

9-2007

Gordie News, September 2007

West Chester University of Pennsylvania

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Recommended Citation

West Chester University of Pennsylvania (2007). Gordie News, September 2007. Retrieved from http://digitalcommons.wcupa.edu/gna_sp_series/28

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GORDIE NEWS

(September 2007) 1:9

Erika Szonntag, editor

Gordon Natural Area for Environmental Studies

West Chester University of Pennsylvania

(A Certified Wildlife Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation)



Special Announcements & Dates-

November 10-workday

Help save postage: If you have an E-mail we can add you to the Friends of the Gordon Natural Area mailing list. You will be notified of the latest Gordie News (<http://darwin.wcupa.edu/gordon/>) and other activities

Contact Erika Szonntag with feedback or ideas for articles at es631042@wcupa.edu

:: *What's New?* ::

Eagle Scout Project Revisited

In February, *Gordie News* featured a write-up about Bryan Stevens' Eagle Scout Project. Bryan is from Troop 22 of Unionville, Pennsylvania, and along with a team of 18, carried out his project in the Gordon Natural Area. Bryan's team treated 40,000 square feet of forest by removing invasive plants, rerouting trails, and replacing signs.

The project spanned the greater part of January and volunteers represented scouts from Troop 22 as well as WCU students and faculty. He received an award at the Eagle Court of Honor on June 3, 2007 in recognition of his efforts. He is pictured above with parents Sue and Craig (Dr Stevens, Department of Kinesiology).



Plum Run Tutorial Available Online

The project took place between the spring and fall semesters of 2006 and was a collaboration between the Biology, Geology, Astronomy, and Geography & Planning Departments of West Chester University. Dr. Winfield Fairchild, Tim Lutz, and Gary W. Coutu oversaw the operation. A major accomplishment of the project was the implementation of the interactive tutorial using Google Earth to help people learn about the watershed, how it affects the Brandywine River and how it is affected by the West Chester area.

Here is a link to the Plum Run tutorial, check it out!

<http://quantifactus.wcupa.edu/website/geoplan/projects/intro.html>

This tutorial was created by Christopher Robinson, with assistance from West Chester University faculty members Winfield Fairchild (Department of Biology), Timothy Lutz (Department of Geology and Astronomy), Gary Coutu and Brian Ochieng (Department of Geography and Planning). Graduate students Danielle Difederico and Mike McGeehin, and undergraduates Katherine Broadbent and Danielle Varnes performed much of the fieldwork, laboratory analyses, and assembly of GIS information. We thank the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection for analysis of total phosphorus samples, and Jane Fava and Kathy Campbell of the Brandywine Valley Association for logistical support.

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Flora and Fauna of the Gordon Area

Jack in the Pulpit

Arisaema triphyllum is a fairly common plant species to moist forests ranging from Canada to Florida and further out west, and was mentioned in the May issue of *Gordie News*. As September is coming to an end, be sure to keep a look out for clusters of bright red berries which now are all that remain of the Jack in the Pulpits in the GNA!



Oriental Bittersweet



Celastrus orbiculatus is an invasive, deciduous, woody vine that was introduced to the eastern United States during the mid-1800s from eastern Asia. It is common throughout the GNA and was a huge obstacle to clear when preparing the deer/invasive species demonstration areas.

Diameter ranges from 2-4 inches and leaves are round and alternating. At maturity, the plant

bears numerous clusters of bright red berries. Because it is a vine, it easily overtakes and chokes out several layers of native vegetation (not just ground layer species, for example). Rachel Stern is pictured at right holding the root system of one vine from the demonstration area.



Beech Blight Aphid

Next time you walk past a beech tree in the Gordon Area, observe its branches. They may



appear to be covered with snow, but take a closer look and you will see that this “snow” is in fact an amalgamation of Beech Blight Aphids. Aphids are a class of very small, plant feeding insects. About 4,000 species have been recognized and



many are specific to certain tree species, such as the Beech Blight or Woolly Alder. Aphids really are fascinating little creatures; for example, when a Beech Blight Aphid is disturbed, it will raise the posterior end of its body and sway back and forth. They are surprisingly slow moving insects as well, and usually cluster in groups upwards of 1,000. Keep your eyes peeled!

The Old Man of the Woods

Mistaking this mushroom for a gnome in the forest wouldn't be a surprise, for the fungus truly fits its name. *Strobilomyces floccopus* is an especially strange looking mushroom and does in fact appear to be bearded. Usually this “old man” is 4-12 cm in height with flesh that becomes grey and black with age. The cap acquires its characteristic coarse, grayish-black, hairy scales and convex shape with age, ranging from 3-15 cm in diameter. These mushrooms have been spotted in the Gordon, so remember to scan the forest floor on your next walk through the woods.



Birds of the Gordon

Blue Jay

The Blue Jay is an easily identified and distinct species. Aside from their bright blue and white coloring, Blue Jays are notorious for bombarding nests and eating the eggs and young of other birds. Their diet relies mostly upon nuts and seeds, but they will occasionally feast on grasshoppers, insects, and sometimes small vertebrates. They are known to be noisy birds, and can even imitate the cries of the Red-shouldered Hawk.



Field Sparrow

While *Spizella pusilla* may seem to be a very common bird, it is actually in great decline, according to the National Audubon Society. The current population is at 5.8 million, compared to 18 million 40 years ago. It is a small white and rusty brown songbird with a distinctive pink bill. It prefers open fields with some shrubs and trees and ranges from the central United States eastward. The most significant reason for their decline is their loss of habitat over the years, so this species could truly benefit from preservation of open space and farmlands.



Want to learn more interesting facts about birds? Check out Mike O'Connor's book:

Why Don't Woodpeckers Get Headaches? And Other Bird Questions You Know You Want to Ask
By Mike O'Connor
Beacon Press, 224 pages, \$9.95

Excerpt:

Q. So why don't woodpeckers get headaches?

A. "You'd think they would get headaches from the way they pound on trees but, luckily for them, they have evolved a rather tough head, much like a soccer player or a tall coal miner. Woodpeckers are among the most common backyard birds, yet they have features that are totally different than other feeder birds.

Woodpeckers have developed a much larger brain case, which prevents the birds from getting a concussion every time they have to chop out lunch. They also have a different muscle and bone structure at the base of the bill, which acts like a shock absorber to help cushion the blows. The woodpecker's stiff, strong tail serves as a kickstand to prop the bird up, allowing it to lean back and smack the tree. Even woodpeckers' feet are different. Most feeder birds have three toes in the front and one in the back; however, most woodpeckers have two in front and two in the back, giving the birds a better grip on the trunk of the tree. They even have special feathers that cover their nostrils to keep out flying woodchips and other assorted debris."

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Oh Dear, Look at all of the Deer!

- In suburban and urban areas of Pennsylvania, deer densities have reached 60 to 100 deer per square mile
- Pennsylvania's population of whitetails has grown by 20 percent in the last five years, from 1.2 million to 1.6 million
- Deer's high reproductive rate coupled with the restriction of hunting in some areas also contributes to the deer population problem. Two sets of triplets have been seen in the GNA this year!
- Deer also pose a serious threat to drivers, causing about 34,000 accidents per year throughout Pennsylvania
- The risk for Lyme disease has increased as a result of more deer in urbanized areas. The deer move the disease carrying tick from place to place.
- Because deer eat tender tree shoots and saplings, many parts of the state are devoid of young trees. That threatens the health of the forests, the birds and the mammals that live in them, and the land's ability to absorb rainfall
(pa.audobon.org)

Courtesy of naturtourism.allegheny.edu

There are an estimated 50 deer living in the Gordon Area, an environment that can only reasonably handle about six. Fenced demonstration areas were completed this past August in an attempt to show the impact deer have on native vegetation (see the August issue). The final bullet of information above is especially pertinent to the GNA.

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:: Check Out These Websites :: *Home of the African Violet*

Since 1999, Dr Gerry Hertel of WCU has been doing forest health monitoring and African violet habitat research in the Eastern Arc Mountains of Kenya and Tanzania. Journey "into Africa" with Dr Hertel and check out the following sites!

http://www.eoearth.org/article/Eastern_Arc_forests

The Eastern Arc Mountains possess large numbers of endemic plants and animals at some of the highest densities in the world.

<http://www.mv.helsinki.fi/jkolehma/article.html>

An excellent resource for information about the African violet.

http://www.easternarc.org/html/african_violet_letter.pdf
Learn about the Eastern Arc Conservation Program.

<http://www.forestryimages.org/browse/genusthumb.cfm?id=Saintpaulia&start=1>
Various pictures of African violets, including a few with Dr. Gerry Hertel.

EekoWorld – Environmental Education for Kids Online pbskids.org/eeeworld/index_flash.html

EekoWorld is a website designed to help kids ages 6 to 9 understand how they can play a positive role in caring for the earth. Kids create EekoCreaturs that have to overcome environmental issues in their respective environments (be they aerial, terrestrial, or under water) and in their EekoHomes – meant to demonstrate how kids make an impact in their own homes. This is a fun, interactive way to learn about the environment and conservation.

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Visitors to the Gordon Natural Area

The ladies pictured below were visiting Dr Turner of the WCU Biology Department to discuss a partnership between WCU and The Nature Conservancy (TNC) for the restoration of a small area at the Chrome Barrens Preserve in Nottingham, PA back to serpentine grasslands. They will collect grass seeds over the next few weeks beginning at the end of September and continuing through early October for planting this spring. WCU Biology will partner with TNC to help with the storage and germination of these seeds over the winter. Visit the site below to learn more about Chrome Barrens Preserve:



<http://www.nature.org/wherewework/northamerica/states/pennsylvania/preserves/art804.html>

Kay Davis and Ruth Galantino, Nature Conservancy volunteers and Molly Anderson, Director of Volunteer & Outreach Programs; Harrisburg, PA

WCU Darlington Biological Society “Adopts” the GNA

This year, the Darlington Biological Society, also known as the “Bio Club”, plans to go to the Gordon at least once a month to pick up trash, maintain invasive species, etc. This past Tuesday, September 25th, the club took its first walk through the GNA. Members of the club were informed about the history and various species of vegetation in the area. A significant amount of broken glass and metal was found along the main trail and was cleaned up for the most part. Thanks to everyone who came out!

Plum Run Watershed Assessment Team (PRWAT)

On September 7, 2007 the PRWAT walked the stream running through the Gordon Natural Area to visually assess its physical condition. This walk, or survey, will be done in all the streams in the Plum Run Watershed. The William Penn Foundation funded the Brandywine Valley Association (BVA) to do this work and they have contracted the work to the Natural Sciences Services unit of RETTEW, Schuylkill Haven, PA. Results are expected in January 2008.



Pictured left to right are Jane Fava (BVA), Aaron Clauser (RETTEW), John Kasitz (RETTEW), and Kathy Bergmann (BVA)

Billion Tree Campaign

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has launched a campaign to plant trees all over the world. The Gordon Natural Area has pledged 100 trees thus far. World target-pledged-planted/the Gordon Natural Area

Target



1,000,000,000/100

Pledged

1,119,364,360/100

Planted

321,979,763/64

Visit <http://www.unep.org/billiontreecampaign/>

West Chester University photos featured online!

<http://www.unep.org/billiontreecampaign/photoGallery/indexNorthAmerica.asp>

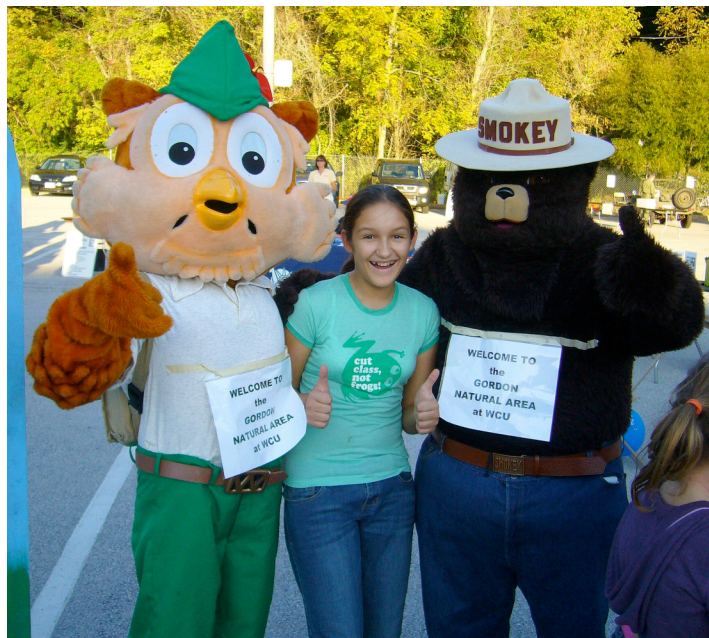


West Chester University students, faculty, and volunteers planting trees for the Billion Tree Campaign in April of 2007

WCU Homecoming - Smokey and Woodsy “rock” the Alumni Event in Lot R next to GNA (more pictures next month)



Matt Bigos, VP of Bio Club, and Gordie News editor, Erika Szonntag



Woodsy, Megan Barker (Dr Hertel's granddaughter) & Smokey

In addition to guest appearances from Smokey and Woodsy, National Wildlife Federation and the Backyard Habitat Program had a table down in R lot. Yellow Springs Native Plant Nursery generously donated six trees to the GNA. The nursery also has a program in which one can purchase a tree and donate it to the Gordon Natural Area.

GNA Supporters:

2004: Presidential Initiative (WCU); Environmental Council (WCU); USDA Forest Service; Henderson High School Environmental Club; Friends of the Gordon Area

2005: Wegman's; Yellow Springs Farm Native Plant Nursery; Environmental Council; Henderson High School Environmental Club; Friends of the Gordon Area

2006: Yellow Springs Farm Native Plant Nursery; Valero Energy Corporation; National Wildlife Federation; Henderson High School Environmental Club; Friends of the Gordon Area

2007: Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resources; WCU Alumni Association; Darlington Biological Society; MENTA Café; Yellow Springs Farm Native Plant Nursery

Contact: ghertel@wcupa.edu; 610-436-2722; 484-883-3371

NO TRAIL BIKES ARE ALLOWED IN THE GNA – They have increased the length of trails by 300% and are impacting the biodiversity in the GNA.

DOGS NEED TO BE LEASHED – Students doing laboratory assignments have been attacked by unleashed dogs.

WCU Public Safety: 610-436-3311

