies of any kind in your home or yard.

While it has been necessary to reduce our number of new patient admissions due to the ongoing pandemic, the clinic is still operating to the best of its abilities. We are caring for more than 20 patients who have been with us over the winter and are not yet ready for release. Some of those patients include box turtles, a snapping turtle, and a red-bellied cooter. Last fall's late-season babies have matured and grown with us over the past months, and are now being released to the wild to start making little babies of their own. You can read about them on our [blog](#). And as more migratory birds make their way back north, we are starting to see an increase in their admissions as well, including patients like this woodcock that flew into a window.



ABOVE: THIS WOODCOCK WAS IN OUR CARE FOR HEAD TRAUMA AND WAS TREATED FOR A CORNEAL ULCER, A COMMON INJURY FOR THESE BIRDS WHEN THEY FLY INTO WINDOWS.



ABOVE: WE INSTALLED A NEW ROOF AND WIRE MESH FOR RECOVERING AVIARY PATIENTS

Thanks to the generous support of clinic donors, we have completed several important enclosure renovations. We repaired the roof and installed wire mesh on the aviaries which helps keep patients safe from inclement weather as well as from predators. The aviaries were also lined with soft screening to protect patient's delicate feathers while in the flight spaces. We have installed a concrete slab to give us a dedicated outdoor space for cleaning and sanitizing kennels and other supplies. And we are installing an irrigation system to expand access to running water for our outdoor enclosures throughout the property, to more easily fill pools and water baths which are important enclosure features for maintaining the health and wellbeing of recovering patients.

A human public health crisis doesn't mean the world of wildlife slows down, too! We continue to provide our necessary and life-saving services for wildlife in need while ensuring the safety and health of our staff, volunteers, and animal rescuers. Thank you for your support! 🐾

If you have an emergency, call our wildlife hotline (215-482-7300 x option 2). We will respond to wildlife inquiries 24 hrs a day, 7 days a week.



enchanted forest postponed

MEET HONOREE KRIS SOFFA

By Amy Whisenhunt, Assistant Director of Individual Giving

COMFORT CAN ALWAYS BE FOUND IN NATURE'S RHYTHM.

When skunk cabbage emerges from the ground, like gnomes waking up from slumber, we know spring is on her way. Bringing a parade of natural beauty from blooming wildflowers to the familiar love songs of nesting birds.

Normally, spring also brings our annual party under the stars, Enchanted Forest. As the Schuylkill Center's signature fundraising event, Enchanted Forest provides the critical funding needed to sustain our programs and keep the nature preserve free and open to the public.

Needless to say, this year will be a bit different. Yes, the party is postponed for the future, but there is still much to celebrate. And at a moment when the world is gripped by this pandemic, there is someone who embodies the spirit that we all need right now—our trailblazing honoree, Kris Soffa.

A Roxborough resident and life-long advocate for nature, wildlife, green space, and historic preservation, there couldn't be a more fitting member of our community to pay tribute to than Kris.

As neighbors of the Schuylkill Center for the last 35 years, Kris and her husband Mark, have a unique appreciation for this special nature preserve and the woodlands where their three adult children grew up. The Schuylkill Center isn't just home to the Soffa family, it's part of an ecological corridor where Kris has dedicated her activism.

Kris possesses both the compassion and tenacity required to protect nature. From serving on the Philadelphia Parks and Recreation Commission, and working to preserve the Historic Upper Roxborough Reservoir and Manatawna Farm, to her long-standing support of the Schuylkill Center, Kris has had a hand in protecting much of our local green space and wildlife habitat.



KRIS SOFFA - PHOTO BY CAROL BALDRIDGE

As a Pennsylvania Master Naturalist and Friends of the Wissahickon Trail Ambassador, Kris is a generous volunteer dedicated to engaging people of all ages with her famous bird walks, butterfly counts, and bat nights.

So right now, don't worry about tickets and parties. Join us in thanking Kris with a gift in her honor that will protect this living resource for our community. It's needed now more than ever.

Visit www.schuylkillcenter.org for ways to help protect this 340-acre sanctuary of habitats—the very places where wildlife roam, wildflowers bloom, and the next generation grows a life-long love for nature. 🦋

Enchanted Forest
honoring
Kris Soffa



thank you, christina!

THIS JANUARY, WE BID FAREWELL TO CHRISTINA CATANESE after six impactful years as our Director of Environmental Art. While leading this program, she built a community of environmental artists and developed our LandLab program.

Christina moved to Michigan during the winter, but has stayed on directing our art program during the interim while we conduct a search, and is still engaged in leading a project for a coalition of 23 nature centers, where we are creating a series of environmental art experiences. Stay tuned!

1

Christina is pictured here (center) at the 20th anniversary exhibition opening in the gallery with her staff Liz Jelsomine and Dominique Chua.

2

Christina contributes to **WE THE WEEDS'** collaborative installation of woven invasive vines in 2015.

3

Christina pictured with the performers and lead artists of Remembering Water's Way, a dance performance and nature walk presented at the Schuylkill Center by Dance Exchange, 2018 LandLab resident artists.

4

Christina pictured with the volunteer knitters and crocheters of the Tempesty Project Philadelphia collection, a visualization in fiber craft of climate change in Philadelphia.

1



2



3



4



From Christina

I learned and grew so much during my six years at the Schuylkill Center. I loved exploring how environmental science can be expressed and interpreted through art exhibitions and projects. I cherished working with so many inspiring artists; I particularly enjoyed getting to know the land and figuring out how to facilitate art installations that are beneficial and harmonious with the ecosystem and all its inhabitants and visitors.

