

Beaver Tales from Unexpected Wildlife Refuge, Spring 2017

Spring came early to Unexpected this year

The spring peepers and carpenter frogs have been serenading us since the third week of February, the great blue herons appear to be gathering nesting materials and the main pond has been busy with travelers and some who look like they might be staying with us for a while: ring-necked ducks, lesser scaups, hooded mergansers, mallards, American black ducks, wood ducks and Canada geese. A lone swan visited with us for two days, perhaps the same one who came to us last spring. And here, a small mud turtle has just come out of her or his underground den where the winter was spent in hibernation beneath the frost line.



Community outreach

I was excited to have the opportunity to make presentations to two fantastic audiences recently. I spoke about wildlife at the Refuge to a group of grade-school students. We discussed the importance of habitat; the uniqueness of the Pine Barrens ecology; and the behaviors and diets of some of the Refuge residents such as great horned owls, coyotes, red foxes, beavers, raccoons, opossums and others. The kids had great questions and were incredibly smart, attentive and engaged.

I also participated in the Vegetarian Society of South Jersey's monthly speaker series. We discussed the history of the Refuge and the wildlife who have been calling it 'home' for generations.

Beaver kits build a small lodge

Beaver families are very close. Two generations of kits are usually with their parents at a time. Second-year kits help care for their younger siblings; all learn from parents how to fetch, carry, build and repair. When they begin to mature, many will leave their parents' lodge and seek their own living space and begin families of their own.



This fall, some of the Refuge kits built their own, small lodge, right next to their parents', sharing the winter food stored in between. In the photo, you can see the main lodge (left); the winter food store or food 'raft' (middle); and the new, rounded, muddy-colored kits' lodge built this year (right).

Beaver success stories

We had many encouraging interactions in the last few months with local townships and homeowners. We were contacted by a local wildlife enthusiast and beaver advocate, Chuck Garrett. He had been monitoring a few local beaver families (photo is his, showing one of the beaver kits). When he found out that a local township – Mansfield, New Jersey – was planning to kill a family of beavers, he organized a fund-raiser and outreach event to save them. Chuck called upon us for help and together we were able to convince Mansfield Township to wire-wrap trees instead of killing the beavers. We extend our gratitude and thanks to Sean Gable (Mansfield mayor at the time) and Michael Fitzpatrick (township administrator) for their thoughtfulness and compassion. Thank you also to everyone who responded to our action alert on Facebook! Your letters and phone calls helped save this beaver family from certain death. And finally, thank you to Third State Brewing Company in Burlington, NJ, who hosted the fund-raiser to pay for the tree-wrapping materials. They even named an honorary beer for the Mansfield Beavers called "Free the Beaver"!



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Here is a photo of one of the historic trees that Chuck Garrett wrapped for the township, showing the 'work' of the beavers prior to this.



We were also encouraged by discussions with the Environmental Commission in Wenonah, NJ, who reached out to us for help improving a pond-leveler installed at a small beaver dam on a local waterway. Further, we are working with a private lake association in Medford, NJ, whom we will be visiting within the upcoming weeks to help them end their years-long history of inviting trappers to kill beavers on a local lake and to help them handle future 'conflicts' humanely.

Balloons and the environment



The release of Mylar, latex or any balloons into the environment can be deadly to animals, especially balloons that float in the air and eventually break and drop to the earth's surface, often miles from their origin. I find Mylar balloons and their strings on

the ground and in trees and shrubs. Animals can become immobilized or entangled by the non-biodegradable strings and will die of starvation, dehydration or gangrene from strangulation of a limb. Balloons are sometimes ingested by animals, leading to gastrointestinal obstruction and death. Pictured is a small sample of the balloons I have found at the Refuge recently. These balloons should be banned because there is no way to prevent their release into the atmosphere. In the meantime, it is critical that people understand the danger to animals and not allow anyone to use these balloons outdoors regardless of a 'controlled' situation

because 'accidents' will happen. Worse, some people purposefully release these balloons as part of an event. If you hear a local organization is planning a balloon release, urge them to consider a more environmentally friendly event. For more information, see <https://balloonsblow.org/>.

A selection of favorite trail camera images

Our trail cameras captured some beautiful photos recently. Below, left to right, are a red fox, a great blue heron landing on the main pond after dark and a turkey trailing behind companions on one of the trails.



Work with Pinelands Protection Alliance and New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection

Unexpected teamed up recently with the Pinelands Protection Alliance and NJ DEP's Watershed Ambassadors to install trail protections to prevent illegal off-road vehicle traffic which was endangering critical habitat, home to some sensitive, rare and endangered species near the Refuge. The Pine Barrens are a globally unique ecosystem and the Refuge is one part of this beautiful region.



2016-2017 deer patrol



This season's annual and time-honored deer patrol was a great success. We did not see or hear hunters on Refuge land or even nearby. As always, we are grateful to our dedicated volunteer patrollers. These included Judy Horowitz and Howard Rosenblatt (pictured) and Mary Ann Gurka.

Our thanks to them and all the others who came out!

Uncommon plants

The beautiful slender aster (pictured by the main pond), a Pine Barrens native, has been extirpated from many places where it traditionally grew. It is a conservation concern everywhere due to loss of habitat.



Volunteers wanted for our 2017 Earth Day Cleanup



On April 22, we will be hosting our annual Earth Day Cleanup at the Refuge (see a few of last year's volunteers in the photo, 'cheerful' despite the rainy weather). We will start at 11 AM, again geared towards removing trash along a portion of our land bordering a two-lane road. Everything you need to help us gather trash shall be supplied. Afterwards, a vegan lunch will be provided at the

cabin by the main pond. Please RSVP by E-mail to director@unexpectedwildliferefuge.org or call our office number: 856.697.3541.

Lush Fresh Handmade Cosmetics grant to provide this newsletter

The cosmetic company Lush (<https://www.lush.com/>) has given us a grant to subsidize the preparation of our paper newsletter for a period of three years. They have also provided funds for other finite projects and we will be announcing these in the very near future, but you will need access to our upcoming electronic newsletters, Facebook and Web site if you want to learn about these prior to the next paper newsletter.

Helping wildlife and the Refuge today



Unexpected Wildlife Refuge continues to be an inviolate home and sanctuary for hundreds of animal and plant species; some of these

species are highly endangered and our Refuge ensures them the best chance possible for survival. Although we were fortunate this year to receive a small grant from Lush to help with some urgent projects, *this is not the norm and we still depend on the support of our donors to keep the Refuge safe.* We – and the wildlife – could not exist without you. We know that you have limited resources and need to consider which of numerous worthwhile causes to support. We hope, however, that you can find it possible to give us a donation – today – of any amount. *Although we say this in each newsletter, we do desperately need your support right now.* We care for these 767 acres with a very small operating budget and with a paid staff of one and a completely voluntary Council of Trustees. Despite this, even our small operating costs continue to exceed our donations. In addition to donations, we have other ways to support us which can be found on our **Help Us** page on our Web site.

Helping wildlife and the Refuge in the future

Please remember Unexpected Wildlife Refuge when planning your will and estate. It is an easy, effective and lasting way to help the Refuge... and wildlife. When talking with your estate planner, just provide them with our name, address and tax identification number (**23-7025010**). I cannot stress enough: This is one of the most important gifts the Refuge can receive. If you have already included us in your future plans, thank you!

Finally, another plea for your E-mail address in order to reduce costs for the Refuge and the environment. We are able to provide bi-monthly newsletters to those on our E-mail list, so you would receive information that is more timely.

For wildlife everywhere, thank you!



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