



2022 will be a year of restoration

By Mike Weilbacher

EVERY OTHER YEAR, THE CENTER'S STAFF DEDICATES A FULL YEAR OF PROGRAMMING TO A SPECIAL TOPIC, allowing all of our various programs—Nature Preschool, the Education team, the Wildlife Clinic, the Art program—to explore that topic over a full year of ambitious programming.

We are very happy to announce that 2022 will be a **Year of Restoration**, dedicated to restoring so many things, starting with the forest habitat that our nature center calls home; restoration has been at the forefront of our Land & Facilities department's work for decades now, and our monthly **Restoration Work Groups** will have a special urgency in 2022.

But we are also looking to restore our climate, the planet in total, and several things lost in pandemic confusion: our sense of awe and a balance in our relationships with nature and each other.

The Land & Facilities team is helmed by Steve Goin, also our resident arborist. “Restoring habitats

is a passion of mine,” he says, “that gets nourished with each tree I plant or trail improvement I make to help our land better benefit wildlife.” So the Center will focus its 2022 habitat restoration efforts along the **Wildflower Loop**, the deer enclosure begun circa 2000 that requires constant TLC: new and better fencing, more native plantings, a degraded meadow and pond to restore, and more.

Our beloved **Pine Grove**, mightily whacked by a 2020 derecho—a climate-fueled high-energy straight-line

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PHOTO CREDIT: SHANE ROUNCE

director's cut

THE WINTERS OF OUR DISCONTENT

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By *Mike Weilbacher*

LAST WINTER, PHILADELPHIA RECEIVED OVER 22 INCHES OF SNOW AT THE AIRPORT, just a hair above the long-term 20.5 inch average. But that's 73 times what dropped the snowless winter before; if anything, our weather has become erratic and prone to extreme mood swings.

So I was intrigued by the Old Farmer's Almanac prediction that this winter would be a "Season of Shivers." The new season, they wrote, "will be punctuated by positively bone-chilling, below-average temperatures across most of the United States."

Our city's winter temperatures have climbed almost five degrees in the last 50 years, from an average seasonal temperature of 33° in 1970 to almost 38° today. While the coldest winter day between 1950 and 1980 was usually around 3 or 4 degrees, for the last 30 years it has always stayed above 5 degrees. First frost once came around Halloween; in the last 50 years, the first frost has arrived more than 17 days later, deep into November.

But the city's temperatures for a whole year have "only" increased by 3.5°, less than the rise in average winter temps. That's the strange thing about climate change: across most of the US, including the Mid-Atlantic, winters are the fastest warming season. In fact, in far northern climes—Alaska, Vermont—the average winter temperature is already five degrees warmer.

A warmer world means more evaporation over the ocean, causing our city's annual precipitation to climb too—our city is getting warmer and wetter. Worse, extreme precipitation events in Philly are on the rise, where large-

scale downpours have increased by a whopping 360% in recent years, the third largest climb of any American city.

Since what goes up must come down, more evaporation means more water precipitating—and in winter, that may come down as snow. "It may seem counterintuitive, but more snowfall during winter storms is an expected outcome of climate change," reminds the Environmental Defense Fund. Which is why we had the snowiest winter ever in 2009-10, with almost 79 inches of snow.

Let's add one more wrinkle: as average global temps rise and the Arctic warms, the jet stream is slowing down and growing increasingly wobbly. This allows bone-chilling Arctic air—typically held in place by a once-stronger jet stream—to spill much farther south and linger over areas unaccustomed to it. So even as winters on average have been getting shorter and warmer, we can still expect bouts of very cold weather from time to time.

But here's something I can say with 100% accuracy: the legions of climate deniers who have an outsized impact on public policy will scream with every coming snowstorm that this snow "proves" that climate change is a hoax. No, it does not.

It actually fits snugly into the emerging science of climate change. Happy winter.

All the best,



Mike Weilbacher, Executive Director
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LAST
WINTER'S
SNOW AT
OUR PAVILION

education spotlight

EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING FOR HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS

By Max Paschall, Land Stewardship Coordinator

JUST ACROSS SPRING LANE ON THE WESTERN SIDE OF OUR PRESERVE, you'll find Lankenau High School. An environmental science magnet school serving high-achieving students from around the city, this hidden "gem" is right here in upper Roxborough. With an ecology-focused high school and an environmental center so close in proximity, a partnership between the two is a natural fit.

Working with staff from both institutions, our Land Coordinator, Jamel Shockley, created an internship that provides hands-on experience for high school seniors by working at the Schuylkill Center. After an interview process, he recruited seven students to participate in work sessions twice weekly. Under Jamel's mentorship, these seniors are actively involved in a range of competencies from tree planting and care to invasive plant removal and landscape design.



CUTTING BACK WINEBERRY AND MULTIFLORA ROSE

"This eco-internship provides seniors the opportunity to receive high school credit while autonomously engaging in environmental stewardship and land preservation," says Lankenau's Principal Jessica Naugle McAtamney. "Our partnership is the needed connection between natural resource study and application, and it enables our students to actively engage within a true land-lab. We're delighted

the Schuylkill Center is committed to our students and the greater Philadelphia community."

The interns have been involved in several high-profile projects such as playing a crucial role in fulfilling our TreeVitalize grant for large-scale tree plantings this fall, and with the front garden installation at the Visitor

Center. Intern Kevin Sanchez Rojas chose to participate because it gives him a chance to learn practical skills and, for him, it's "rewarding to see things grow as a result of the work I do." Every intern has their own passions, interests, and ambitions—and the diversity of nature here means that one student might get excited at spotting a salamander, while another is motivated by the opportunity to plant trees in an effort to reforest a riparian buffer.



KEVIN SANCHEZ ROJAS PREPARING NURSERY FOR THE WINTER

While we have done many programs with Lankenau over the years, this is the first ongoing collaboration between the two. "We value our relationship with Lankenau," Director of Education Aaliyah Green Ross notes. "Students who are interested in environmental careers have a unique chance for experiential learning and get a taste of what it's like to actually work in the environmental field."

This internship is paving the way for ongoing partnerships and projects that will provide enormous opportunities across our 340 acres to the students of Lankenau, and help widen our scope of work. With luck, the next few years will see a lot more collaborations between both of our ecologically-focused institutions. ✂



naturalist notebook

FEEDING OUR YEAR-ROUND FEATHERED FRIENDS

By Leigh "Bird Nerd" Ashbrook, Nature Preschool Teacher

THE PEAK OF AVIAN MIGRATION HAS PASSED and those well-travelled birds have now reached their "summer" digs below the equator. Now, they're basking in the tropical sun and devouring an unending supply of fruit and insects.

Think of those beautiful, flashy Baltimore orioles, now home in Colombia; the richly, decked-out scarlet tanagers, settling in Bolivia; the iridescent ruby-throated hummingbirds, having zoomed across the Gulf of Mexico to Guatemala; and the more subtly feathered thrushes, following their wood thrush, hermit thrush, and veery companions along the mid-Atlantic flyway to Costa Rica.

Have they departed because it gets too cold here in winter? No. They're looking for a smorgasbord of insects and have migrated south only because that is where their ample food supply is available. Eat up, and see you in the spring, migrants.

But wait, what about the hundreds of species of birds that live here at the Center and in your backyards during the winter? You most likely recognize many of our year-round resident birds: Carolina chickadees, tufted titmice, white-breasted nuthatches, six species of woodpeckers, Northern cardinals, and blue jays. They're relying mainly on the insects of summer for the nourishment of their growing nestlings and themselves, then switching their diets to the food that is available: flower and grass seed



PILEATED WOODPECKER

heads, berries, overwintering insects and their larvae, and various macroinvertebrates—small worms, centipedes, millipedes, and whatever else may live beneath the leaf litter on the forest floor.

I take great pleasure in observing birds throughout the year. But did you know that winter is the peak time during which you can

see a concentration of your favorite year-round feathered residents? If you love to watch birds throughout our cold weather months, but prefer the comfort of your cozy home

and mug of hot coffee, **consider establishing feeding stations outside your windows.** Our Gift Shop has an assortment of bird feeders to offer for different birds' feeding preferences.



WINTERING CARDINAL

But what to put in the feeders, once you have them? Michelle Havens, our marvelous Gift Shop Manager, will happily walk you through appropriate choices. We carry an excellent selection of high quality wild bird food, including various seed mixes, suet, peanuts, and cracked corn.

Here is a list of many of our local year-round resident and winter-visiting birds and their preferred food:

- Mourning doves, white-throated sparrows, dark-eyed juncos, song sparrows, sometimes blue jays and northern cardinals...a seed mix of millet, black oil sunflower seed, peanut chips and cracked corn. Doves especially like cracked corn.
- Carolina chickadees, tufted titmice, white-breasted nuthatches, Carolina wrens, downy woodpeckers, hairy woodpeckers, red-bellied woodpeckers, northern cardinals, blue jays...black oil sunflower seed, peanut hearts, and suet.
- American goldfinches, house finches, purple finches...thistle seed, also known as nyjer seed.

These birds are among some of the most common feeder visitors, but this is not a complete list by any means. For good resources for identifying your feeder birds, consider loading the app Merlin (free), managed by The Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. Cornell's website, allaboutbirds.com, is excellent. Also visit audubon.org, for another good source of information about North American birds.

Have fun, enjoy feeding the birds, and tag us in your social media [@schuykillcenter](https://twitter.com/schuykillcenter) when you spot your newest friends. 🐦



artist spotlight

LESS IS MORE: THE NATURE OF LETTING GO

By Emily Sorensen, Exhibitions Coordinator

PHILADELPHIA-BASED VISUAL ARTIST AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZER MAKEBA RAINEY is the focus of our current exhibition *LESS IS MORE: The Nature of Letting Go*. Created by and especially for Black folks in America, it features Rainey's dazzling portraits of local Black figures, Liberation leaders, and ancestors. Her choice of bright colors and patterns of African wax cloth frame defiant, determined, and joyful faces.

Rainey explores how Black folks can access the energy of nature necessary for community and self-sustainability. More particularly, she asks us, how do we harness nature while also living in ethical and resourceful accord with it? Especially in this time of global scarcity—keenly and unjustly felt by those living in already under-resourced communities in our city—what does it look like to live sustainably, to find sustenance in ancestors, neighbors, family, and friends?

In that vein, Rainey's work is characterized by extensive collaborations with fellow artists, local organizations, and community members. "Artist" is only one of many titles Rainey gives herself; others include "curator" and "community organizer." Her creative practice "focuses on building community," which she considers "an extension of family," and key to her social justice work, in which "community becomes the key to liberation," particularly Black Americans. Makeba Rainey's exhibition is a presentation of understanding environmental practice as a social event that grows on building ecological empathy across communities.

Her collaborators include fellow Philadelphia artists Dominique London (creator of Skoolie, a school bus turned sustainable tiny home), musician Sudan Green (of Spirits Up!) and sound designer Julien Terrell, among others. With these collaborators, Rainey offers self-guided, meditative walks, healing rituals, and art workshops.

Transforming the gallery into a healing, restorative space, we welcome you to experience our cozy reading corner for rest and reflection. Outdoor wall art and seating (look for

a swing!) extends the exhibition on our grounds, and is an invitation to recharge and take solace in nature.

This exhibit is on display in our Visitor Center through March 26, 2022. ➤



PHOTO CREDIT: MAE BELLE VARGARS



2022 will be a Year of Restoration

(CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1)

windstorm—will benefit from the year: the piles of tree trunks left in the wind's aftermath will become raw material for the Environmental Art department to invite area sculptors, woodworkers, and others to create inspired sculptures that we share with you.

In the spring, look for a series of **Restoration Stations** to pop up across the property. These are outdoor exhibits where you can stop and interactively learn something new about a different feature of restoration: native plant species, native bees and other pollinators, monarch butterflies, amphibians, migratory birds, ash trees, box turtles... Which will they be? Come see!

We'll unveil the first Restoration Stations at **Naturepalooza**, our annual Earth Day festival, which this year becomes a Celebration of Restoration. Both the spring and fall semesters of **Thursday Night Live**, our popular online conversations, will skew heavily in this direction— look for the new semester in March into April. And school groups, our afterschool program, even Summer Camp will be involved in the action.

Aaliyah Green Ross, our Director of Education, notes, "We're excited for students to take part in restoring habitats both at the Center and in their own neighborhoods. It's important to get across that we have the power to make real, positive changes in our environment. The future of our planet is not all doom and gloom."

"The **Wildlife Clinic's** work is by nature restorative," offers clinic director Chris Strub, "restoring wildlife to their natural habitats and restoring the public's connection with wildlife through direct rescue efforts." On top of this, we will work with volunteers and staff to install a Wildlife Garden inside one of its old outdoor cages, using the cage to protect the plants from deer, rabbits, woodchucks, and more. "We'll grow native plants that make the food wildlife eat," (think berries and nuts) says Chris, "as well as domestic plants for our patients, like lettuce."

The clinic will also continue its partnership with Audubon chapters and the **Bird Safe Philly**, as our clinic is the official drop-off site for migratory birds found stunned when they

hit Center City skyscrapers, and we will focus your attention on this important program this year too.

The **next two art exhibitions**, by Black artist Makeba Rainey and Filipino-American artist Maria Dumlaog, will feature numerous installations and events focusing on the restorative powers of nature, especially for communities of color.

We'll build a **monarch way station** on our site, one formally certified by Monarch Watch, and replace a series of **bluebird boxes** that provide nesting sites for more than bluebirds—tree swallows and small mammals like them too.



Nature Preschool already raises mealworms to feed to the clinic's bird patients, and will continue this practice, while growing trees from seeds to plant in our forest and collecting acorns and nuts to bring to the clinic. They'll even assist us in many of the projects noted above.

We'll end the year in another now longstanding tradition, presenting a restoration-flavored **Henry Meigs Environmental Leadership Award** to... ah, we'll be asking you for nominees in the spring.

Steve Goin's thinking about restoration has shifted lately. "These days, I'm placing equal or maybe even more importance on the restorative benefits of nature for myself, like how my soul feels following a tough hike to take in a beautiful autumn sunset."

We're with you Steve, and look forward to reconnecting you all to the restorative power of nature. 🦋



season in images

HIGHLIGHTS FALL 2021

NATIVE NORTHEAST WILDFLOWER MIX



THIS FALL, WE HELD A CONTEST TO DESIGN OUR WILDFLOWER SEED PACKET THAT WE SEND TO NEW MEMBERS. INSPIRED BY THE "WILDFLOWER PATCHES HER HUSBAND PLANTED ON THEIR FARM," THE WINNING DESIGN WAS CREATED BY MEMBER **MONICA SMITH**.



ON THE 20TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE ATTACKS OF SEPTEMBER 11, WE HELD A HEALING SESSION IN OUR IRAQI SANCTUARY, AL MUDHIF, WITH MEMBERS OF THE IRAQI COMMUNITY AND U.S. VETERANS. THEY SHARED STORIES OF THE LOSS OF FRIENDS AND LOVED ONES IN THIS DEEPLY MEANINGFUL AND INTIMATE GATHERING.



OVER THE COURSE OF TWO DAYS, OUR STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS PLANTED A POLLINATOR GARDEN AT THE ENTRANCE TO THE VISITOR CENTER. AWE FELLOW **JAMEL SHOCKLEY**, CENTER, LED THIS EFFORT AS PART OF HIS CAPSTONE PROJECT WITH HELP FROM STUDENTS FROM TEMPLE UNIVERSITY'S HONORS PROGRAM.



OUR **MEMBERS** ARE PART OF A SPECIAL COMMUNITY OF NATURE AND WILDLIFE CHAMPIONS WHOSE GENEROUS SUPPORT FURTHERS OUR MISSION. WE WELCOMED THEM AT AN INFORMAL GATHERING BY OUR MUDHIF FOLLOWED BY CANOEING ON WIND DANCE POND.



OUR **NATURE PRESCHOOL FAMILIES** HAD THEIR FIRST IN-PERSON EVENT SINCE MARCH 2020 AT A BYO DINNER PICNIC; IT WAS A GREAT, COVID-FRIENDLY WAY FOR PARENTS, STUDENTS, AND EDUCATORS TO SOCIALIZE TOGETHER.



TOGETHER CHEF **ANNABEL RABIYAH**, RIGHT, AL MUDHIF ARTISTS **YAROUB AL-OBAYDI** AND **SARAH KAVAGE**, AND IRAQI-AMERICAN ARTIST **MICHAEL RAKOWITZ** EXPLORED AROMATIC JEWISH-IRAQI FOOD AND CULTURE AT OUR MUDHIF.



WE LAUNCHED THE NEW, INTERACTIVE CARD GAME **AQUA MAROONED!**, CREATED BY SWIM PONY PERFORMING ARTS. THESE BEAUTIFULLY ILLUSTRATED CARDS HAVE THEIR OWN CHALLENGE QUESTIONS. WHILE STROLLING ALONG OUR TRAILS, PLAYERS RESPOND TO PROMPTS THAT ARE SILLY, PHYSICAL, AND REFLECTIVE, WHILE DEEPENING THEIR CONNECTIONS TO THE NATURAL WORLD. CARDS ARE AVAILABLE AT THE VISITOR CENTER.



BRANDI NICOLE, **FOUNDER OF HIKE+HEAL**, LED A COMMUNITY OF BLACK WOMEN IN A HEALING HIKE, GENTLE STRETCHING AND BREATHWORK FOLLOWED BY A TEA CEREMONY IN OUR MUDHIF.



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supporting

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supporting us helps build a future
where all people respect and protect
our natural world



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winterfest for wildlife

SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 5 @ NOON - 3:00 PM

