

# Somerset County Conservancy A Charitable Trust

Conserving Land...Enhancing Habitat...Educating the Community

## Newsletter

Fall 2024

### President's Message

Jeff Payne

Things have been hopping at KRNA since our last newsletter. We are seeing many more visitors utilizing the 8 miles of trails through the beautiful woods and fields. We completed the new Bearclaw trail on the Menser side of KRNA and new maps are going up in our kiosks and are now downloadable on the website. We have had many well attended and informative outings including birds, amphibians, spiders, moths, mushrooms, family stream day, summer and fall wildflower walks and a very enjoyable member's picnic. We had several classrooms from Somerset High School utilize our macroinvertebrate and stream health outdoor classes.

The wetland creation project on the Menser side is developing well with many wetland plants growing and the surrounding area has been beautified with wildflower gardens by Girl Scouts. We continued our partnership with the PA Game Commission and they did three prescribed fire controlled burns in some of our fields to help control woody invasives and encourage native grasses and forbs. We continue to pursue other partnerships for help in managing our fields. The Board is nearing completion of an updated Management and Strategic Plan for the KRNA.

Exciting news is we are in the early stages of adding a beautiful wooded 25-acre tract of land that borders and will protect the core areas of KRNA-more news on this will be forthcoming.

[www.somersetcountyconservancy.org](http://www.somersetcountyconservancy.org)

## Creature Feature - White Snakeroot

By Scott Bastian

This is a wildflower worth a second look. Our fall wildflower walk at Kimberly Run a month ago located White Snakeroot (*Ageratina altissima*) and we learned that the plant has quite a history.

Back in the early 1800s, this pretty wildflower from the daisy family used to cause human death rather commonly in the fall, especially in the South. Cows would graze the plant and then transmit the toxic principle —tremetol— through their milk, hence the moniker Milk Sickness. It was a common enough problem that some localities still bear the names “Milk Sick Ridge” or “Milk Sick Holler.” Nancy Lincoln, Abraham’s mother, died at 34 years of age in 1818 from the disease (presumed; along with her aunt and uncle) in the state of Indiana. Young Abe was born in 1809, so he was only 9 years old when he lost his mother to the toxin. [Aside: the Lincoln cent was first issued on his 100th birthday in 1909.]

With some help from a medicine woman in the Shawnee tribe, Dr. Anna Pierce Hobbs Bixby was the first to connect the problem to the plant and was successful at nearly eradicating the problem in her home area by about 1834. She noted that the annual late summer and fall recurrence of the disease coincided with the blooming of White Snakeroot.

Not to worry, fellow milk-drinkers: the problem is not possible from commercial milk today. Even if an occasional cow managed to eat a snakeroot plant, the dilution factor when her milk is mixed with the herd, and then with other herds, eliminates any danger. It could only still occur if you drank hillbilly milk straight from a cow left to forage in the open wooded areas where the plant grows and forbade her access to pasture forage.

The name snakeroot came from a Native American practice of using a poultice made of the plant for treatment of venomous snakebite. While that use held little value, the blooming of White Snakeroot provides an important source of fall nectar to bees and other insects.

If you hurry, you won't even have to wait until next year to see this common wildflower yourself for the first time. A few late bloomers may still be found through October around the county. Get out there and botanize!







## **Prescribed Fire at KRNA**

By Jeff Payne

KRNA contains many different types of habitat one of which is open fields with grasses and wild flowers and forbs. This habitat is important for grassland breeding birds, pollinators (such as bees, butterflies and moths), reptiles and many small mammals. If fields are completely left alone they will start reverting to brush and eventually woods. Unfortunately, the first stage of this succession process in present times is dominated by non-native and invasive shrubs such as autumn olive, bush honeysuckle and multiflora rose. While these shrubs do have some wildlife value, when they get established they choke out many of our native plants.

Controlling the invasives can involve hand removal (very labor intensive), mowing (which helps in short term but can be expensive), chemical control with herbicides (can be effective but costly, labor intensive and needs to be done very carefully), and lastly with controlled burns.

Periodic fire, whether started naturally by lightning or set by man (including Native Americans for 100's of years), can be effective in controlling shrubs and encouraging grass and forbs. The SCC has a cooperative agreement with the PA Game Commission which allows the PGC to do the prescribed burns on our property. Burn plans are carefully devised and approved for each area and large, extensively trained crews perform the burn when weather conditions are most favorable. This year we had burns on September 5 on the Tree Swallow and Overlook fields on the Menser side and on Sept. 10 in the Bluebird field on the Rt. 219 side. This should slow the invasives and encourage the grasses and wildflowers. Various methods will need to be employed over time to maintain this open field habitat type.





## Spring Flower Walk

By Scott Bastian

On Sunday, May 19, the Conservancy hosted a spring wildflower walk at Kimberly Run. The turnout was light, but the flowers were impressive. In the accompanying photo, Meg Moses points towards the star of the show: Pink Lady's Slipper. From late February through October, there is a long parade of

blooms to study in the out-of-doors. One week will always be a little different on the flower roster than the week before or after. We are currently producing a flower checklist for Kimberly Run that may be used for hikers to learn the species they encounter while on our trails.



## Map Case

By Fred Will

A big THANK YOU goes out to Bob McVicker of Somerset Door & Column for making & installing a new map case for the kiosk at the Menser parking lot. The old case was insufficient for the new map Musser Engineering made for us. (also, a new map at the Kimberly Run parking lot), The old case will be installed on the back of the kiosk for additional information.

Pictured here are Jeremy Lensbouer and Ben Weimer of Somerset Door & Column flanking Fred Will from the Somerset County Conservancy.

Conservancy members like Bob McVicker & Ron Musser are always a great asset, and their contributions are greatly appreciated.

The SCC's Annual Meeting and dinner will feature a talk by Chris and Rebecca Payne Snowbirds: Where do "our" birds spend the Winter?" They will have photos and talk about and behavioral differences on wintering grounds and the importance of breeding, migration

As of this printing date and location of our dinner is being determined as the Somerset T up for the good food, comraderie, and interesting information!



## Waterfowl Identification Outing

By Jeff Payne

The Conservancy hosted a waterfowl identification outing in March at Somerset Lake. Migration is always highly dependent on weather and this is especially true for waterfowl. This season we did not get a freeze until mid-January and actually had very good local movements of southbound birds up until January 16, then ice melted by the third week of February and ducks and geese started back north. March 9 was a cold and rainy day and 11 folks braved the weather for the event. Even though we hoped for fallout of large flocks of birds did not occur we saw 12 species of waterfowl and one gull species. All participants appreciated the roofed pavilion and fishing platform constructed at Somerset Lake by the Conservancy's Somerset Lake Action Committee which helped keep us a little dry.

The following birds were sighted: Canada Goose; Mallard; American Wigeon; Gadwall; Wood Duck; Green-winged Teal; Redhead; Ring-necked Duck; Lesser Scaup; Common Merganser; Red-breasted Merganser; and Hooded Merganser.

## Fall Flower Walk

By Scott Bastian

Sunday, September 1, marked our first fall wildflower walk for Kimberly Run -- the weather was beautiful and the species array was very nice for our exploration of the Menser portion of the refuge. The group identified over 40 species of flowering plants. There was a little overlap with our spring findings, but the bulk of the list was different. It was also nice to see our newly created wetland area alive with activity from dragonflies, frogs and wetland flora. We also observed the bear claw marks on a large Beech tree for which the new Bear Claw Trail was named.



of Cardinal Directions Nature Tours. The title of the talk will be "Somerset County's  
about migration of Somerset County breeding birds, where they go, physiological changes  
in stops and wintering areas in conservation.

rust dome room is being remodeled. We will send out an invitation soon. Be sure to sign



# Macroinvertebrates + Students = Fun Education

By Pam Diesel



In May students from Somerset Area Senior High School's environmental science and biology classes completed analysis of Kimberly Run's aquatic life. Students collected organisms from the stream and identified them in the Kimberly Run classroom.

High concentrations of mayfly nymphs were found. Since mayfly nymphs have gills on the outside of their bodies, they can only live in clean water streams. Other macroinvertebrates found were dragonfly larvae, dobsonfly larvae, stonefly nymphs, caddisfly larvae, and damselfly nymphs. Crayfish, clams, and salamanders were also found.

Students are finding both nymph and larva stages of aquatic insects who undergo metamorphosis. May flies, dragonflies, damsel flies, and stone flies undergo incomplete metamorphosis which means they grow through molting and do not pupate. Caddisflies and dobson flies are examples of complete metamorphosis where a pupa is formed.

The nymph and larval stages of aquatic insects are food for many other stream organisms. Their presence indicates Kimberly Run is a healthy stream capable of supporting aquatic life.



## Mushroom Foray

By Scott Bastian

Sunday, September 22, saw the return of a crew from Central Pennsylvania Mushroom Club to lead us in a foray across the grounds of Kimberly Run. Chris Ciccirelli, Dan O'Brien, and Dr. Jeff Territo led the way for CPMC while Tom McCoy lent his expertise as president of the Mycological Association of Washington DC. The weather was beautiful, but not so nice (the best mushrooming weather is wet). In spite of the dry conditions, our group of 18 foragers managed to round up over two dozen species, including several new species for the park inventory.



# SCC's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Picnic

By Bob Hook



Bright sunny skies, warm temperatures, and smiling faces greeted all who attended the Somerset County Conservancy's 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Picnic on Saturday, September 14<sup>th</sup>, at the KRNA red cabin area. Judging by the excellent turnout, the switch from the usual Sunday afternoon picnic to a Saturday event was well received.

SCC president and master grill chef Jeff Payne had two charcoal grills fired up and ready to barbecue as members and guests arrived. There were plenty of tasty bison burgers, provided by Roger Latuch, and hotdogs, compliments of the SCC. Three coolers of assorted beverages, also supplied by the SCC, kept everyone hydrated. As usual, members were asked to bring a covered dish. The variety and quality of these picnic specialties, fruit and vegetable trays, and desserts were amazing. Since this is a milestone year for the Conservancy, a large cake, decorated with the all-volunteer organization's 30th anniversary logo was also enjoyed.



A unique feature of this year's picnic was exhibits from several SCC board members' collections showcasing their interests and experiences in nature. Jim Moses brought a beaver skull and a turtle shell for all to examine. Jeff Payne's display included teeth from an alligator, a bear, and even a whale. Fred Will exhibited two deer antler sheds he had found in the woods, one from a 12-point buck and the other from a 6-point buck. Perhaps the most eye-catching specimen from these exhibits was the beautiful pelt of a 190 lb. timber wolf from Canada. It was impossible to study the

long sharp teeth and gaze into the piercing eyes of this magnificent apex predator without imagining being its prey. Each of these exhibitors did an excellent job of answering the many insightful questions from their enthusiastic audience. As the Conservancy continues to expand its public outreach and education focus, this type of activity will continue.

Bob Hook, this year's picnic committee chair, would like to thank all who attended the picnic, especially those dedicated members who contributed their time and talents to the planning, preparation, and presentation of this signature celebration: Aimee Steele, Dan Jenkins, Sue Moon, Steve Peck, Fred Will, Jeff and Carolyn Payne, Jim Moses, Scott Bastian, Pam Diesel, Sue Hook, and Roger Latuch.

We look forward to seeing all of our 200 SCC Members, as well as their families and guests, at future SCC meetings, programs, work parties, and events.

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# I Live at Kimberly Run

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Find the following words in the puzzle:

salamander

moss

turtle

dragonfly

fern

trout

crayfish

oak

lichen

mayapple

toad

hemlock

mushroom

frog

deer





## Spiders & Moth Workshop

By Scott Bastian

On Wednesday evening, August 14, the SCC did a double header of sorts: an hour of learning about spiders followed by a presentation on "lighting for moths." The special guest for the first half of the meeting was a Black Widow Spider named "Gilda" who has been in captivity for almost a year after

being captured last October within the county. The assembled group of more than a dozen members located a few other spider species near the cottage to observe. We worked towards a proper understanding of just how fascinating

spiders can be and how beneficial these creatures are to the environment. As darkness descended, there was an

arrangement of large lights on white sheets and ultraviolet lights set up to attract moths for study. Unfortunately, the action

didn't begin in earnest until after

the attendees departed. But we

did get to add eleven new species

to the Kimberly Run inventory

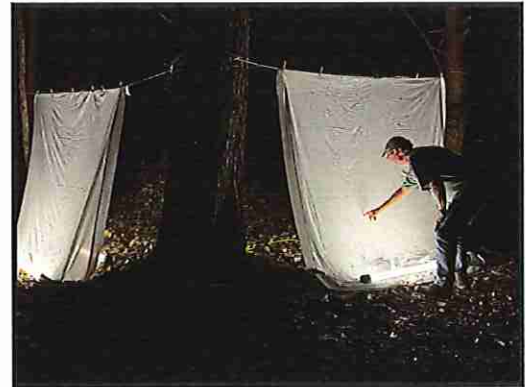
list and get close up looks at a

Luna moth. Perhaps next year

we'll set up the light traps on a

weekend in late July so that visitors can stay a

bit later into the evening.



## Intern

By Jim Moses

Eryn Mckendree is a rising sophomore at the College of William and Mary who is studying Government and Environmental Policy. She plans on pursuing a career in diplomacy and policy-making because she is passionate about improving planetary health and supporting environmental protection. She is most passionate about combating water pollution,

especially in rural regions. Her internship with the conservancy has given her first-hand experience with the work it takes to enact environmental protection, and she will use what she has learned to help her in her career.

**Somerset County Conservancy**

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**HELP US SPREAD THE WORD!**  
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— \$100 Patron, Club, Organization Member

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