



Middle Creek in Motion

Fall 2025

Welcoming Water to the Visitors Center

Whether hunters are checking out their harvests during the winter, school groups, events, or admirers of our native plant gardens, the Visitors Center has always been a hub for outdoor enthusiasts.

Despite this, there is always something new that can be done at the Visitors Center to make one's visit even more enjoyable. One idea was the installation of what we are calling the "education pond." Middle Creek is flush with wetlands, but many of them are intentionally out of reach from human disturbance to allow many species a safe haven during their migration and breeding season.



To remedy this, Visitors Center staff pursued the installation of the education pond. We hope to showcase what can be seen further away in our impoundments and wetlands at the Visitors Center on a smaller scale.

Photographers can also be sure to have new photo ops. It won't be long before frogs, dragonflies, and who knows what else will appear to utilize the pond. In fact, it wouldn't be surprising to see a rogue great blue heron or Canada goose show up in the near future.

Looking into next spring, garden volunteers will be refilling the soil around the pond with native plants and the water will clear. We will be sourcing local native aquatic vegetation to go into the pond.



Photo by April Olson

Newsletter in Short

Fall is the season of many things, particularly getting outside more to enjoy less oppressive weather!

With the increased recreation, it's important to always be conscious and respectful of other user groups getting outside to enjoy their day.

An important annual reminder, users of State Game Lands, including Middle Creek, are legally required to wear a minimum of 250 square inches of fluorescent orange from November 15th to December 15th. More hunting updates, including Sunday hunting changes, can be found on page 2.

Other exciting updates are within the pages of our newsletter, so be sure to read every word, and we hope to see you soon on the trail or at one of our events!



Important Sunday Hunting Updates

Act 36 of 2025, signed into law by Governor Josh Shapiro on July 9, fully repealed the ban on Sunday hunting and authorizes the Pennsylvania Game Commission to provide additional Sunday hunting opportunities.

After considering public comment, the Board of Game Commissioners approved a total of 13 Sunday hunting dates within the established 2025-2026 seasons.

On these Sundays, any species that is legally in season may be hunted, with the exception of migratory game birds which are federally regulated.

These changes do not bring any major differences to Middle Creek other than sportsmen having more opportunity to get out in the field and the need for increased awareness for all recreational users.

This year, the controlled archery hunts have an additional day (Sunday after the first Saturday), for a total of 7 as compared to 6 days hunting in the field.

Haven't applied for any of our controlled hunts yet? No worry, there is still time to apply for some of our hunts. The deadline to apply for the controlled flintlock/archery hunt is Friday, October 24th. To apply online, click the "applications" tab on www.huntfish.pa.gov. This hunt will be held on Wednesday, January 7th.

As for waterfowl hunts, one can always apply for a no-show goose or duck blind one week prior to the day of the hunt. On that specific day the following link can be used to apply: <https://pgcdatacollection.pa.gov/SHR>.



Pennsylvania's 2025 SUNDAY HUNTING DATES

SEPTEMBER 14
SEPTEMBER 21
SEPTEMBER 28
OCTOBER 5
OCTOBER 12
OCTOBER 19
OCTOBER 26
NOVEMBER 2
NOVEMBER 9
NOVEMBER 16
NOVEMBER 23
NOVEMBER 30
DECEMBER 7

As established by an Executive Order, pursuant to the authority granted under 58 PA Code and Act 36 of 2025.



APPLY FOR A MIDDLE CREEK WATERFOWL BLIND

2025 DUCK BLIND HUNT DATES

NOVEMBER 25	JANUARY 3
NOVEMBER 27	JANUARY 6
DECEMBER 23	JANUARY 10
DECEMBER 27	JANUARY 13
DECEMBER 30	JANUARY 15
	JANUARY 17

YOUTH WATERFOWL HUNT: NOVEMBER 8

There is a mentored waterfowl hunt opportunity on November 22nd. On the application page, which can be accessed by scanning the QR code in the upper right, you will be asked to fill out a series of questions to determine your eligibility. Applicants must have little to no waterfowl hunting experience, as well as some other requirements. The deadline to apply is October 15th. One can apply online here: <https://bit.ly/45YLMq3?r=qr>

We have general hunting information also available on our webpage, <http://bit.ly/3VldClC>

Regardless of what day of the week, it is important to remember that wearing a minimum of 250 square inches of fluorescent orange is required by law on State Game Lands, including Middle Creek, from November 15th to December 15th. Although not legally required outside of those dates, it is still a good idea to wear some orange as Middle Creek is used for many different forms of outdoor recreation in the fall and early winter. It is always safer when you can easily be seen by others.

Continued Improvements Along the Conservation Trail

Many visitors looking to hike will ask, what is Middle Creek's most popular trail? That would most likely be the Willow Point Trail. It is short, paved, and lots of wildlife can be seen. It's also the main destination to witness the snow goose migration. However, Middle Creek's second most popular trail is probably the Conservation Trail. It's a loop trail, has a vista with a view of the lake, and goes through a diversity of habitats from fields to forests to wetlands.

Since the trail is heavily used and is not paved, lots of care is needed to maintain the trail. In fact, each of our trails has the ability to be "adopted" by someone who regularly hikes here. This helps to keep us informed on trees that may fall over, significant erosion events, and those adoptees can also help to keep vegetation trimmed.

Some work requires a heavier lift, literally. Middle Creek has made an effort over the years to reduce erosion on our trails. For example, when there is a wet spot on the trail, hikers have a tendency to walk around the wet spot to keep their feet dry. This has a negative impact by widening the trail and increasing the area that the puddle of water can occupy. Over time, this can be a big problem for the soil and plant habitat. To fix this, we have been installing "boardwalks" to keep people out of the wet areas.

Other erosion problems can be caused by an area that is heavily trafficked, which reduces or removes vegetation that once held the soil together, and gravity. Trails with a downward slope can become a temporary stream during heavy rainfall events, washing away the trail's soil and create gullies. That was the case on the beginning part of the Conservation Trail. To fix this, a staircase was built that takes foot traffic off the most erosion-prone part of the trail.



Another improvement is updated signage. The Conservation Trail has always had educational signs about some common tree species. Thanks to an Eagle Scout Project by Logan G. of Troop 423 of Hawk Mountain Council, new educational signs have replaced the old ones, and additional ones were added that had not been featured before. Many of the dilapidated wildlife nest boxes along the trail were removed and replaced, which also now have their own signs. We thank Logan and his fellow scouts for freshening up the educational resources along the Conservation Trail!

Editor's note: a HUGE thank you to all who offered their photographs for this newsletter. We received more wonderful photos than could possibly fit!



Sparrows are not the most visually spectacular birds, but they can provide wildlife observers with a challenge perhaps even more than warblers! White-throated sparrows are a common species at Middle Creek that can be observed closely. But identifying sparrows, particularly females, can be difficult. At least 12 species featuring “sparrow” in their name can be found at Middle Creek. Regardless of their lack of flashy colors, many sparrows can be seen during the fall and winter, giving us all a little excitement during a time of year where the outdoors become a little less “decorated” after autumn.

Photo by Michele Laucks

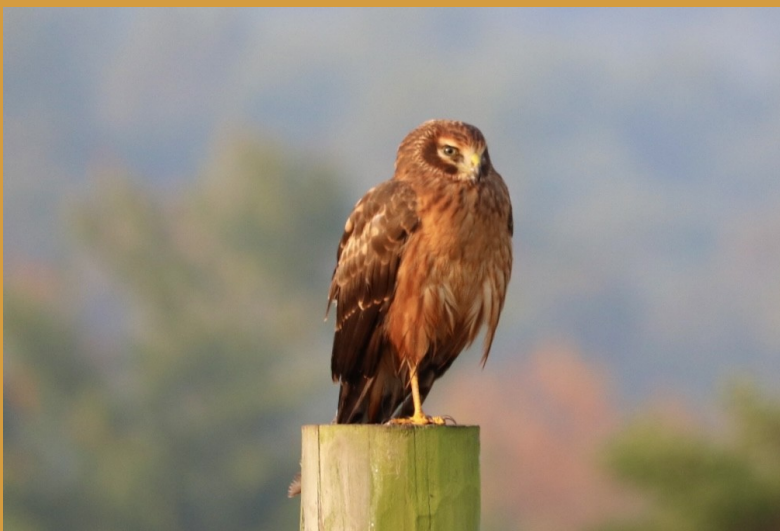
In our Summer 2025 newsletter, we featured a black-crowned night heron perched on a mallard nesting tube. These nesting tubes not only help mallards to raise their young, but they are a popular vantage point for wading birds looking for fish. This photo features a classic autumn scene at Middle Creek as well as a mallard tube sticking up from the water. Can you spot which species of wading bird is utilizing it this time? It's one that is much more common than a black-crowned night heron! They can be viewed in most of the Management Area, but are also common at the lake's spillway.

Photo by Deborah Moehlmann



Oh look, another northern harrier post! Ha, get it? The fall migration through Middle Creek does not exactly mirror that along more traveled ridges and their thermals, such as the Kittatinny Ridge to the north. However, with the Furnace Hills and Middle Creek's diverse habitats, plenty of species still pass through. Others will stick around for the winters, which is now more common due to increasingly mild winters. Although northern harriers can migrate to nonbreeding ranges in the Caribbean Islands and northern South America, they can usually be found year-round at Middle Creek.

Photo by Ali M. Ehly



Emma Migrates South

Middle Creek has a small staff, and it's not hard to meet them. There is always a lot going on and the staff all wear many hats. Therefore, if you've been to Middle Creek for a school program, public event, songbird banding, or just stopped by on a weekend, you have likely met Emma Banta.

Emma was an ever-smiling face that helped in every aspect of work at Middle Creek, but found the most enjoyment working with our numerous bird species. She had also taken a larger responsibility over our bluebird nest monitoring program and our public volunteer projects.

She started working with the Game Commission as an education intern out of our Southeast Region Office in 2022 and was later hired at Middle Creek as a Bio Aide. Most recently, Emma was promoted to an Environmental Education Specialist.

Emma has recently left Middle Creek and relocated seeking opportunities out-of-state. We will greatly miss her happiness and strong work ethic! However, this is the bittersweet nature of parting ways with a good coworker, and we know that Emma will have success in her future endeavors and wish her the best!



Emma with a banded ring-necked duck.

Songbird Banding Season Wrap Up

This year, the Middle Creek Banding Station opened for the fourth season on April 14th for some practice days, much needed after the winter off! The true spring brought several new species for the banding station, and the hot, damp summer brought many long days of banding and bug bites! However, despite the insects and heat, it was an incredibly successful banding season.



A banded common yellowthroat.

Educational banding days were incorporated into the Middle Creek schedule this season, welcoming over 150 members of the public who observed the bird banding process. This turnout was tremendous, and we expect to continue providing education days in the future. Thank you to everyone who participated. We hope you enjoyed your time and enhanced your knowledge of the banding process. Keep an eye out for our banding schedule in next year's spring newsletter!

This year, we banded a total of 396 songbirds of 40 species! Out of this total, we banded 189 gray catbirds, that's 47% of newly banded birds! We also had a total of 127 recaptures, or birds banded in previous years. New species for this year include the Acadian flycatcher, mourning dove, red-winged blackbird, white-crowned sparrow, and yellow warbler. While many of these birds are often seen or heard around Middle Creek, this was the first year we were able to band these birds, and we were thrilled! **(Continued on Page 6)**

Songbird Banding Season Wrap Up (Continued from Page 5)

Some of our recapture highlights for this year include recapturing three birds originally banded as adults in 2022 (gray catbird, ovenbird, American robin). That means these birds are now at least 5 years old! This data is incredible when you consider how many challenges birds face each year. Between migration, predators, window strikes, vehicles, and outdoor cats, birds have many obstacles. Additionally, the fact that they returned to Middle Creek tells us that our habitat is providing valuable resources for their breeding, which is a win for us.

Since the opening of the Middle Creek banding station in 2022, we have banded 1740 birds of 67 species! The top five species banded at Middle Creek are the gray catbird (41% of newly banded birds), common yellowthroat, ovenbird, white-throated sparrow, and the American robin. The banding station also recaptured 425 birds, giving us a 20% recapture rate!

Overall, this was a very successful year at the Middle Creek banding station. We look forward to an even more productive season in 2026 with increased educational opportunities and, of course, more birds!

897 Parking Area Complete!

Several wildlife viewing opportunities and habitat enhancements have been in the works recently and detailed in past newsletters. One has recently been completed: the parking area along PA 897.

There are several shallow water impoundments along PA 897 between Kleinfeltersville and Chapel Roads that previously required people to either stop on 897 or pull off onto private property to view any wildlife using these areas. This new parking area allows visitors to safely pull off and park for better viewing opportunities in the area.

These wetland areas host a large diversity of waterfowl during winter stopover and spring migration as well as numerous shorebird species when mudflats are exposed during drawdown periods. In an effort to provide a safe place to view these areas, the local habitat and game lands maintenance crew has built a parking area where visitors will be able to get off 897, exit their vehicles, and deploy their spotting scopes and binoculars!

While heading east along 897, this is an additional birding location before taking the next right onto Chapel Road to park and walk out to the viewing platform. Vice versa, if traveling west, this can be a stop after checking out the viewing platform.

Please help us keep this area clean by taking any trash home with you. As always, report any littering or suspicious activity to our centralized dispatch at 1-833-PGC-WILD.



Upcoming Events at Middle Creek

September 22nd - December 27th

Sunday, September 28th from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.: National Hunting and Fishing Day

Learn about hunting and fishing, while enjoying the outdoors and talking to over 35 organizations!

Wednesday, October 8th at 6:30 p.m. in the Auditorium: More than Just a Good Time: Pennsylvania's Outdoor Economy

Outdoor recreation is more than just a good time, it's a growing industry in Pennsylvania and a strategic tool for development. Thousands of outdoor recreation businesses large and small create jobs, produce outdoor recreation products, and provide experiences that fuel our economy. Outdoor recreation improves the quality of life in our communities, helps to retain youth, attract workers, and create entrepreneurial opportunities. Next time you venture into Pennsylvania's great outdoors, know that there's a diverse industry supporting outdoor recreation experiences and that you are supporting Pennsylvania's outdoor recreation industry.

Saturday, October 11th from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.: 2025 Big Sit! with the Lancaster County Bird Club

Join LCBC member Bruce Carl anytime throughout the day on the hillside just up from the Visitor Center along the Conservation Trail for the 2025 Big Sit! The Big Sit!, a semi-competitive one-day bird watching event started in 1992 by the New Haven Bird Club, challenges participants to spot as many bird species as possible from a 17-foot circle. Since 2014, Bruce has hosted LCBC's Middle Creek Big Sit! annually, using it as a fundraiser to keep the Visitors Center's feeders full and support LCBC's youth scholarship program. Bring your binoculars and observe the birdwatching action!

Wednesday, November 12th at 6:30 p.m. in the Auditorium: History of Conservation and Conservation Law Enforcement in Pennsylvania

This program will provide a history of Conservation Law Enforcement in Pennsylvania and in the United States. A special focus will be on the rise and fall of wildlife populations through the centuries and an overview of the hero's that fought to protect wildlife in our nation. There will be an additional overview and brief history of our federal and state wildlife agencies with a focus on the Pennsylvania Game Commissions extensive history. This event is part of America's 250th Anniversary Celebration.

Saturday, November 15th at 11:00 a.m.: Avian Anatomy

Everyone, from waterfowl hunters to avid bird watchers, have wondered how birds are able to fly, float on water, and perform so many other seemingly impossible tasks. Join staff from the Wildlife Futures Program to get an inside look at bird anatomy.

Note: this presentation will include utilizing deceased birds for demonstrations. Attendees should be prepared for viewing dead animals and organs. Only birds testing negative for avian influenza will be used in the program.

Wednesday, December 10th at 6:30 p.m. in the Auditorium: It's the most wonderful time of the year - Christmas Bird Count Season!

Join us to explore the fascinating history of the Christmas Bird Count (CBC), the world's longest-running community science survey, which began in 1900 as a new tradition to replace Christmas "side hunts," where participants competed to see how many birds they could kill. This year marks the 126th CBC, and the Lititz Christmas Bird Count, covering Middle Creek and the surrounding area, is one of the oldest in the nation, dating back to 1905, even before Middle Creek existed. Discover how this cherished event brings bird enthusiasts together to celebrate conservation and community. Learn about the CBC's origins, its influence on birding in Lancaster County and beyond, and how bird occurrences in this area have evolved dramatically since the first count was conducted.

Upcoming Events at Middle Creek

September 22nd - December 27th (Cont.)

Saturday, December 27th at 10:30 a.m.: Winter Bird Walk and Christmas Bird Count Scouting!

Join Lancaster County Bird Club for a field-based complement to their Dec. 10 lecture we are hosting on the Christmas Bird Count. This hands-on birding experience will allow participants to explore Middle Creek's winter landscape and observe the season's local bird species while gaining insight into the process of counting birds for the CBC. Whether you're a seasoned birder or new to birding and CBCs, this outing offers a unique opportunity to connect with nature and learn how birding data is collected in the field each year for this community science survey.



SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28
11 A.M. - 5 P.M.

MIDDLE CREEK WILDLIFE MANAGEMENT AREA

Join us to learn about wildlife, hunting, and fishing with demonstrations, talks, and hands-on activities. There's never been a better time to get outdoors and learn about activities that are enjoyable for everyone from all backgrounds and skills sets.



- Habitat Hayride
- Deer Processing Demo
- Fly Tying
- Muzzel loader Building
- Decoy Carving
- Falconry
- Livetalks
- Archery Shooting
- Live K-9 Demos
- Simulated Target Shooting
- Live Demonstrations

OVER 35 DIFFERENT VENDORS | FOOD TRUCK ON-SITE
DONATE TO WILDLIFE CONSERVATION FOR YOUR CHANCE TO WIN RAFFLE PRIZES!

717-733-1512 | Middlecreek@Pa.gov | pa.gov/pgc

Contact us! Have a question or comment about Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area? We would love to hear from you!
Please contact us at middlecreek@pa.gov.