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## Gordie News, April 2008

West Chester University of Pennsylvania

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# GORDIE NEWS

(April 2008) 2:4

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-

**Next Workday: Saturday October 18, Gordon Natural Area 10-12PM**

**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](mailto:es631042@wcupa.edu)**

## **:: What's New? ::**

### **Crosstown Traffic...through the Gordon Natural Area**

Traffic density is on the upswing in & around West Chester; with this trend comes an ever-increasing pressure to open the road through the Gordon Natural Area, which would serve as a connection between New Street and High St. A public road through the preserve would have severe, negative impacts on the forest ecosystem. Contrary to intuition, new roads do not thin out traffic, but bring more of it.

The traffic problem is low on the University's "to-do" totem pole. Therefore, people of the community, especially students, have little knowledge of traffic's impact on local neighborhoods and ecosystems. Change must begin at the grassroots level.

A proposition: Could the students, faculty, staff and administration do more together to be good neighbors? Biking is a great option for commuting around campus in the springtime (sometimes, depending on traffic in town, one can reach a destination faster on bike). Walking never hurts either. Carpooling is a great way to save on gas, cut automobile congestion, and spend a few extra minutes with a friend, coworker, or family member. Reducing traffic benefits the campus, town, local neighborhoods, and of course the GNA. Keep the road closed to keep the Gordon intact.

## **:: Check out these Websites ::**

### **The World's Oldest Tree**

[www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/main.jhtml?xml=/earth/2008/04/17/eatree117.xml](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/main.jhtml?xml=/earth/2008/04/17/eatree117.xml)



Don't be daunted by the extensive URL; the article is worth the look. A Spruce discovered in Sweden has been dated at 9,550 years old! Until now, the pine trees of North America were thought to have been the record holders at around 5,000 years old. The tree is as small as it is because technically, it is new growth from a mother tree; each "trunk" from the mother tree lasts about 600 years. The finding is also notable because it was previously thought that Spruce was a relatively new species. Scientists believe the tree may have been imported by the ancient people occupying the region. This particular tree offers insight into climate history.

### **Solutions for Our Future**

[www.solutionsforourfuture.org/site/PageServer?pagename=going\\_green\\_home](http://www.solutionsforourfuture.org/site/PageServer?pagename=going_green_home)

See what other campuses are doing to go green. Read about green education from Indiana State University, see green videos from University of Minnesota, and check out green innovations from University of South Florida. Hopefully, WCU can continue to take a lead in going green as well.

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### **Birds of the Gordon**

This red tailed hawk (*Buteo jamaicensis*) was seen at the gate of the GNA a couple of weeks ago. They are very common in this area, so keep your eyes peeled!



### *White Breasted Nuthatch*

As their name implies, these industrious little birds feed on nuts and other seeds by wedging them between bark and “hatching” away to open them up. They are also unusual in that they



forage for insects by hopping *down* the bark of trees headfirst. The white-breasted nuthatch is usually between 13 and 14 cm in length, has blue-gray wings, a white head and belly and a black stripe running from the head down the nape.

Common to deciduous forests all over the United States, these birds are territorial over foraging grounds and are monogamous for the most part. They nest inside of tree cavities, using shredded bark, fur, and grass to line their nest.

Because these birds are suspicious by nature, they migrate with chickadees and titmice during the winter as a defense mechanism. One study has shown that if titmice were removed from the feeding flock, the white-breasted nuthatch was disinclined to eat from exposed bird feeders (birds.cornell.edu).

### *Eastern Bluebird*

Bright azure plumage and a brick-red belly is the trademark of the famed eastern bluebird. This small thrush is 14 to 16 cm in length, females having more subdued blue hues. This species is common to the mid-eastern United States and summers further north into Canada. They prefer to occupy open space, such as orchards, meadows, or suburban lawns, munching on insects and fruit.

In contrast to the white breasted nuthatch, these bold birds are not afraid to feed and fly in the open. They are highly inclined to make use of nesting boxes, so set some up in your yard and see what happens. A male eastern bluebird will perform an entertaining courtship display for the female by taking nesting materials, such as grass, pine needles, and fur, into a tree cavity or box, then perching above the entrance and waving his wings around as if to say “check it out, we can build a house now!” But of course it’s the female who actually does the nest building.





## Flora and Fauna of the GNA

### Mourningcloak Butterfly

*Nymphalis antiopa* is a fairly common brush-footed butterfly; its velvety wings are midnight



blue with a butter yellow border dotted with pale blue spots. Adults overwinter by actually becoming frozen and hibernating in tree cavities or underneath tree bark; the state is called “cryopreservation.” In the spring, males sun in the open to await passing females. Eggs are laid in bunches on around a single twig, usually a variety of willow. Mourningcloaks rarely feed on nectar, preferring oak sap and sometimes rotting fruit. The butterfly pictured left was observed in Gordon Area on April 12.

### Spring Beauty

*Claytonia virginica* is a low-lying spring ephemeral native to eastern United States. Its petite white flowers are star shaped, and petals are striped with pale pink. Its underground tubers, known as corms, are edible and have a taste similar to chestnuts; they were a staple of the Native American diet. The species does well in a variety of environments, from woodlands to meadow, in somewhat moist soil. When in bloom, the plant is 4-6” tall but can grow to 9-12” after the flowers have died off. Opposite, slender, long dark green leaves complement the white blooms nicely.



### Bloodroot



These white flowers can be found in woodlands and shady floodplains all across the eastern half of the United States. This native species’ name comes from its bright orange colored rhizome (a horizontal stem found underground) in which toxic sap is stored. Bloodroot blooms from March to May and is a favorite snack food for deer. Flowers mature before the leaves and seeds mature in long green pods. The species can grow between 20 and 50 cm tall and the multi-lobed leaves can be up to 12 cm across. It is rarely found in disturbed areas.

## :: Visitors & workers the Gordon Area ::



Pictured left is Jez, with his kids Elliott and Evie. Jez chose the Gordon Natural Area to take them on their first hike.



Pictured above L to R: Justine Hicks, Katie Murray, David Oh, Sun-young Oh, and Sarah England. These students participated in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual Interfaith Tree Planting with the Newman Center and Hillel. A Tree Vitalize grant provided \$5400 for tree planting in the Gordon Natural Area as part of our Forest Restoration Project. Throughout the month of April and into May we are planning to plant 174 trees!



Pictured left are Walt Cressler, WCU Science Librarian, and Catherine Smith, owner of Redbud Native Plant Nursery in Glen Mills, Pa. Many thanks for her donation of trees to the GNA



## :: Snapshots ::



Friday Nov 9, 1973. The article in the Daily Local News highlights the dedication ceremony of the GNA on that Saturday morning.

Trout Lilly blooming in the Gordon Natural Area



Morel fungus (left) and wood thrush (right) seen in the GNA on May 3rd

## 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 200 trees thus far. World target-pledged-planted/the Gordon Natural Area

### Target



4,000,000,000/200

### Pledged

3,477,043,203/200

### Planted

1,997,168,429/136

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

### 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

2008: Redbud Native Plant Nursery, Aramark, Tree Vitalize

Contact: [ghertel@wcupa.edu](mailto: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; if you call 911 tell them you are on Stadium Rd

