



The Leaflet

Newsbrief of
WILLISTOWN CONSERVATION TRUST

2004... Celebrating 25 years of Conservation in the Willistown Countryside!

You Are Invited to the Kick-Off Event!

In 2004, the Willistown Conservation Trust will celebrate 25 years of conservation in our program area with a series of fun and educational events for the community. Details of the yearlong celebration will be forthcoming, but please save the date for our kick-off event. The Strawbridge Dinner Lecture, an annual event that focuses on conservation issues of importance to our community, will be held on Saturday, February 28, 2004 at Radnor Hunt.

We are excited that Steve Hoffman, Director of Bird Conservation for Audubon Pennsylvania, has agreed to be our guest speaker. Steve will present a slide lecture on Audubon's Important Bird Area (IBA) program, a global conservation initiative to identify and protect critical habitat for feeding, breeding and migrating birds. He will focus on why the Willistown countryside is special for birds, and why Audubon Pennsylvania designated 13,000 acres of land in the WCT program area as its newest Important Bird Area.

The Strawbridge Dinner Lecture honors the memory of Polly and Stockton Strawbridge, beloved members of our community and ardent conservationists. Past speakers include Frank Gill of the Audubon Society, Chester County architect John Milner, and renowned author, naturalist and historian Robert McCracken Peck. We welcome suggestions for future speakers.



Audubon staff members visit Pennsylvania's newest IBA. Director of Land Protection and Stewardship Alex Van Alen (right to left) toured the Willistown countryside with Audubon Pennsylvania staff members Rob Blye, Art McMorris and Steve Hoffman. Art's daughter, Lizzie, joined their visit.

"Here is your country. Cherish these natural wonders, cherish the natural resources... the history...the romance, for your children and your children's children. Do not let selfish men or greedy interests skin your country of its beauty, its riches or its romance."

Theodore Roosevelt

The Leaflet is an interim publication to supplement our annual newsletter, THE SYCAMORE. Through *The Leaflet*, the WCT staff will be bringing you interesting and timely information about Willistown Conservation Trust activities, stewardship news and upcoming events.

FOCUS ON LAND MANAGEMENT

Meadow Management

A "feather in our cap"! Last winter, Willistown Conservation Trust nominated the open lands of our Program Area as an Audubon Society Important Bird Area. Audubon confirmed

the nomination in the spring, creating the 13,000 acre Upper Ridley Crum IBA. An IBA is part of a global network of places recognized by Audubon for their outstanding value to bird conservation. Although our local lands are owned by many people, Audubon recognized their

cumulative ecological value to bird life locally, regionally and globally. It is a real testament to the conservation ethic in this community that hundreds of landowners have helped preserve a large enough area to receive this recognition. However, beyond initial preservation, the way these lands are managed is critical to enhancing habitat for birds and other wildlife. *Meadow management is one of the simplest ways a landowner can achieve this end.*

Much of the open land in our Program Area is either lawn or fallow fields that may be relatively void of bird and wildlife. With some simple changes in the mowing regime of these areas a landowner can create beautiful meadows full of native grasses and wildflowers resulting in greatly improved wildlife habitat. Historically, meadows in Pennsylvania were ephemeral breaks in the forest created by fires, wind, disease or other natural or man-made causes. Certain native grass and wildflower species would grow in these areas, and specific birds and other wildlife would use these plants for nesting and foraging. It is the objective of meadow management to strengthen the native plant community, and thereby strengthen the wildlife community as well.

Generally speaking, lawns and frequently mowed fields have a low value to most wildlife. Frequent mowing promotes non-native grasses and does not allow for varying



A properly managed meadow is a beautiful sight to behold.

structural makeup, an essential component of wildlife diversity. In order to best promote native wildflowers and grasses, improve structural variety and increase wildlife habitat, landowners in our area should mow more or less according to one of the following plans:

I. Since most native grasses grow best during the warm weather of summer and into fall, mowing off non-native grasses that grow during the spring will help the natives to dominate. Plan to mow in the middle weeks of July at a height of 8 to 10 inches. Mowing earlier than this will not inhibit the non-native grasses and may also harm wildlife during birthing and nesting seasons. Mowing later than this may not give the warm season grasses and wildflowers enough time to complete their reproductive cycle. Keep in mind that Nature does not work on a calendar. One summer is different than another. If you suspect that birds are nesting in your meadow, mow at the late end; if not, mow a little earlier to promote the native wildflowers.

II. Another option is to mow only in mid-March. This allows a winter cover for wildlife and will not conflict with fledging birds in the summer. If you do follow this schedule, it will likely be necessary to spot mow (mowing only where these plants are) for weeds like Canada thistle, Russian olive and multiflora rose during the summer. It is an

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important aspect of any management scheme to prevent potentially invasive plants such as these from encroaching into the meadow.

By following these plans, or even a third plan of occasionally skipping a year altogether (always spot mow the invasives!), we can create a mosaic of meadows in different stages that will have a great benefit to wildlife in the area. Keep an eye out for more birds looking to the Willistown area to settle down for the summer!

Some native plants to look for include: Grasses: Broomsedge, indian grass, little and big bluestem and switchgrass; Wildflowers: Chickory, black-eyed susan, milkweed.

Native wildlife may include: a plethora of butterflies and other insects like praying mantises, birds such as bluebirds and sparrow species, and in larger fields, meadowlarks, bobolinks and upland sandpipers. Raptors such as northern harriers, great horned owls, American kestrels and red-tailed hawks will make use of these meadows to hunt small mammals and insects.

WCT Program Area Map

The Willistown Conservation Trust Program Area, shown on the map to the right, encompasses more than 27,000 acres in Chester and Delaware Counties. Our program area contains approximately 5,000 acres of protected lands, not including the 3,300 acres of Ridley Creek State Park and Tyler Arboretum. Much of the protected land is the result of the generosity and caring of 120 local landowners who have donated conservation easements over the years, and 12 community conservation partnerships formed to acquire critical lands to hold and resell to conservation-minded buyers.



CONSERVATION ~ A TEAM EFFORT

Conservation Celebration at Crossbrook Farm: A Family Affair!
On June 19, 2003, Deacon and Sheila Shorr and their children invited WCT staff and trustees to Crossbrook Farm to toast the completion of an easement on their 36 acre farm.

We are your community conservation organization working to protect the Willistown area countryside and its special natural and scenic resources. We depend upon annual contributions to continue to do our work. Did you know that, thanks to your generosity, individual annual gifts accounted for 53% of our operating budget in 2002?

In a few weeks, you will receive a request from the Trust for your financial support. We hope that when you read of our many accomplishments in 2003 and our ambitious goals for the future, you will consider a generous gift before year-end. Thank You!

NEWS FLASH:

WCT Website Coming Soon!

The Trust's new and informative website will be up and running by year-end. Please check us out on the web for information on the Trust's mission and history, conservation easements, newsletters, volunteer opportunities and more at www.wctrust.org

Willistown Conservation Trust is a nonprofit, tax-exempt corporation under Section 501(c)3 of the I.R.S. Code. Donations are tax deductible. A copy of the official registration and financial information may be obtained from the PA Department of State by calling toll free, within Pennsylvania, 1 (800) 732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.



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