



Middle Creek in Motion

Spring 2025

New Wildlife Viewing Platform Opens to the Public

Get your binoculars and spotting scopes ready! Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area is proud to announce the opening of a new viewing platform overlooking our second largest shallow water impoundment structure known as Risser's; second only to the main lake. This latest addition to our facilities provides visitors with enhanced opportunities to observe the diverse wildlife that calls Middle Creek their home or stopover site. During the spring migration (Feb.—April), this is a great location to see numerous species of ducks and a lot of shorebirds when mudflats are exposed during drawdowns in late summer to early fall.

The platform, which mirrors the design and dimensions of our popular Halde-man Island structure on Game Lands 290 in Dauphin County, offers unparalleled views of the impoundment and surrounding habitat. The platform gives visitors additional viewing opportunities into surrounding areas that are closed to public access, creating more opportunities to connect with nature and observe wildlife in their natural environment.

We've designed this platform with accessibility in mind, and it therefore includes special features. The pathway to the platform is wheelchair-friendly with a ramp up to the main platform. An ADA-compliant 20x magnification viewing scope is available at an appropriate height. Installed on the platform itself, there is a special color blindness-enhancing binocular featuring Enchroma Technology.

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Photo by David Sonnen

Newsletter in Short

A cold, dry winter with preventative measures taken for highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) resulted in unique challenges for Middle Creek. However, we hope to have lots of good news on the horizon!

In this newsletter, we detail a new wildlife viewing platform opened to the public and we begin our popular public events.

If you're interested in how the season's snow goose migration went by the numbers, or how the annual controlled waterfowl hunt went, that information is also inside.

As temperatures warm and migratory birds return, be sure to stop by and see what's new! We hope to see you around Middle Creek sometime soon with binoculars in hand!



Conclusion New Wildlife Viewing Platform Opens to the Public (Continued from Page 1)



This strategic location allows for easy access while minimizing disruption to wildlife habitats and maintaining the natural beauty of the area. The platform is off of Chapel Road and only accessible by foot and bicycle traffic. Access is permitted to the public March 1st through September 30th, the same time period the Wildlife Drive and Chapel Road are open.

We invite everyone to visit and experience this exciting new addition to Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area. Whether you're an avid birder, nature photographer, or simply enjoy connecting with nature, the new viewing platform offers a fresh perspective on the remarkable ecosystem that thrives within the management area.

Summary of Middle Creek's 50th Controlled Waterfowl Hunt

January 18th marked the end of the 2024-2025 waterfowl hunts here at Middle Creek. The season proved to be a tough one as drought conditions hampered the start of the season and frigid temperatures made for an icy end to it.

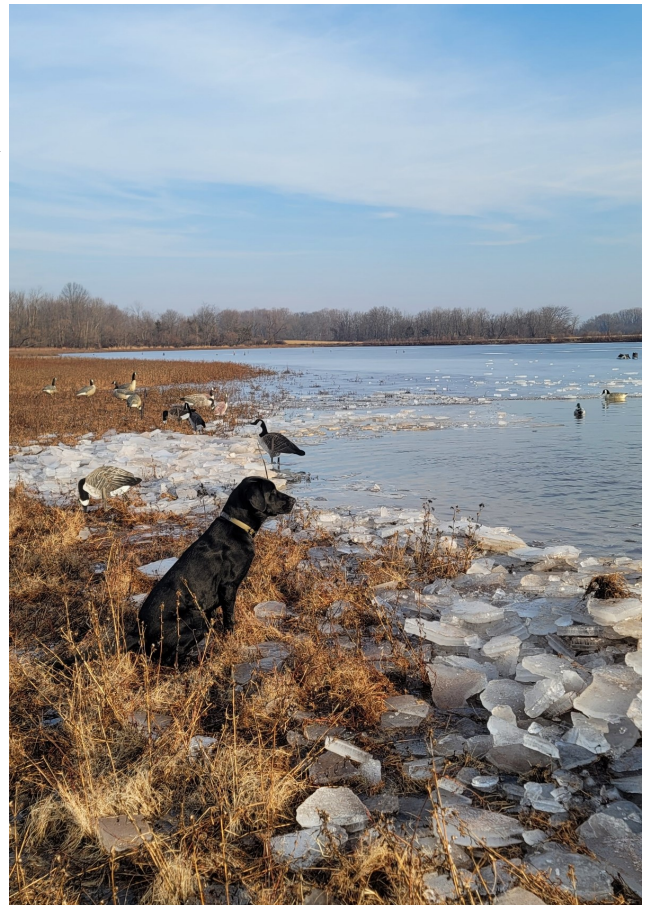
Despite the conditions, 498 hunters braved the cold and opened water holes in the impoundments throughout the season. Those

same hunters fired 648 total shots and managed to harvest 37 ducks and 35 geese. The duck harvest was not what we are used to seeing the last few years but was largely attributed to the lack of water and then solidly frozen water later in the season. The duck harvest consisted of 17 black ducks, 5 mallards, 5 common merganser, 5 American green-winged teal, 2 wood duck, 2 gadwall and 1 mallard/black duck hybrid.

The goose hunting was slower than in years past as well but still provided successful outings and some exciting harvests. Perhaps the most interesting harvest of the season was 3 geese from the Atlantic Population. Generally, we determine this by the weight and bill length of the goose but one of these geese happened to be banded and we were able to confirm our suspicions. As it turned out the goose had been banded in Quebec in 2022. In addition to the 35 Canada geese, hunters brought in 3 snow geese as well.

One exciting addition to Middle Creeks waterfowl hunting this year was a new mentored waterfowl hunt that took place on December 28th. The event began with an orientation and time at the shooting range and was completed with a morning of hunting. The same frigid and icy conditions made it a tough day, but one lucky hunter scored her first duck, and everyone got a taste of what waterfowl hunting is all about. If you have ever wanted to try out waterfowl hunting, keep an eye out for the mentored waterfowl hunt next fall.

Thanks to all who participated this year and have been a part of Middle Creek's conservation story for years!



Middle Creek's Persistent Invasive Plants

Managing nearly 6,000 acres of habitat is a challenge, especially for a small habitat crew tasked with managing that plus all other Game Lands in Lancaster and Chester Counties. Luckily, our habitat management staff are very knowledgeable about what they do and have the tools to accomplish their mission!

One seemingly never-ending task the habitat crew at Middle Creek faces is managing invasive species. Besides experimenting with common carp removal from the main lake these past few summers, habitat management work usually focuses on plants, particularly ones that can become very aggressive in our early successional habitats (fields).

Two particular species are the focus of today's article: autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) and Chinese silver grass (*Miscanthus sinensis*).

Autumn olive is well established at Middle Creek. At one time, many actually planted this species because deer numbers were low long ago and, before the true value of native plants was better understood and communicated, it was thought to benefit deer habitat. It's nearly ubiquitous in fields and along the edges of fields and woodlands. As is common with many invasive shrubs, it's an early species to leaf out in the spring. It also produces small red berries in the fall. They are very difficult to pull out of the ground, and can resprout after infrequent fires. Another annoyance for the land manager or homeowner is that the bushes have infrequent,



Autumn olive in spring, late summer, and winter. Photos by Erik Schiff, John Dziak, and peakaytea, respectively.

long thorns that will result in a loud "ouch!" if you aren't paying attention. They provide little to no benefit to wildlife compared to other species that may form thickets in fields, like sumacs, brambles, or pokeweed.



***Miscanthus*, easy to ID during the dormant season, taking over a field at Middle Creek off of Rt. 897.**

To manage autumn olive, fire is often used to make them more accessible. Once other vegetation is topkilled (meaning above ground vegetation is dead or burned away from the fire), autumn olive is easier to reach, and we will cut them back and treat with herbicide. Other options are using mowing that handles larger vegetation. Ultimately, herbicide is a necessary tool, otherwise the shrubs grow back with a vengeance! Left totally unchecked, they can take over entire fields. Autumn olive fixes atmospheric nitrogen and increases the levels of nitrogen in the soil, which can actually throw off the soil chemistry to the detriment of other native species. Some, if left unchecked, can grow up to 10 feet tall.

Chinese silver grass, or what we refer to by its genus *Miscanthus* since there are hybrid versions and other species sold at nurseries, is another species starting to take over our fields. They generally grow in bunches that have a larger diameter each year and can grow over 7 feet tall, particularly in landscape settings. Not as common at Middle Creek yet, it's still unfortunately a popular landscaping plant and seeds can drift on the wind into our fields, or wind up here when people illegally dump yard waste on Game Lands. Once established, it's hard to remove.

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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!



The lack of snow goose viewing opportunities due to avian influenza restrictions this year resulted in an unlikely photogenic celebrity. Beginning in mid-February, a skunk began appearing every afternoon around the Visitors Center to feed. Many stopped to take photos. Some unexpected visitors were shocked to suddenly find themselves near a skunk. Just because an animal that is normally more active at dusk/dawn or at night is out during the day, doesn't always mean it's unhealthy. Skunks breed in the late winter and can be much more active at different times of day during this time.

Photo by Kelly Schwartz

For once, a warbler that is not difficult to identify! Maybe not, don't get it confused with the golden-winged warbler, which is covered in much less yellow (or gold?). Anyway, even when this bird is flying fast through a thicket, the yellow warbler easily sticks out to unexpected observers in spring and summer. Sixty percent of this bird's diet is insects, this is another reason to plant native shrubs, especially those that flower and attract pollinators they can feed on, like this cherry tree. Something for advanced (or crazy) birders is the challenge of identifying the 35 subspecies of yellow warblers!



Photo by Michele Laucks



One of the spring highlights, after the snow goose craze begins to fade, is the sighting of short-eared owls. Most of us are used to owls nesting and resting in trees. How many watched cartoons as a child that featured an owl sticking its head out of the cavity in an old tree? Uniquely, the short-eared owl is a species adapted for grasslands. It is often found in similar habitats to the northern harrier. Sometimes observers will see a northern harrier vanish into the grass at sunset while the short-eared owl rises! A Pennsylvania endangered species, this owl is losing habitat to development. Mostly from the loss of farms.

Photo by Deborah Moehlmann

Middle Creek's Persistent Invasive Plants (Continued from Page 3)

As most grasses typically do, it can grow back quickly after a fire, and mowing may just push back or prevent the production of seeds. Ultimately, cutting and spraying with herbicide is the best way to remove them. Seeds can travel far from the wind, and it can become a game of whack-a-mole if the ultimate source near Game Lands are not removed. There are plenty of aesthetically pleasing native bunch grasses that can replace them in yards such as big bluestem, northern sea oats, switch grass, and more. Not only do those grasses look just as nice, many species of caterpillars rely on those grasses for food and birds will feed on the seeds. There is a net positive for you and wildlife when you plant them. No insects are able to feed on *Miscanthus*.

Although the battle continues here at Middle Creek, the more local landowners remove and replace these troublesome invasive species on private lands, the more public lands and your own backyard wildlife will benefit!

New Event Coming to Middle Creek in June

The Pennsylvania Game Commission has produced many items through the years that are desired by fervent collectors. Those include old hunting licenses, state duck stamps, Game News magazines and Working Together for Wildlife Series patches, to name a few.

Rarely, though, have those collections been showcased in one place.

That's about to change. From 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday, June 28, Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area will host a new event called the "Pennsylvania Conservation Collectables Expo." There, vendors can connect with the public to buy, sell, trade and showcase various historical and collectable conservation-themed memorabilia. Visitors can expect a wide variety of collectables, such as publications, patches, pins and posters offered at different times by government conservation agencies, hunting and fishing clubs, and numerous conservation organizations.



Additionally, current Game Commission merchandise will be offered for sale during this event.

Interested vendors must pre-register to participate. Vendor applications and additional information about the event can be picked up at the Middle Creek Visitors Center or found online at <https://bit.ly/3XEn6A7>.

Middle Creek Law Enforcement Updates

Early spring brings about different law enforcement duties at MCWMA. Among those is the patrol of closed areas to prevent unlawful intrusion that disturbs wildlife and waterfowl that are resting for the next leg of their northern migration. During the special closures brought about by HPAI there were quite a few citations issued to people for their unlawful entry. Please bear in mind that there are areas within MCWMA that entry is unlawful year round. Please be aware of and obey posted signage. While MCWMA exists for wildlife and people to enjoy it, the focus is on wildlife so know that laws and regulations are in place to ensure wildlife protection.

Recent law enforcement related incidents in the area include numerous violations of possession of drugs, drug paraphernalia and alcoholic beverages, drone usage, as well as one case where an individual fled on foot from a game warden who subsequently searched the vehicle and located drugs, drug paraphernalia, stolen credit cards and a firearm.

At MCWMA, wildlife viewers and photographers are an integral part of maintaining harmony between wildlife and people by reporting violations that they witness. Please be a good witness and take photos or notes concerning violations and then reporting them promptly to the PGC Central Dispatch at 833-742-4868 or by calling the Visitor Center at 717-733-1512.

Soon there will be countless numbers of juvenile mammals and birds in the fields and forests of MCWMA. Please leave young wildlife alone and do not touch them. If there is unusual behavior please report it as soon as possible. Many times a game warden can respond while you are still there to help in locating it and possibly transporting it to a wildlife rehabilitator. State Game Wardens routinely patrol MCWMA to ensure that wildlife and people stay safe so everyone can enjoy this amazing area.

Monitoring Avian Productivity and Survivorship (MAPS) Banding 2025

Ever wonder how and why scientists track bird populations and movements? Come check out our MAPS songbird banding station! During your visit, biologists with the Pennsylvania Game Commission will capture, band, and record data on songbirds flying through Middle Creek.

The following dates are open for members of the public to join us during the banding procedure. Visitors are welcome from 9:00 am until the end of banding, typically around noon. Please join us, ask questions, and learn more about bird research in the state of Pennsylvania.

If you plan on joining us on any of the following dates, please RSVP using the QR code on the right so we can plan accordingly. Please note that a limited number of spots are available for banding days. There is no registration required for May 10th. If you register but can no longer attend, please call the Visitors Center. Thank you, and happy birding!



MAPS banding viewing opportunities sign up.

PUBLIC BANDING DAYS	RAIN DATES	BANDING TIME
Saturday, May 10 th – World Migratory Bird Day No RSVP Needed	N/A	Event time: 10 am – 2 pm
Tuesday, June 3 rd	Wednesday, June 4 th	9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Thursday, June 26 th	Friday, June 27 th	9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Tuesday, July 15 th	Wednesday, July 16 th	9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Wednesday, July 30 th	Thursday, July 31 st	9:00 am – 12:00 pm

Spring Migration Summary

This year's spring snow goose migration was nothing like one would have expected. In previous years, we had record-warm winters, resulting in earlier migrations with lower goose numbers. Low numbers were not due to a lower overall population of snow geese, but most likely due to the lack of ice and snow both at Middle Creek and to our north. Such conditions often keep geese to the south where it is ice and snow-free and prevents them from continuing their northern movements.

In the 2024 spring migration, snow geese arrived at Middle Creek in early December and peaked on February 27th with 62,000 birds. Pennsylvania's average temperature last February fell around 33 degrees Fahrenheit, with thin ice that thawed quickly, if we had any ice at all. There was also little mention of avian influenza in the southeastern portion of Pennsylvania, however some birds did test positive and have been since the highly pathogenic strain, currently impacting birds, first started getting detected in 2022

2025 made things interesting. With the first "true" winter the southeast has experienced in several years, Middle Creek experienced several inches of snow, ice, and overall cold temperatures. Snow geese didn't appear in high numbers until late January, peaking on February 18th with roughly 100,000 birds. In Pennsylvania, February's average temperature for 2025 was 24 degrees Fahrenheit, making it almost 10 degrees colder than last winter. Our lake was nearly ice covered for roughly two months.

In addition to a much colder winter, southeast Pennsylvania also experienced a highly pathogenic avian influenza (HPAI) outbreak that impacted Middle Creek and neighboring counties. The migration started off with a high publicity mortality event in the Lehigh Valley that resulted in many dead snow geese that prompted the Game Commission to respond. This outbreak resulted in the closures of several snow goose viewing areas at the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area. This was to reduce exposure of the virus for people and to bolster biosecurity for local poultry operations

Predicting anything regarding wildlife movements, habits, and behavior is always tricky. However, one can confidently say that no one could have predicted this year's spring migration to be so unique and challenging. The Middle Creek staff would like to extend a big thank you to our visitors for being so patient and understanding this snow goose season. We hope you visit us for the 2026 spring migration or any time of year! Please don't forget that there is always something to see here at Middle Creek, no matter what time of year you visit!

Upcoming Events at Middle Creek

March 20th - June 28th, 2025

Wednesday, April 9th at 6:30 PM in the Auditorium: Hawk Mountain: Local to Global Raptor Conservation

Join us for a fascinating journey into the lives of raptors and the people that study them with the President of Hawk Mountain Sanctuary Association. Hawk Mountain is the first raptor conservation organization in the world and from its humble beginning it has grown into a global influencer in raptor conservation through science, education, and land stewardship. Hawk Mountain initiated a trainee program in the 1980's that has now had trainees from 78 countries around the globe.

Saturday, April 25th at 10:00 AM: Middle Creek Geology Ramble

Join the Department of Conservation and Natural Resources' State Geologist on a guided hike to explore Middle Creek and the Furnace Hill's geologic history. The hike will begin at the Visitors Center and conclude at the vista at the top of the Valley View Trail. Explore geology both close-up and from afar!

Saturday, May 10th from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM: World Migratory Bird Day

Learn about and celebrate the wonders of bird migration, the threats they face, and how you can help! All while meeting local organizations that contribute to bird conservation! Food will be available from the Lancaster County Bird Club.

Wednesday, May 14th at 6:30 PM in the Auditorium: Olympic Medalist Casey Kaufhold's Story from the Backyard to the World's Biggest Stage

Casey Kaufhold shares her story about how she developed from a young hunter and recreational archer to an Olympic bronze medalist. A native to Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, Casey's life has always been surrounded by archery due to her parents' involvement of running and founding Lancaster Archery Supply. She went on to compete in the Tokyo 2020 Olympics and come home with a bronze medal from the Paris 2024 Olympics. Casey will discuss her relationship between the love of bow hunting and the passion for competing.

Wednesday, May 21st at 6:30 PM in the Auditorium: Allegheny Woodrats on the Road to Recovery in Pennsylvania

Allegheny woodrats are a native species found only in rocky habitats along the Appalachian Mountains. Unfortunately, the species has experienced significant population declines in the past two decades and is listed as a state-threatened species in Pennsylvania and a regional species of greatest conservation need. To recover the species and avoid federal listing, Pennsylvania Game Commission staff and partners have been working diligently to address the three primary drivers of Allegheny woodrat decline: decreased food availability, disease, and habitat fragmentation. This talk will discuss the Allegheny woodrat recovery program in Pennsylvania.

Wednesday, May 28th from 5:00 to 7:00 PM at the Willow Point Archery Range: Women's Pop-up Event

Ladies' evening at the archery range! All equipment provided!

Saturday, May 31st at 10:00 AM: Backyard Bird Feeding Basics

Learn the basics of healthy bird feeding! Different types of bird feed, suet, and birdfeeders will be discussed and on hand to look at. Keeping feeders clean and proper placement are also important factors in successful feeding to keep our feathered friends happy, as well as deterring those pesky squirrels. Additionally, some good native plants will be discussed that can be planted to benefit birds year-round.

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Upcoming Events at Middle Creek

March 20th - June 28th, 2025 (Cont.)

Wednesday, June 11th at 6:30 PM in the Auditorium: Camera-Trapping for Wildlife Research

The use of remote automated cameras is a non-invasive and cost-effective way to survey and study wildlife in the field. Since the advent of digital photography, the use of remote cameras in wildlife research has exploded. In this talk, Dr. Haines will review how he has used remote cameras to study wildlife and what new efforts are underway to use cameras in wildlife research.

Wednesday, June 11th from 5:00-7:00 PM at the Willow Point Archery Range: Public Archery Event

Open to everyone of all ages! All equipment provided!

Saturday, June 21st at 10:00 AM: Watercolor Workshop

Join watercolor artist and art educator Taryn Showalter to learn how to create a landscape painting. We will go over basic watercolor techniques to create water, trees, and sky. Each person will create their own landscape painting of Middle Creek. No experience necessary, recommended ages 14+. *This event is limited to 15 attendees, and you must RSVP in advance. Necessary materials will be provided. Please Call Visitors Center to RSVP.*

Wednesday, June 25th from 5:00-7:00 PM at the Willow Point Archery Range: Public Archery Event

Open to everyone of all ages! All equipment provided!

Saturday, June 28th from 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM: Pennsylvania Conservation Collectables Expo

Join us for a NEW event where collectors can showcase their Game Commission, Fish and Boat Commission, and other conservation organization memorabilia of items such as patches, licenses, Game News, PGC art, pins, old maps, books, posters, etc.



World Migratory Bird Day
Shared Spaces
Creating Bird-Friendly Cities and Communities

Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area
100 Museum Rd, Stevens, PA 17578

SATURDAY, MAY 10TH | 10AM - 2PM

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.