



Summer 2007

VOLUME 50, NUMBER 2

WVWA's Mission is to protect the quality and the beauty of the Wissahickon Creek and to enhance life in the watershed by:

Protecting and enhancing open space.

Promoting awareness of environmental issues through education.

Promoting wise land use.

Preserving historic sites important to the history of the Wissahickon.

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ANNUAL MEETING MARKS 50TH ANNIVERSARY

New Members Elected To Board

The Annual Meeting of the Watershed Association was held at the William Penn Inn on April 18, 2007. Members celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Association with cocktails and hors d'oeuvres, and enjoyed a slide show presented by Jamie Stewart, whose photographs are collected in a new book entitled *Wissahickon: Worth Preserving*.

During the business portion of the meeting, three new members of the Board of Directors were elected unanimously.

James E. Hasson, the president of Hypex, Inc. in Southampton, Pennsylvania, has lived in the watershed for 23 years. He has a special interest in the Evans-Mumbower Mill, where he has already been active in restoration work. Jim also serves on the boards of LaSalle Academy and the Little Flower High School.

Timothy P. Hughes, the president of Movers Specialty Services, Inc. in Montgomeryville, Pennsylvania, has lived in the watershed for over twenty years. Tim was active in efforts to protect the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve.

John Rorer, well-known to local residents for his catering, recently sold his retail food shop in Broad Axe. John has been serving on the WVWA marketing committee for several months, and has applied his carpentry skills to projects at Four Mills Barn.



James E. Hasson



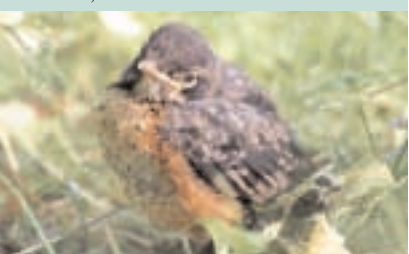
John Rorer

STATE OFFICIALS SEND CONGRATULATIONS

Messages of congratulations celebrating WVWA's 50th anniversary were sent from Governor Edward G. Rendell, the Senate of Pennsylvania and Senator Stewart Greenleaf, and from the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and State Representative Mike Gerber. In his message, Rendell said, "The contributions of the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association have dramatically impacted the area through a wide variety of projects."

The Senate of Pennsylvania's letter recognizes WVWA's "adherence to the highest standards of service." The citation from the House of Representatives states that WVWA "has truly made immeasurable contributions toward the welfare of society and the community at large." The citation further states, "a succession of dedicated leaders and members, keeping ever mindful of its noble goals and principles, has made this possible."

We appreciate the recognition signified by the documents we received, but we are even more grateful for the continuing support of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and the people who represent all the residents of the watershed in both houses of the legislature. Our ability to call on those representatives for help in protecting open space and in providing quality environmental education programs has been vital to the success of our mission.





WVWA FORGES NEW TRAIL AT BRIAR HILL PRESERVE

By Bob Adams

As part of the acquisition of the Briar Hill Preserve, WVWA agreed to install a new trail, so that walkers can park at Prophecy Creek Park, walk across a field to Briar Hill and continue their walk into the beautiful woods, floodplains and wetlands that are Briar Hill Preserve. We called on our members and the larger community for help, and as usual they turned out in large numbers to make our spring Serve the Preserve a great success.

Among our volunteers were Horseways, the Wissahickon High School Horticulture Club, and Whitpain.Org, a group of Whitpain residents interested in preserving open space. We also had a Cub Scout pack, a Girl Scout Troop and many WVWA members, staff and board members. With all this help, we were able to make a clear, safe trail in a few short hours. For directions on how to access this trail, call our offices.



STEWARDSHIP RAMPS UP

By Bob Adams



Chris Bergerson

I've been busy putting the pieces in place for our greatly expanded Stewardship program. During the winter, I researched tractors, and decided to purchase another Kubota tractor from Histand's in Doylestown. Kubotas are generally sturdy, reliable tractors, and Wendell Histand was very helpful in getting us a significant non-profit discount from Kubota International. Along with a new tractor came a new brush hog, loader and trailer! Since we were getting all this nice shiny equipment, it seemed a shame to tow it around with our old van, so we got a nearly new van as well. This was bought with a generous donation from Merck Manufacturing Division in West Point, a longtime supporter of WVWA's programs.

You might ask, why do we need two of everything? That brings us to our next piece of great news. We hired Chris Bergerson in April as our full time Stewardship Assistant. Chris has a degree from the University of Tennessee, and spent two years as a firefighter in the western United States before coming back east. Last summer, he interned with Fairmount Park, organizing volunteers to remove invasives and plant native trees and shrubs. With all these skills, he will be a great addition to our program. Our hope is to have two crews this summer, each with their own transportation and equipment. We can really start getting some work done on restoring our lands with that kind of support.

WETLAND PROJECT RECEIVES AWARD AND GRANT

The Philadelphia Water Department recently presented a certificate of recognition to WVWA and the Environmental Protection Agency for the Sandy Run Wetland Restoration project located at the intersection of the Lafayette Connector and Bethlehem Pike. Bob Adams received the award at the Urban Watersheds Conference on May 3. The EPA funded the project, which Bob designed and implemented.

The Project will be expanded to include another acre this fall, with the help of a grant from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Community Economic Development, sponsored by Representative Mike Gerber. Mike stopped by WVWA headquarters recently to present the grant to John Shober, Bob Adams, and Randy Gray.

L-R: John Shober, Mike Gerber, Bob Adams, Randy Gray





GRIST FOR THE MILL

By H. Kirk Horstman

If you hear some noises from inside Evans-Mumbower Mill this year, don't be alarmed. This normally peaceful setting will soon become the scene of some woodworking activity.

Through a grant from the JDB Fund, we have been able to hire the services of a professional millwright, Mr. Benjamin Hassett. A millwright is defined as one who makes a business of building mills and mill machinery. As you might imagine, qualified millwrights are scarce these days. Ben will be making periodic trips all the way from his shop in Lynchburg, VA. He will be crafting individual pieces there and then assembling them on-site. You will be able to track the progress of his work by attending the regular open house sessions on the third Sunday of each month.

The largest and most important component of the project will be a new wooden waterwheel. There has not been a waterwheel inside the mill for well over a century. All that remains are some rotted pieces of timber, but these are enough to give us clues about the size and construction of the wheel that once powered the

mill. The new water wheel will be about 10 feet in diameter and 8 feet wide.

Ben will have to fashion various gears and pulleys out of wood. There will also be a flume and a sluice gate. The millwright will utilize particular tools and materials, mimicking the practices of the past.



L-R: Hank Webster, Ben Hassett, Dave Froehlich at Evans-Mumbower Mill.

The fun part should be when Ben and his helpers have to squeeze a 2-foot diameter, 22-foot long horizontal shaft (hewn out of seasoned white oak) through the back door and into position in the wheel pit.

Of course, waterwheels do not turn without reason. Their whole purpose is to drive equipment. In our case, we are going to start by reactivating two types of machinery. We will return one pair of grinding stones to operation. Such stones were used to generate various types of meal for human consumption. We also intend to restore the corn cob crusher, which made feed for livestock. Visitors will be able to sift their fingers through both types of products.

The next step will be even more exciting. It is WVWA's goal to reconnect the mill works to the stream that originally gave it life. However, since the old mill dam and the abandoned head race are long gone, we are evaluating a different means of delivering water to the wheel. The ultimate result will be that we will all be able to watch the splashing water as it cascades over a rotating wheel. Some of us can't wait to hear the creaking and groaning timbers as the mill returns to life.

EVANS-MUMBOWER MILL

Open Houses

Sunday, June 17, July 15, August 19,
October 14, November 11
1 - 4 p.m.

Fall Festival

Saturday, September 15
12:30 p.m. - 4:30 p.m.

Do you like history? Visit our Nineteenth Century gristmill, being restored by volunteers. See the artifacts that have been found during archaeological digs at the Mill, and learn how important the Wissahickon Creek was to early settlers in the area. Admission is free.

Visit the only mill on the Wissahickon Creek that is being restored to demonstrate its original function. The festival will include demonstrations of blacksmithing, wood carving, butter making, and children's games from the nineteenth century. Admission is free. For more information and directions go to our web site at www.wvwa.org and click on the Evans Mill link, or call (215) 646-8866.

Jamie Stewart has created a slide show about the properties preserved along the Wissahickon, from Montgomeryville to the Schuylkill River. If you belong to a service club or a garden club and would like Jamie to present the show to his group, please contact the WVWA office at 215-646-8866.

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WATER QUALITY

By Dennis Pennington

Water quality in the Wissahickon and its tributaries is central to the mission of WVWA.

We measure and monitor the quality of the water by taking samples at regular intervals at specific locations along the Wissahickon, from the headwaters in Montgomeryville to Fairmount Park in Philadelphia. The samples are analyzed in a laboratory and the data from those analyses are recorded, so that we can see trends in several different characteristics that might tell us whether the water quality is improving, deteriorating, or staying the same.

Samples are analysed for chemical and biological constituents, nutrients, and Total Maximum Daily Load (the amount of solids suspended in the water). At the same time, we note the stream flow, water temperature and dissolved Oxygen, and any special conditions in the months since the last sampling, such as drought or flooding. Often, the data helps us to narrow in on where impacts on the Creek are the greatest.

The Watershed Association is partnering with the Philadelphia Water Department to continue collecting water samples from the Wissahickon. The PWD has a special interest in the quality of the water in the Wissahickon because nearly 10% of the drinking water supply for the City of Philadelphia is supplied by the Creek. Data collected from 2003 through 2006 is being used as a baseline for gauging any changes in water quality.

WVWA RANKS HIGH IN ACRES PRESERVED

The Spring 2007 issue of “Conserve Land,” published by the Pennsylvania Land Trust Association (PALTA) ranked fifty-four land trusts in Pennsylvania as of the end of 2005. At that time, WVWA ranked tenth in number of acres owned, and twenty-eighth in number of acres held under conservation easements.

WVWA is a member of PALTA, an organization that helps conservation practitioners improve their effectiveness, builds public understanding, and advocates for better governmental policy.



CREEK CLEAN UP GETS GREAT TURNOUT

By Carol DeLancey

Over 300 people scoured the banks of the Wissahickon Creek and its many tributaries, ranging from Lansdale to Abington, to haul out tons of trash on Saturday, April 28. This natural scavenger hunt garnered a laptop computer, two TVs, a mattress, a ride-on mower, two car bumpers, several deer skeletons, a swing set and thousands of plastic bags. Cleaners harvested only 30 tires, down from the usual count of 75.

Following the Clean Up the volunteers met at the Upper Gwynedd Township Park for a picnic hosted by Whole Foods Market of North Wales. Long-time volunteers noted that attendance at the picnic has increased, and includes many young people. The Creek Clean Up, sponsored by Merck, is an excellent way to introduce the coming generations to the importance of taking care of the environment.

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Starbucks Coffee
The Philadelphia Cricket Club

CREEK KEEPERS

Ambler Savings Bank
Catanzaro's Insurance & Financial Services
Commonwealth Agency, Inc.
DMI Sports
Sandy Run Country Club

Save the Date – Walk For the Wissahickon September 30

The Walk for the Wissahickon is scheduled for Sunday, September 30. You can take a guided 5 -8-13-or 21-mile hike of the Green Ribbon Trail, and then be bussed back to your car. Look for the complete flyer in August. Discover the true beauty of the Wissahickon Watershed and support WVWA.

2007 Wissahickon Birdathon

by Jamie Stewart

The 2007 Wissahickon Birdathon was held on May 10th & 11th with near perfect spring weather, if a bit warmer than usual, with highs in the upper 70's to low 80's. Occasional showers, especially overnight on the 10th, helped to keep the migrant numbers up for both days.

This year eight teams recorded 128 species, just shy of our average of 130 species. Overall the teams averaged 90 species per team. Two new species for the birdathon were a Red-headed Woodpecker and a Blue-winged Warbler, both found at Militia Hill.

A cooperative Black-crowned Night-Heron was found at the Wissahickon Waterfowl Preserve. Many teams also saw Black Vultures, which are usually scarce. Their increased population in this area is due due to the northward expansion of their range. In the 1930's they were only known to breed south of central Virginia. The first nest in Pennsylvania was recorded 1952 and they are now becoming more common in New York and Connecticut.

Locally the American Kestrel is becoming very difficult to find with most teams not recording them for the past three years. Five years ago nearly every team saw them. This reflects the steady decrease in their population in southern New England, probably due to development of farm lands.

The population of Wild Turkeys is steadily increasing in our area as shown by the fact that in 1999 and 2000 none were recorded, followed by steady increases up through this year when all teams but one recorded them. Belted Kingfishers disappointed most teams this year but this does not indicate a trend at this point as the numbers recorded do fluctuate over the past eight years.

The winning team this year, as judged by species count, was Team Snow Goose with 103 species, just edging out the Falcons, the winner for the four previous years, who had 102 species. Third place goes to the Hawks with 96 species.

The birders also brought in nearly \$23,000 in pledges for WVWA. Well done, everyone!

INVITE A TOAD TO DINNER

By Judith Gratz

Kingdom: Animalia
Phylum: Chordata
Subphylum: Vertebrata
Class: Amphibia
Order: Anura
Family: Bufonidae
Genus: Bufo
Species: Bufo americanus

Length
50 to 102 mm; avg. 75 mm
(1.97 to 4.02 in; avg. 2.95 in)

American toads, *Bufo americanus*, are found throughout large portions of North America. These toads have an immense ability to adapt to their surroundings as long as there is a source of water for them to use in the breeding season. This quality has allowed them to successfully colonize suburban and agricultural areas.

American toads require a semi-permanent freshwater pond or pool for their early development. They also require dense patches of vegetation, for cover and hunting grounds. Given these two things and a supply of insects for food, American toads can live almost everywhere, from forests to backyards. They are common in gardens and agricultural fields. During daylight hours they seek cover beneath porches, under boardwalks, flat stones, boards, logs, woodpiles, or other cover. When cold weather comes, these toads dig backwards to hibernate.

American toads breed once yearly, between March and July. They congregate in shallow wetlands, ponds, lakes and slow-moving streams. After mating takes place, the females lay their eggs in the water, in long spiral tubes of jelly. The eggs mature fastest at higher temperatures. They generally hatch in 3 to 12 days. After developing for 40 to 70 days, the tadpoles transform into adults. This usually takes place from June to August.

During the first 20 days the tadpoles start to form their hind legs. After 30 to 40 days the front legs appear. At the same time that the front legs emerge, the tadpoles' gills disappear, and the tadpoles start to breathe "atmospheric" air. In the last two or three days of development, they complete their metamorphosis, reabsorbing their tails and strengthening their legs. They also stop eating plants in favor of animal matter.

After metamorphosis, toads disperse and begin to live primarily on land. American toads continue to grow until they reach their full adult size of approximately 3 inches. While they are still growing, toads shed their external skin every couple of weeks or so.

American toads are mainly nocturnal, and are most active when the weather is warm and humid. They are solitary, congregating only at breeding ponds in the early summer and late spring. During the day American toads hide under rocks or logs or dig into dead leaves and soil. In regions with a cold winter, American toads dig deeper to hibernate. When digging they back in, pushing out dirt with their back legs.

American toads have one of the most notable calls of all toads. They give off long trill sounds that each last between 4 and 20 seconds. American toads use this call as a way to attract females for breeding. When they call, their throats puff out like large, inflatable balloons. American toads also use body postures, touch, and chemical cues for communicating.

Contrary to folk-belief, you will not get warts if you touch a toad. However, the defensive chemicals in toad skin are toxic to humans, so it's important to wash one's hands carefully after handling one.

OK, so not everyone finds toads attractive. However, a single toad can consume about 110 beetles, slugs, moths, sowbugs, armyworms and other bugs a day. That's around 3,300 per month! Toads are most active at night when slugs and cutworms are active. During the day, they need a fairly dark, cool place to hide from the sun and predators.

A simple way to welcome one of these homely, but lovable gardener's friends is to make a toad house. (This is a great project for both kids and adults!)

WHAT YOU'LL NEED: A medium-sized clay flower pot, A trowel or large spoon, A disposable pie tin or the saucer from the flowerpot

WHAT TO DO: Wash and dry the pot if it has been used. Put it outside in a sheltered spot in your garden among your plants. Lay the pot on its side. Using a trowel or large spoon, bury the pot halfway into the ground. Place some dead leaves in the bottom of the house. After a few days, check to see if any of the debris in the house has been moved. Give it some time, but if it seems that no one has moved in, try moving your house to another location. Toads drink by sitting in water and soaking it through their skin. Place the pie tin or clay saucer filled with water in a spot near the house, but that is out of view.

Websites to check out to learn more and to hear toad calls: www.dnr.state.wi.us/org/caer/ce/eek/critter/amphibian/toad.htm
www.naturesound.com/frogs/pages/amtoad.html www.projectwildlife.org/gardens_toadhouse.htm
www.michigan.gov/dnr/0,1607,7-153-10370_12148-60160--,00.html
www.learner.org/jnorth/images/graphics/t/ToadProfile3_Erickson.jpg

BE ALL YOU CAN BE: VOLUNTEER

By Judith Gratz

Volunteering in the Environmental Education program for the WVWA will give you the opportunity to work with children and to pass on your love of nature to the next generation. Volunteers participate in both classroom and outdoor programs that will help students meet state requirements under the no child left behind (or inside) initiative. The training will enable you to develop new skills and to acquire new knowledge about environment and ecology topics. Your on-the-job training will include observing lessons as they are being taught to students.

We welcome seasoned teachers, but teaching experience is not required. Teach as many or as few times a month as you enjoy. Teach the age groups and subjects you enjoy most in the seasons that suit your schedule.

Call me at (215) 646-8866 Ext. 13 to find out more about becoming an environmental education volunteer.
The next training sessions will be:

Monday, September 10, 9:30 a.m. to Noon

Tuesday, October 9, 9:30 to Noon

Monday, November 12, 9:30-Noon