

SCEE Celebrates Winter with Two New Events

Winterfest Returns

For decades, SCEE members reveled at Winterfest, a celebration of the winter season. Our favorite seasonal festival returns on the first night of winter, as SCEE teams up with WXPN's *Kid's Corner* to present a solstice celebration for the entire family, Thursday, December 22.

Kid's Corner's marvelous host, Kathy O'Connell, will preside over the festivities, which feature many favorite guests from the show. Brush up on your astronomy while stargazing with the Franklin Institute's Derrick Pitts, enjoy a wintry walk through the woods with SCEE's own Mike Weilbacher, the "All-Natural Science Guy" on the show, and join librarian Joe Hilton for storytime in the bookstore. Chemist Dr. Lisa Chirlian presents a live version of "science fact and fiction," her Science Thursday game show.

And what winter festival would be complete without roasted marshmallows, s'mores and something warm to wet your whistle? We hope you'll join us for the festivities.

Thursday, December 21, 2011
7:00 pm – 9:30 pm
Free to members / \$5 non-members



From left to right, Joe Hilton of the Free Library of Philadelphia, *Kid's Corner* host Kathy O'Connell, Franklin Institute chief astronomer Derrick Pitts, and Science Thursday's Dr. Lisa Chirlian.

Merry Making, A Winter Craft Event

Tackle your holiday gift list with artistic flair and celebrate nature at the same time. Drop by the Schuylkill Center on Sunday, December 4 for *Merry Making*, an afternoon of sustainable shopping, craft workshops and art.

Local artists and crafters that work with eco-friendly materials and nature themes will offer unique, handmade gifts for sale. Select artists will also host kid-friendly workshops on how to make your own gifts and holiday decorations, so the kids can create while you shop. Make your own wreaths, candles, paper cards and more.

Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction, a Philadelphia-based artist cooperative, will be on hand to share their delicious, organic craft spirits and liqueurs, and we'll have hot chocolate and snacks for all.

The opening reception for *Flock*, SCEE's new art exhibition, will add to the afternoon's creative mix. Join us and we'll make your holiday gift giving a little more "green" and a lot more merry.

The event is FREE with a suggested donation to the Schuylkill Center. Workshops may have a materials fee.



Want to experience owls in winter? Join us for Owl Prowl!

Saturday, January 28, from 4:00 – 6:00 pm



We'll search for owls, their signs, and maybe see one. You'll also meet Jackson the great-horned owl and Loki the eastern screech owl.

Free for members; \$8 non-members.
Call 215-482-7300, ext 110 or visit our website for more info.

Owls in Winter, continued from page 4

their territories in our upland forests and find plenty of food on the forest floor, in open meadows and right in our backyards. They are, though, still susceptible to human disturbance. As we cut down dead and decaying trees, we reduce nesting sites for the screech owl. Our own wildlife ambassador, Loki the screech owl, came to us as a flightless owlet in a section of tree that had been chopped down. Sitting at the top of the food chain, owls are also particularly susceptible to pesticide poisoning. Pesticides used to kill rodents accumulate in the owl's body and slowly poison it. Owls are also injured by flying into fences, which are difficult to decipher in the dark.

So, some quiet winter night, consider bundling up against the cold and finding a spot outside to listen. Or join us at SCEE for our own winter Owl Prowl, on Saturday, January 28. You may be rewarded with the back and forth calls of an owl pair rekindling an old flame, or moving into your neighborhood for the first time. Their haunting songs will capture your imagination and inspire you to keep an eye out for these neighborhood friends all year long. ■

Director's Cut What Makes Us Unique

As a member of the SCEE team and loyal reader of the *Quill*, you know what makes us special—unique even. Your Schuylkill Center is the only nature center in Philadelphia that has permanently protected its open space. We walk our talk: our forests will remain forever wild.

We're also the only one with a wildlife clinic, saving thousands of wild animals annually that would otherwise perish. The only one with a groundbreaking environmental art program, uniquely marrying art with science in a way that pushes the envelope on environmental programming. The only nature center with an afterschool program that gives kids acres of time in the outdoors.

And we're the only nature center with an urban farm program, a place where kids push their fingers deep into the dirt to viscerally understand their direct connection to the soil that sustains life.

Of course, every nature center offers a rich menu of programs to the community, but we are ramping up the numbers and kinds of programs we offer you, as the program calendar tucked into these pages reveals.

So as the year slides to a merry December conclusion, as we move into the season of giving, we ask you to remember the good work of all of us here at the Schuylkill Center through our Annual Appeal. There's an envelope tucked into this newsletter that we invite you to use to make a year-end contribution above and beyond your membership dues.

Give in honor of the thousands of animals we save. In honor of the children we teach every day. In honor of our diverse programming.

And give in honor of our protected landscape, ravaged this August from the one-two punch of Irene and Lee. Amazingly, we're still clearing out from the extensive damage of trees fallen, bridges flooded, and trails hammered.

Your donation today would immensely help strengthen us as we head into the new year.

This holiday season, we hope and trust you'll remember the Schuylkill Center. And I look forward to seeing you on the trails and at our programs this winter season and beyond.



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Executive Director

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Halloween Hikes and Hayrides 2011

This year's Halloween Hikes and Hayrides took a hit from an unseasonable snow storm that forced us to cancel the second night of the event. The first night, however, was a hit. Over 300 people came out to hike enchanted, lantern lit trails, meet friendly nocturnal creatures, paint pumpkins and enjoy s'mores around the fire.



Staff and Board Updates

This fall the Schuylkill Center welcomed new marketing and PR coordinator **Naomi Leach**, who comes to us with 15 years of communications experience in nonprofit and for-profit sectors. We also sadly said goodbye to two longtime employees, bookstore manager **Peggy Frankenberg** and IT manager **Steve Aldrich**. Both served SCEE in many capacities over the years, and will be missed.

Our Board of Trustees welcomed several new members in recent months. **Cheryl Mason-Dorman**, an assistant principal with Philadelphia schools, **Kathleen Wagner**, retired Philadelphia Zoo vice president and longtime consultant, and certified professional accountant **Curtis Welch** all joined the Board in July. **Timothy Szuhaj**, partner at the law firm of Becker Meisel, where he chairs the Intellectual Property and Technology Practice Group, was elected in September.

All are serving three year terms. Wagner now chairs the Resource Development Committee, Mason-Dorman joined the Education Committee, and Welch and Szuhaj the Finance Committee. We appreciate all four of them volunteering for SCEE in this important role.

Dance on the Falls Bridge

Schuylkill Center staff joined over 600 other people dancing the night away at September's first annual Dance on the Falls Bridge. Hosted by the East Falls Development Corporation, the neighborhood celebration included a silent auction benefiting the Schuylkill Center.



Photo, left to right: James Mitchell and Sandra Lawrence from the Café at the Mills, Peicha Chang of Falls Flowers, Nancy Karahuta from East River Bank, Gina Snyder of the East Falls Development Corp., SCEE's own Mike Weilbacher, Philadelphia Univ. professor Barbara Macaulay, and SCEE's Emily Simmons.

Owls in Winter

Virginia Ranly, Director of Education

While most of us are hunkered down for the winter, birds are engaged in nonstop activity. Owls are particularly busy this time of year, courting, mating and incubating their eggs. It's worth braving the cold some dark winter evening to scout for owls and hear their wonderful vocalizations. You may recognize the classic "hoot" of the great-horned owl or the eerie whinny-call of the screech owl, the two species most common in this area.

Owls reunite with the same mate each year. They may drift apart over the summer, but in January and February we hear them almost exclusively in one another's company, looking for a nesting site and re-establishing their relationship. Our knowledge of owl courtship rituals is sketchy, but males have been witnessed fluffing their own feathers, bowing, and spreading their wings to their mates. Even if the pair has raised young together in the past, the male still has to win the female's affection again each winter. Only when she's given the okay does the courtship progress to preening each other's feathers and mating.

Owls do not build their own nests. Instead they take up residence in nests abandoned by another species - crow, hawk or woodpecker, most likely. The great-horned owls' nests are sturdy and high in the branches. The screeches are cavity nesters, using holes in dead and decaying trees that were formed naturally from rot or through the industriousness of woodpeckers. Nest selection happens in January, so choosing a site that will withstand the winds and elements of winter is critical.

The female begins laying her eggs in early February. In our region, great horned owls typically have clutches of two to three eggs, and the smaller screeches have four to six. The eggs need to be incubated continuously for one month during this time, when temperatures regularly drop below zero. Nest-sitting responsibility falls primarily to the female, (while the male hunts), but roles may be



photography by Lisa Haun

switched for a short stint each afternoon. When the eggs hatch, the owlets are totally dependent on Mom and Dad for at least a month (longer for the great horned). At about the time the owlets fledge, lots of other spring wildlife babies are also emerging, providing easy prey for the inexperienced owlets. Fledglings may continue to hang out with the parents throughout the spring, but by the fall will have ventured in search of their own territory.

Eight species of owls are known to reside in Pennsylvania, but only the great horned and screech owls are common to our urban and suburban environments. They establish

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Of Trees, Streams and Baby Squirrels, continued from page 3

year." For a while, the clinic staff had their hands full caring for all those squirrels, many of which had to be fed by hand, from a syringe or dropper, every few hours or so. Fortunately, most recovered fully after a couple of months of rest, fluids and proper nutrition and were released back into the wild.

"We were happy to care for the squirrels," says Rick, "but we also want people to understand that sometimes just leaving the animal alone is the right thing to do." Squirrels, for instance, always have more than one nest, so a downed nest isn't catastrophic. The babies you think are orphaned or homeless may just be waiting for their mother to relocate them. If you're ever unsure what to do about wildlife in distress, "call us," says Rick. "It's what we're here for." ■

A Long Look at Birds

Photographer Lisa Haun reflects on her inspiration for SCEE's latest exhibit

Go to a window or step outside and look up. Within a few seconds, you'll see a bird. Most likely a sparrow or pigeon. But many more species of birds are right around you. This afternoon while I was visiting a farm market in Plymouth Meeting, a great blue heron burst out of their cornfield and flew over my car. On the way home I saw a red-tailed hawk. In my own backyard in Glenside I regularly see wrens, cardinals, blue jays, robins, crows, sparrows, mourning doves, grackles, cat birds, nuthatches and golden orioles. Twice I've seen hummingbirds, and once I surprised a baby turkey vulture that ran around the corner past my neighbor's and disappeared. Think of all the geese you see wherever there is a body of water. Like I said, birds are everywhere.

I started taking photos while in college. My first professional work was photographing musicians for magazines. I did that for a long time, living in New York and California. But for the past decade most of my photos have been nature-based.

About two years ago the community art center where I work had a table at a local summer camp fair. The Schuylkill Center had the table next to us. Their screech owl was to my immediate left. One look and I was enchanted. I spent the afternoon thinking of how to photograph it.

About a year later I was at a gallery opening at the Schuylkill Center and saw their curator, Jenny Laden, in the lobby. I was early and the lobby was pretty empty. It seemed pushy, but I took my shot, introduced myself to Jenny and talked her into lending me some of the birds from their amazing taxidermy collection. She connected me with Gin Ranly, who handles the collection as part of the Center's education department.

These birds are easily the most beautiful subjects I've ever been lucky enough to work with. Each one inspires me, and they came at a time when I really needed inspiration. I've been taking photos for over 30 years now and still work with film shot on a heavy, medium-format camera. As technologies have changed, it's become increasingly difficult to find supplies for my format. There is only one lab left in Philadelphia that actually processes the film.

Add the recession and, well, it's been rough. A friend donated most of the film I've used this year to photograph the birds. There were times when I'd wait to shoot a new bird until the next cycle of my credit card, so I could afford to get the film developed.

All worth it.

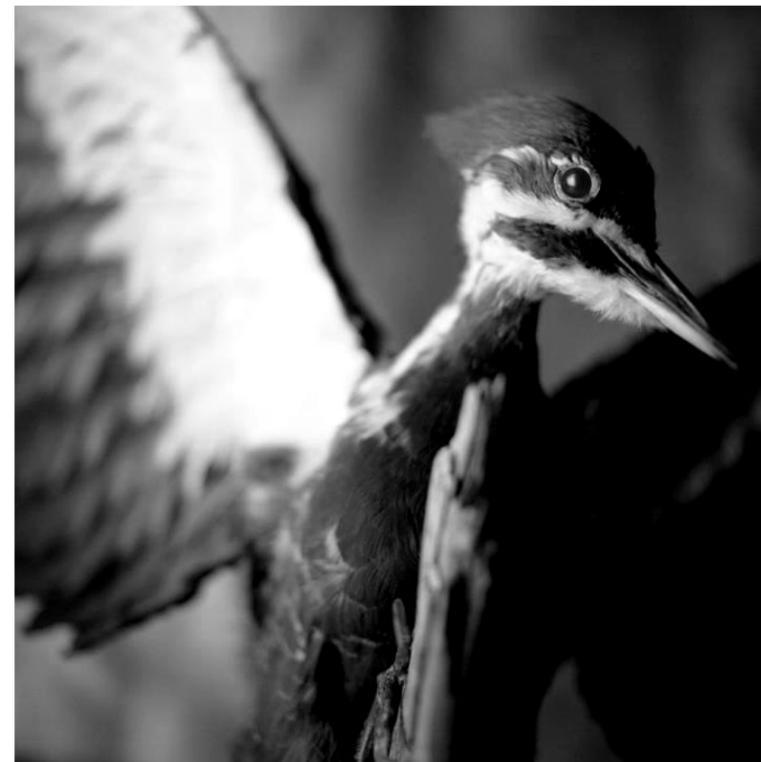
Take a long look at these amazing creatures and take a longer look around you next time you're outside. The birds have been there all along.

Lisa Haun

Flock
An Exhibition Inspired by the Schuylkill Center's Bird Collection

Including works by
Lisa Haun
Jennie Thwing
Lorenzo Buffa

December 2, 2011 – February 18, 2012
Opening reception and "Merry Making" event, December 4, 11 – 4 pm. ■



photography by Lisa Haun

