



Somerset County Conservancy A Charitable Trust

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Newsletter

Spring 2023

President's Message Spring 2023

Jeff Payne



After finishing a very busy and productive 2022, your Somerset County Conservancy is off to an active start of 2023. The initial phase of the Menser tract addition to Kimberly Run Natural Area is nearly complete and we are working on some improvements for this year. There is a new trail being laid out through the woods from the connecting trail off the White Trail. It will lead through the woods to the picturesque feeder stream coming out of the shrub-scrub wetlands close to its juncture with Kimberly Run and then loop back to the field along Menser Road. We have had preliminary meetings with Partners for Wildlife and have found some interesting possibilities for wetlands creation on the new property. We also plan on erecting some new signs, marking boundaries, and starting some invasive vegetation control.

We have had winter walks at KRNA (unfortunately no snow for snowshoeing this year), a cold but successful Duck ID day at the newly refilled Somerset Lake, and our first Frog Walk. We stocked some beautiful Brook Trout in the stream above the cabin. The Somerset Lake Action Committee has bought and, in conjunction with the Somerset County Parks Board, planted trees at the lake. We are also administering a Reservoirs Habitat Grant that is allowing the PA Fish and Boat Commission to put new shoreline erosion structures and fish habitat boxes in place. Watch out for activities May 10 and 11 at the Lake!

If you have not already done so, take this opportunity to renew your membership to SCC. We all know how important these memberships and donations are to the maintenance of the lands we cherish. We are striving to increase our membership so consider inviting a friend to join or present a friend with a gift membership. Members will get notices of all our activities and invitations to the fall picnic and annual dinner. There are also opportunities to volunteer for various cleanups, tree planting, or trail building parties. Just supply your email with a note if you would like to be informed and we will send out notices-if you are available you can be part of building better lands!



Frog walk attendees on April 1, 2023

Frog Walk at Kimberly Run

In partnership with the Somerset Conservancy, IUP graduate student and founder of PA Woods and Forests, Aaron Capouellez, hosted the first frog walk of the season on April 1, 2023, at the Kimberly Run Natural Area.

Frog walks are nights filled with croaks, trills, and splashes as Aaron entertains and educates the people in our community about the creatures that live in our backyards.

Six people attended the first event in April 2023. This group was enthusiastic about exploring the park at night and observing the woodland creatures and their habitats.

Capouellez played frog calls on his bluetooth speaker to kick off the walk, and attendees did well when identifying the critters' unique breeding vocalizations.

Attendees also jumped at the chance to help Capouellez relocate egg clutches from a drying pond, a crucial part of his conservation work.

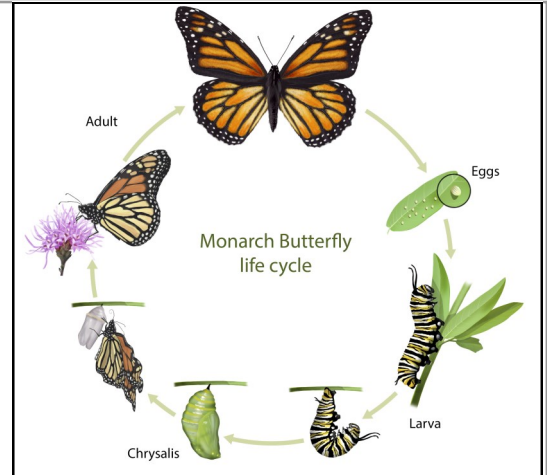
Capouellez encourages his followers to attend his upcoming frog walk at KRNA on July 8, as the weather gets warmer and the animals become more active.

In addition, go to Aaron's YouTube channel: Woods and Forests Media, to see what is coming to Frog Week 2023. "Get ready to experience Frog Week 2023. It's going to be like nothing you've ever seen, and we've ever done," says PA Woods and Forests founder Aaron Capouellez. "Frog week is going to climb to new heights. We got so much more tech, more stories to tell, and get ready to see my passion on a whole other level."

Pollinator Butterflies

By Pam Diesel

Why do we need butterflies and how do they develop? Butterflies go through a process called metamorphosis which means transformation. They begin as eggs (stage 1) laid on plants where they grow into caterpillars (stage 2). They grow as they eat the leaves until they enter (stage 3) the pupa of chrysalis stage. This is the vessel that changes a caterpillar into a butterfly (stage 4). The butterfly slits the pupa and emerges waiting for its wings to dry.



Butterflies are active during the day and pollinate many flowers. Butterflies prefer flowers in clusters or those that provide landing platforms. Red, yellow, and orange flowers attract butterflies, along with those who have ample nectar. Even deeply hidden nectar can be found as they taste with their feet. They prefer flowers like goldenrods and Spirea and are found on every continent except Antarctica.

One of the most visible butterflies is the monarch who feeds on milkweed. The juice of the milkweed plant, once ingested, makes the caterpillars and adult monarch distasteful to birds. Monarchs today are in trouble and are on the endangered species list of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. Presently they are down 70% and they are important in food webs and pollination of flowering plants.

What can we do? We can plant the best flowering plants for monarchs. Those plants are common milkweed, swamp milkweed, and orange butterfly weed. Other plants that are good for monarchs are: purple coneflower, wild bergamot, coreopsis, buttonbush, Joe Pye weed, Ironweed, goldenrod, Zinnia, New England Aster, Verbena, and Mexican sunflower.



Dead trees and fallen leaves are important habitats for butterflies to overwinter. Landscape with native plants. See the list of native plants at DCNR, Department of Conservation and Natural Resources or visit the U.S. Forest Service.



Waterfowl Identification a Success

By Jeff Payne

The SCC, in conjunction with the Conemaugh Valley Conservancy (CVC), sponsored a waterfowl identification outing at the newly refilled Somerset Lake on March 19. The weather was a bit brutal with the actual temperature at 10 degrees and the wind-chill a brisk -1 to start the morning! Twelve intrepid individuals braved the elements and were rewarded with a nice assortment of 20 waterfowl that were using the scattered brush and ample flooded vegetation found in the lake which is now at full pool. The pavilion at the north end and the handicap accessible fishing platform

mid lake, both constructed by SCC's Somerset Lake Action Committee, proved to be handy gathering spots to view the lake. Identification tips were provided by leaders Jeff and Chris Payne for this trip. A big thank you to CVC Director, John Wenzel, for supplying coffee and donuts! The following is a list of water birds found on this outing:

25 Canada Geese, 2 Tundra Swans, 20 Wood Ducks, 4 Blue-winged Teals, 5 Northern Shovelers, 20 Gadwalls, 20 American Wigeons, 12 Mallards, 1 American Black Duck, 3 Northern Pintail, 50 Green-winged Teals, 5 Redhead, 300 Ring-necked Ducks, 25 Lesser Scaups, 15 Buffleheads, 1 Common Goldeneye, 20 Hooded Mergansers, 5 Pied-billed Grebes, 2 Horned Grebes, and 30 American Coots. In addition, 25 other bird species including Bald Eagle, Ring-billed Gull, American Pipit, and Rusty Black bird were noted.



KRNA Workday, Trees down

By Jim Moses

Wind storms in early March brought down 12 large trees on the walking trails at Kimberly Run. It was a much larger job than our trail crew could handle so we scheduled a workday on March 11 at 10:00 am. Eight volunteers arrived and we split into two, four person teams. Bob and Pam Diesel along with Dan Jenkins and Shawn Woltz headed to the Blue Trail blockage and Adam Katrancha, Greg Gdula along with Jim and Meg Moses tackled the trees on the Red-dog Road. Three hours of cutting and dragging branches into the woods we completed the cleanup and Adam even carved some additional seating along the trail.



Fish Stocking 2023

By Jim Moses



Anna Moon
stocking fish.

On March 30th representatives from the Salisbury-Elk Lick Hunting Club delivered Brown Trout raised at the Casselman River Watershed Association's nursery on Mount Davis to our Kimberly Run Natural Area stream just in time for the opening day of trout season in Pennsylvania. Twelve volunteers from the Conservancy carried buckets of trout up and down the stream to distribute them all along the creek. These fish are in addition to the fish stocked by the PA Fish and Boat Commission. Thank You to all our volunteers, Salisbury-Elk Lick Hunting Club and The Casselman River Watershed Association.



2023 Cross Country Ski, Snowshoe or Hike Activities

By Jim Moses

Our winter activities, Cross Country Skiing and Snowshoeing were scheduled on January 29th and February 19th this year. Unfortunately, Mother Nature didn't cooperate with us. Both events became walks to explore the new Menser Preserve trails. In January there were only five participants and in February sixteen turned out to explore the new trails. We climbed to the top of the south loop to where we hope to

build a lookout platform because the views of the Laurel Highlands are awesome, then wound down to the middle loop where the White Trail joins the new addition. Some of the group continued to walk the entire White Trail while others went back towards the parking area. The weather was perfect for a winter hike, a good time was had by all. Thanks to everyone that joined us.



Creature Feature: Cinnamon Fern

By Scott Bastian

There are about 52 species of ferns and allies known from Somerset County, PA, and close to 20 from that list may be observed in the woodlands and wetlands of Kimberly Run. One of the most distinctive of those ferns must be the large **Cinnamon Fern** (*Osmunda cinnamomea*), which derives its name from the rich cinnamon color of the fertile frond that arises from the middle of a clump of sterile green fronds. Each fertile frond has many tens of thousands of spores that will one day ride the wind in a bid to become a new fern nearby; or possibly very far away – dust-like spores can travel great distances. The sterile fronds (the classic "fern leaves") can be quite large at up to 6 feet tall, although half that height is more typical.

Cinnamon Ferns are common around the county – they are a perennial species, meaning the plant lives for years at one spot. They like to have their feet in a bit of moisture and so are normally found in wet habitats that offer partially shaded conditions. At Kimberly Run, you will find them around the outskirts of the central bog. If you wish to drive right up to this species, go to the Laurel Summit Road atop Laurel Mountain where they are numerous beside long stretches of that road in the company of Interrupted Ferns and Bracken Ferns there. A modest number of local fern species are wintergreen, but not Cinnamon Fern. When the cold weather hits in October, they wither for the winter.

The wooly croziers ("fiddleheads") of *O. cinnamomea* shoot up in spring, just in time for returning songbirds to gather the abundant hairs off the croziers with which to line their nests. By late spring and early summer, this species may be recognized at a great distance by the cinnamon-stick fronds present. But, by mid-summer, the fertile fronds have wilted and only the "fern" remains. They are still rather distinctive, but might now be easily confused with young Interrupted Ferns or even Ostrich Ferns. A classic diagnostic distinction is the "hairy armpits" that Cinnamon Ferns possess: there are small tufts of hairs right beneath where the pinnae (leaflets) attach to the rachis (stem). Ruffed Grouse reportedly eat the croziers, but they aren't suitable for human consumption. Only the Ostrich Fern croziers are good food for our plates.

If you'd like to learn more about the local fern flora and how to identify them in the field, make plans to attend the first Somerset County Conservancy fern walk on Sunday, June 25th at 1:00 PM. We'll meet at the primary Kimberly Run parking lot on Craig Road and take an easy amble through the woods. Come and see some hairy armpits for yourself!

Cinnamon Ferns at Kimberly Run



cinnamon-colored fertile fronds



Spring Bird Box Maintenance

By Fred Will

On February 25, a cold Saturday morning, Girl Scout troop 46709, under the leadership of Kristin Fairman, and several family members, gathered at the Menser property to clean out and inspect the newly installed Bluebird boxes. Since the boxes were installed in late summer 2022, they were all empty because the birds were already done nesting. Only one mouse nest was found and cleaned out.



On Sunday, March 5, (boxes should be cleaned out in February to early March because the Bluebirds are already returning) Troop 52906 under the leadership of Brook Borek and family members, cleaned the boxes on the Bluebird Trail at Kimberly Run Natural Area. Of the 22 boxes, 5 contained Bluebird nests and 16 were used by Tree Swallows. It has been suggested this trail should be renamed The Tree Swallow Trail. Of course, Tree Swallows are very beneficial as their diet consists mainly of flying insects (mosquitos).



Over the past years the Girl Scouts have painted and helped install boxes made and donated by the PA Game Commission.

SLAC provides native trees to Somerset Lake Nature Park



The Somerset Lake Action Committee purchased 39 native trees for the Somerset Lake Nature Park. 18 were planted last spring and 21 additional trees were planted in early April this year. SLAC member Larry Adams lead the project. He assembled a group of volunteers from the Somerset County Parks and Recreation Board, Somerset County Conservancy, Somerset Trust Co., and SLAC to dig holes then plant and install guards to protect the new trees.



Somerset County Conservancy

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Pass this newsletter on to a friend and ask them to join.

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— \$ 100 Patron, Club, Organization Member

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