



# Middle Creek in Motion

## Summer 2025

### *Celebrating Conservation Heritage with a New Event*

Middle Creek is hosting a new event this summer, one that will hopefully be an annual occurrence that grows with time: the Pennsylvania Conservation Collectables Expo.

This event seeks individuals and organizations who have created and collected items over the years that help to tell Pennsylvania's diverse and rich of conservation through collectable items such as patches, licenses, publications like the Game Commission's *Pennsylvania Game News*, and many more.

Several private collectors from across Pennsylvania and beyond are bringing their collections of Pennsylvania conservation heritage and memorabilia. Those showcasing their collections will also have some or all of their items available for purchase or to trade.

In addition to private collectors, there will be several statewide conservation organizations selling their selection of collectable items such as the Keystone Trails Association, Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology, the Ned Smith Center for Nature and Art, the Pennsylvania Society for Ornithology, Hawk Mountain Sanctuary, and the Conservation Officers of Pennsylvania.

We will have a table of FREE back issues of *Pennsylvania Game News*, and we will also be selling Game Commission items normally only in stock at our Harrisburg Headquarters or available online in addition to the normal items sold at the Visitors Center.

This will be the biggest celebration of Pennsylvania's conservation heritage at Middle Creek since the opening of the Conservation Heritage Museum in 2022.

Food and refreshments will be available for purchase at this event courtesy of the Lancaster County Bird Club and proceeds will go towards the Bird Club's initiatives within Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area.

The event will be **Saturday, June 28th from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.**



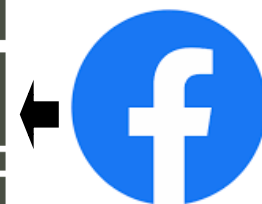
Photo by Carol Ecker

### Newsletter in Short

*This spring brought wet conditions that finally brought our area out of a severe drought due to a long-running deficit of rain water stretching back to October. Not only has this spring seen healthy growth of vegetation, but it filled up all of our impoundments to better set the stage for controlled drawdowns for migratory birds and to grow the food waterfowl benefit from.*

*This summer is action-packed, as usual, with new faces at the Visitors Center and new events on the calendar. Be sure to stop in and see what is new and say hello.*

*We have a new event on June 28th, as well as our regular monthly Outdoor Explorer Series, Speaker Series, and summer archery programs that are free for all to attend.*



## ***New Faces at the Visitors Center***

We recently had some new additions to our staff here at the Middle Creek Visitors Center.

First is Phil Hunt who was recently hired to fill a new Maintenance Repairman position. As visitation has grown at Middle Creek, so did the task of cleaning, repairing, and completing every day tasks. This also put an increased burden on our local habitat managers who also oversee multiple other State Game Lands. Phil's father, John, was a member of Middle Creek Search and Rescue which brought him here often as a kid for training. He also came to Middle Creek in the past for Scouting events and to partake in the controlled waterfowl hunts. Besides hunting waterfowl, Phil also taxidermies waterfowl as a hobby. He is a former communications worker and enjoys just getting outside, which is why he also enjoys groundskeeping and keeping things looking nice and meeting new people.

Next is a part-time employee who has been an all-star volunteer at Middle Creek for years helping with our trails, and with our bluebird box monitoring program. Beth Gettle is no stranger to nature and wildlife, she also volunteers with groups such as the Master Watershed Stewards, Lancaster Watershed Leadership Academy, Wildlife in Need, and she helps to teach nature classes to local families. She is also taking an online course for journal therapy which involves documenting daily experiences to help process life and distress. Often times being in nature and keeping a journal not only makes a good naturalist by taking careful observation, but also helps to relax. Beth enjoys the peacefulness of being at Middle Creek and that the public can come here to connect with nature.



**From left to right: Beth Gettle, Leanna Brady, Evelyn Kreitz, and Phil Hunt.**

We are also bringing our two seasonal interns onboard: Evelyn Kreitz and Leanna Brady

Evelyn is local to Lancaster County, but attends school at Longwood University, a small school in Virginia studying Environmental Science with a concentration in Life Science. She is most interested in the life science aspects of biology and wildlife. At school, she is participating in research involving avian window collisions and ways to mitigate them. For those who have visited Middle Creek and have seen our windows, or who attended Dr. Daniel Klem's Speaker Series last year, you are very familiar with this topic! Additionally, she has been involved with projects that involve macroinvertebrates and water quality work. Evelyn spent time kayaking and hiking at Middle Creek growing up, but applied wanting to work more with wildlife to align with her college work. She is

looking forward to songbird banding to gain those skills of handling such small, delicate animals.

Last but not least, we have a second intern, Leanna Brady, who is joining us from Drexel University and is a graduate student pursuing a Masters Degree in Environmental Policy and currently holds a Bachelor's degree in Zoo Science. Elanna is interested in conservation education and bird conservation, which made Middle Creek the ideal choice to apply for an internship. She comes to us from the Philly area and is looking forward to interacting with people and handling wildlife outside of the more controlled setting of a zoo where animals have more direct human care. Getting out and partaking in more work in the field is something Elanna is excited about!



## ***Organic Waste Dumping on State Game Lands - Just as Bad as Litter***

It's easiest to see in the winter. Pull off the road near a trailhead, and there's an out-of-place wall of English ivy separating you from the woods. Go to another parking lot, and it isn't uncommon to see the surrounding forest floor covered in pachysandra or periwinkle aka vinca vine. All of these species easily takeover and are native to Europe or Asia, so why do they have such an affinity to parking areas?

It's not the parking areas those plants like, it's ultimately illegal human behaviors delivering them to the doorsteps of State Game Lands. Unfortunately, like plastic litter and other garbage, some bad actors dump their yard waste onto our natural areas instead of properly disposing them in their municipalities. There is a reason it's illegal. One may think the organic waste will naturally decompose with time, but in reality, many of those plants are still alive and well, allowing their roots to establish and take over.

Until very recently, the alarm bell waking people up to the rapid decline of our native plants, insects, and birds was not rung. Most people planted exotic plants in their yards admiring how insects and other animals never bothered them. Their well-manicured yards never brought a second thought. But while a yard looked nice, seeds and roots of exotic plants were rapidly spreading into



**Recent brush piles dumped illegally. Notice invasive English ivy growing up trees from previous dumps.**



**Yard waste illegally dumped off of Millstone Road.**

natural ecosystems displacing native plants that our wildlife has relied on for millennia. In some cases, state agencies even planted a few exotic species in the wild at a time when deer were scarce, hoping to provide abundant food. Unfortunately, most didn't realize the cost exotics were putting on our other plants, insects, birds, and more.

People are indeed waking up and beginning to value and cherish our native plants, using them in landscaping, letting their yards sometimes get a little "messy" but natural and beautiful, and landowners and state agencies are battling the dizzying array of exotic plants that have taken over Penn's Woods.

Sadly, many yards are still filled with exotics and much of the public still needs to learn about the importance of our native

plants. As a result, people clean up their yards each year from the aggressively spreading exotics they have growing or bought from big box stores and instead of putting it at their curb or their organic waste dump, they dump it on public lands. Those same plants that needed to be cut back in their yards, survive the trip to our public lands and quickly begin to take over.

Dumping organic waste on State Game Lands is illegal. If you see anyone illegally dumping, please report any information (location, time, license plate, etc.) to our centralized dispatch at 833-742-9453 and help to protect our environment!



**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 plumage of a brown thrasher can confuse it with a wood thrush at a quick glance, but they are larger in size and prefer more open habitats like forest edges and thickets. Their diet is fairly diverse, including berries. This thrasher was likely feeding on mulberries. Most mulberries one sees are white mulberries, *Morus alba*. Of course, it's non-native and from Asia. The native red mulberry, or *Morus rubra*, is more common the further south you go, and is more beneficial to our native insects. However, both taste good to both birds and people!

**Photo by Lori Joy**

Black-crowned night herons can be found throughout the world, but are considered a species of greatest conservation need in Pennsylvania and classified as PA endangered. They prefer wetlands, like this image that was taken on top of a mallard nesting tube where it can get a good view of possible meals. Although it is not uncommon to see birds using nesting tubes for a good vantage point, that doesn't mean the nesting tubes are dangerous for mallards. Generally birds on top of nests are looking for fish, and we have mallards fledge successfully from tubes every year.



**Photo by April Olson**



Another denizen of wetlands, prothonotary warblers nest in cavities near bodies of water, most often hardwood swamps. Interestingly, they are our only warblers to nest in cavities. Nestboxes have been installed at Middle Creek for these birds, and we have evidence of them being used. Another species of greatest conservation need in Pennsylvania, these colorful warblers migrate to the northern parts of South America. Such long journeys for such a small bird present many risks as they travel across ever changing and developing landscapes much marred by humans.

**Photo by Joe Wolf**



## Eagle Scout Project Restores Habitat Along Willow Point Trail

Southeastern Pennsylvania is ripe with invasive plant species in the understory, there is a lot of edge habitat which makes ideal habitat for plants like multiflora rose, autumn olive, oriental bittersweet, and others. Gabe T. from Troop 73 of the Pennsylvania Dutch Council saw an opportunity for his Eagle Scout Project, located at the beginning the Willow Point Trail. The section of vegetation in between has a large Chinese chestnut tree (likely a remnant from a farmstead that used to be in the area) and a few other early successional trees like black walnut. The understory, however, was almost entirely invasive species.

Since this area receives high visibility from the public, the plan was to remove invasive shrubs and some of the trees. Middle Creek habitat staff removed the large trees and scouts and their adult leaders removed and treated the shrubs. Native plants were donated by Country Meadows Nursery, Hoover's, Esbenshade's, Hungry Hook Farm, and Hi-Five Farms Native Nursery.

One unexpected result was lots of invasive garlic mustard and mile-a-minute sprouted this spring. To manage this and still meet the project's original goals, Troop 73 will be returning to hand pull what came up to help the native plants thrive.

## Small Mammal Camera Trapping Research

by Kevin Bratina

Pennsylvania supports a diversity of small mammal species (e.g., various species of shrews, voles, mice etc.), many of which are critical seed distributors, pollinators, soil aerators, pest consumers, and prey for larger animals. However, the small nature and often illusive activity of these species inhibit large-scale surveys which are essential for conservation action.



Long-tailed weasel detected by the ADriFT system at Middle Creek.

Traditional live trapping methods are invasive to individual animal's health, labor intensive, and less successful than camera trapping survey efforts. Although, camera trapping is a great tool for collecting distribution data, it is limited by the focal distance which wildlife can be detected and identified.

One method to address this is to lure or funnel small mammals to a confined area such as a bucket to improve images for small mammal identification.

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Gabe T. at his project area, cleared of invasive shrubs. Before and after on the right.



One such camera trapping technique being employed at the Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area is the Adapted-Hunt Drift Fence Technique – AHDriFT for short. The AHDriFT system is composed of a sheet metal fence that is mounted flush to the soil, guiding small mammals towards non-lethal camera traps at both ends. These traps capture top-view images of passing wildlife, increasing photo-capture events by funneling more small mammals that might otherwise walk by the cameras undetected.

Early results from the AHDriFT setups at Middle Creek, in partnership with Millersville University, have shown promising increases in total wildlife photo-capture events. These exciting results can help refine strategies used by the Pennsylvania Game Commission for better monitoring of small mammals in their natural habitats throughout the state.

### 897 Parking Area and Update on New Wetland Habitats

There's another wildlife viewing enhancement project in the works! There are several shallow water impoundments along route 897 between Kleinfeltersville and Chapel Roads that require people to either stop on 897 or pull off onto private property to view any wildlife using these areas.

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 is building a parking area where visitors will be able to get off 897, exit their vehicles, and deploy their spotting scopes and binoculars! This project should be completed by the end of summer.



**Parking lot being constructed off of PA Route 897.**



**Looking towards the main lake from the Wildlife Drive where a new wetland will exist in the future.**

The habitat crew is almost finished building a new shallow water impoundment that can be seen from Sunnyside Road that will provide 4 additional acres of wetland habitat as well as another location for a controlled waterfowl hunt opportunity.

As soon as the earthwork is complete here, the next impoundment project will begin. This one will be right along the Wildlife Drive between stops 3 and 4 in the large, mowed goose pasture area.

This impoundment will create 5 additional acres of wetland habitat that will provide up close views of the wetland-loving wildlife that call Middle Creek home at some point throughout the year. Stay tuned for project completion photos and additional status updates.

# Upcoming Events at Middle Creek

## June 20th - September 28th, 2025

### **Saturday, June 21st at 10:00 a.m.: 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. EVENT CURRENTLY FULL***

### **Wednesday, June 25th from 5:00-7:00 p.m. at the Willow Point Archery Range: Public Archery Event**

Open to everyone of all ages! All equipment provided!

### **Saturday, June 28th from 9:00 a.m.- 1:00 p.m.: 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.

### **Wednesday, July 9th from 5:00-7:00 p.m. at the Willow Point Archery Range: Public Archery Event**

Open to everyone of all ages! All equipment provided!

### **Wednesday, July 9th at 6:30 p.m. in the Auditorium: Insects Rule! - The Entire World Rides on the Backs of Bugs**

Insects play critically important roles in nature that directly impact us. Things like food pollination, decomposition and soil fertility are all roles insects play. The world could not survive without insects. Unfortunately, insects are declining in abundance and diversity, and we risk losing the critically important functions they perform. This presentation will explore the amazing beauty and diversity in the insect world, will discuss the ecological roles they play, and will present solutions that will stop their decline.

### **Wednesday, July 23rd from 5:00-7:00 p.m. at the Willow Point Archery Range: Public Archery Event**

Open to everyone of all ages! All equipment provided!

### **Saturday, July 26th at 9:00 p.m.: Insect Night Life**

What do insects do at night? How do they see in the dark? The ultra-violet world, in which insects live, has always intrigued Ryan and he'll detail anatomy and life cycle, while keeping the main focus on nocturnal insects. You'll have the opportunity to hold some of the largest LIVE bugs in the world! Next, Light Stations are set-up to attract insects, where the audience will venture into the darkness to see just what is...flying, crawling and hopping around at night.

### **Wednesday, August 6th from 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. at the Willow Point Archery Range: Public Archery Event**

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

### **Friday, August 1st from 12:00 - 5:00 p.m.; Saturday, August 2nd from 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.; and Sunday, August 3rd from 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m. at the Visitors Center: Wildlife Art Show**

Meet Pennsylvania's most talented wildlife artists and their extraordinary artwork. Paintings and limited edition prints will be available for sale. The Art Show is hosted by the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Come spend a day at Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area Visitors Center. Educational booths and two food trucks will also be on site. **(Continued on Page 8)**

# Upcoming Events at Middle Creek

## June 20th - September 28th, 2025 (Cont.)

**Wednesday, August 13th at 6:30 p.m. in the Auditorium: Insects Rule! - The Power of Mussels: An Overview of Pennsylvania's Freshwater Mussels and their Importance to the Health of our Aquatic Environments.**

Freshwater mussels are considered keystone species in aquatic communities around the world. They provide ecosystems services including water filtration and streambed stabilization which helps to maintain the health of our streams, rivers, and lakes. In North America, we are at risk of losing many of these species as 74% are recognized as endangered, threatened, or of special concern. This presentation will provide an overview of freshwater mussel life history, diversity, and ecology including a case study examining species recovery efforts in several Pennsylvania rivers.

**Wednesday, August 20th from 5:00-7:00 p.m. at the Willow Point Archery Range: Public Archery Event**

Open to everyone of all ages! All equipment provided!

**Saturday, August 23rd at 10:00 a.m.: Invasive Species and How They Impact Our Lives**

Let's go for a walk and discuss common invasive species we encounter, how they impact the ecosystem, and different strategies that can be used to manage them.

**Saturday, August 30th at 9:00 a.m. at the Wildlife Drive Entrance: Wild Goose Chase 5K Run/Walk**

Get those feet moving with all proceeds benefiting local habitat restoration work at Middle Creek! Pre-registration is required for participants and registration is open up until the date of the race. Runners will check in at the Willow Point parking lot before going to the entrance of the Wildlife Drive for the beginning of the race.

**Wednesday, September 3rd from 5:00-7:00 p.m. at the Willow Point Archery Range: Crossbow Event**

Open to everyone of all ages! All equipment provided!

**Wednesday, September 10th from 6:30 p.m. in the Auditorium: Light Pollution: The Destruction of Night Skies in Southeastern Pennsylvania**

Have you noticed fewer stars in the night sky lately? Light pollution, the excessive and misdirected use of artificial light at night, is obscuring our view of the cosmos, but it's about much more than stargazing; it's a complex environmental issue with far-reaching consequences. This presentation examines the interconnected impacts of light pollution on wildlife, human health, climate change, safety, and culture. As a local astronomy educator, Jarrod will share insights and solutions to help us create a darker, healthier, and more sustainable future.

**Saturday, September 20th at 9:00 a.m.: Native Plant Exchange**

Are you looking to increase the native biodiversity in your back yard? Do you have some native plants you'd like to thin out and give others instead of throwing in the compost? Middle Creek will be hosting a native plant exchange where you can come swap your native plants with others. Some plants sourced from the Visitors Center's native plant garden will also be available to trade.

**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!