



Montour Preserve Newsletter



WINTER 2010

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Sky Watch

Clear winter nights provide a great opportunity to find your way around the stars and constellations. Look toward the southeast on a clear moonless night for **Orion, the Hunter** about midway up in the sky. Above Orion is **Taurus, the Bull** with its V-shaped face. The bright orange star, **Aldebaran**, forms the eye of the bull. Above Taurus is a bright cluster, the **Pleiades**.

Look for **Jupiter** in the twilight in the west-southwest in January. It will be the first bright object you will see in the evening sky. **Mars** climbs into the eastern sky by 10 p.m. at the beginning of the month, rising earlier as the month progresses.

The last quarter moon is on Jan. 7. **New moon** is on Jan. 15, first quarter moon is on Jan. 22 and **full moon** on Jan 29.

In February, Orion and Taurus dominate the southern sky. Follow the diagonal line of Orion's belt down to the birth star **Sirius** in the constellation **Canis Major**. **Jupiter** is still low in the south-southwest at twilight. As it sinks out of sight by the end of the month it is replaced by **Venus** as it rises higher.

Full Moon is on Feb. 28 and **new moon** on the Feb. 13. The first quarter is on Feb. 5 and last quarter is on Feb. 21.

Venus becomes more easily visible after sunset in the west during March. **Saturn** begins rising in the southeast at the beginning of twilight early in the

month. By the end of the month it is already low in the southeast as twilight fades.

Spring equinox is on March 20. March's last quarter moon is on March 7; **new moon** is on March 15; first quarter March 23; and **full moon** occurs on March 29.

Nature Notes

Great Horned Owls begin calling at dusk on cold winter days as males defend their territory and call to females. By mid to late February, Great Horned Owl females will begin nesting.

January and February are good times to watch for winter raptors. **Red-tailed Hawks** and **American Kestrels** hunt over open fields as do visiting **Rough-legged Hawks**. Smaller birds visit feeders on a regular basis this time of year and can attract accipiters like **Sharp-shinned** and **Cooper's Hawks**. Both specialize in catching and eating smaller birds. The concentration of birds at winter feeders provides good opportunities for food when it is most scarce and these two accipiters take advantage of the situation.

Beginning in February, some of our native mammals begin their courtship and mating. **Mink** are active beginning early in the month and both **raccoons** and **groundhogs** are more active toward the end of February. Tracks in the snow and road kills are good indicators that these animals are out and about at night. **Eastern chipmunks** begin emerging from hibernation near the end of February also. They might show up at bird feeders during this time of year, especially if food is scarce.

January Programs

A WINTER WANDERING

Saturday, Jan. 16

10-11:30 a.m.

Meet in Environmental

Education Center

Presented by: Jon D. Beam, Naturalist

We often think of winter as a bleak and desolate time of year, a time when the natural world appears to sleep. However, a closer look reveals that life in winter continues, but at a somewhat less hectic pace. Join us as we investigate woodland and meadow for traces of nature in winter — memories of the past year and promises of the next. Most of the program will be held outdoors, so dress for the weather and be prepared to walk an easy half to three-quarters of a mile.

**MAPLE SUGARING ORIENTATION FOR
TEACHERS AND GROUP LEADERS**

Saturday, Jan. 23

9:30-11:30 a.m.

Environmental Education Center

Advance Registration Required —

Call 570-437-3131

This workshop is for teachers or group leaders planning to attend Maple Sugaring at Montour Preserve for the first time with a group. We will cover trip logistics, maple tree identification, seasonal changes in trees, tree tapping, sap collecting, cooking techniques, historical facts and lesson-planning ideas. A certificate of completion will be issued to all participants. We will spend time both indoors and outdoors during this session, so wear appropriate clothing and footwear. Participants should bring pencil and paper to the workshop. To register, call the preserve at 570-437-3131 or e-mail jdbeam@pplweb.com.

WINTER BIRD WALK

Saturday, Jan. 30

10-11:30 a.m.

Meet in Visitors Center

Led by: Jon D. Beam, Naturalist

This walk through field and forest will provide opportunities to observe a variety of resident winter birds. We'll travel through or along several different habitats and spend some time looking and listening to the birds in each. We'll have an opportunity to explore woodland, field and water habitats. With any luck, we might even see some very early spring migrants that have returned to our area. Dress for the weather and plan to spend time outdoors. Bring binoculars and a field guide if you have them.

February Programs

VAN WAGNER CONCERT

Saturday, Feb. 6

1:30-3 p.m.

Environmental Education Center

Van Wagner returns to bring us songs of our Pennsylvania life. Join us for a concert that will include songs of the Susquehanna River, the coal region, logging camps, life on the farm and more. In addition, this concert will feature

videos to accompany the songs. Audience members of all ages will enjoy this unique, multimedia presentation about our natural and cultural heritage.

STARRY, STARRY NIGHT

Friday, Feb. 12

7-8:30 p.m.

Meet in Environmental

Education Center

Presented by: Jon D. Beam,

Senior Naturalist

Distant lights sparkle against the black velvet of a crisp, cold winter night sky. With a little imagination you can pick out patterns among these stars. Since ancient times people have described images from star patterns. In fact, modern astronomy is based on star patterns known as constellations. Constellations also provide the basis for navigation, legends and tales, and are just plain fun to locate. Join us as we explore the lore, science and identification of some common winter constellations. The program will begin indoors and if the weather permits will conclude with an outdoor session. Dress warmly and be prepared to spend some time outdoors.

MAPLE SUGARING OPEN HOUSE

Saturday, Feb. 27

Noon to 4 p.m.

Environmental Education Center

Presented by: Preserve Staff

Programs begin on the hour (noon, 1, 2 and 3 p.m.) in our Environmental Education Center with a talk and film featuring the natural and cultural history of making maple sugar. Afterward, a short walk through Goose Woods takes you to the Sugar Shack to experience the sights, sounds and scents of maple sugaring. Join us for this family experience and follow the sugaring process from sap to syrup. Scouts, 4-H and other groups are welcome to attend either day. Plan to arrive on the hour at the Environmental Education Center auditorium to enjoy the entire sugaring program. Outdoor demonstrations end at 4 p.m. Maple products and a poster will be available for purchase. For your comfort, we suggest you dress for the weather and a short walk outdoors.

MAPLE SUGARING PROGRAMS FOR SCHOOLS

Maple sugaring programs will be offered Tuesday through Friday from Feb. 23 through March 12 this year. Schools and home school groups can contact Montour Environmental Preserve at 570-437-3131 to schedule a program. Please provide your name and school, number and grade(s) of students, approximate time of arrival and contact phone number. **Registration begins Jan. 5.**

Each maple sugaring program lasts about two hours. Program participants should be kindergarten age or older. Minimum group size is 10. Dress for time outdoors.

MAPLE SUGARING OPEN HOUSE

Saturday, Feb. 28

Noon to 4 p.m.

Environmental Education Center

Presented by: Preserve Staff

Programs begin on the hour (noon, 1, 2 and 3 p.m.) in our Environmental Education Center with a talk and film featuring the natural and cultural history of making maple sugar. Afterward, a short walk through Goose Woods takes you to the Sugar Shack to experience the sights, sounds and scents of maple sugaring. Join us for this family experience and follow the sugaring process from sap to syrup. Scouts, 4-H and other groups are welcome to attend either day. Plan to arrive on the hour at the Environmental Education Center auditorium to enjoy the entire sugaring program. Outdoor demonstrations end at 4 p.m.

Maple products and a poster will be available for purchase. For your comfort, we suggest you dress for the weather and a short walk outdoors.

March Programs

MAPLE SUGARING OPEN HOUSE

Sunday, March 7

Noon to 4 p.m.

Environmental Education Center

Presented by: Preserve Staff

Programs begin on the hour (noon, 1, 2 and 3 p.m.) in our Environmental Education Center with a talk and film featuring the natural and cultural history of making maple sugar. Afterward, a short walk through Goose Woods takes you to the Sugar Shack to experience the sights, sounds and scents of maple sugaring. Join us for this family experience and follow the sugaring process from sap to syrup. Scouts, 4-H and other groups are welcome to attend either day. Plan to arrive on the hour at the Environmental Education Center auditorium to enjoy the entire sugaring program. Outdoor demonstrations end at 4 p.m. Maple products and a poster will be available for purchase. For your comfort, we suggest you dress for the weather and a short walk outdoors.

DELIGHTFUL DULCIMER AFTERNOON

Sunday, March 21

2-3:30 p.m.

Environmental Education Center

Presented by: A.J. Bashore II

Celebrate the beginning of spring with the delightful sounds of dulcimer music. A.J. Bashore II will treat us to a mix of old-time, Celtic, Appalachian, contemporary and original music. What better way to chase away the winter blues than to enjoy a music-filled afternoon? This special performance promises to delight both young and old with the unique music of the Appalachian lap dulcimer.

TIMBERDOODLE TIME

Friday, March 26

7-8:30 p.m.

Environmental Education Center

Presented by: Jon D. Beam, Naturalist

It is dance time, and you are invited to come and watch. This dance is unlike any you have experienced before. It is the unique courtship ritual of the timberdoodle (also known as the American woodcock). An indoor talk will focus on the natural history and behavior of this unusual bird. Afterward, we will go outdoors to watch and hear the ancient song and dance of the timberdoodle. Dress for the weather and be prepared to spend some time outdoors.

WILDLIFE ART EXPO

Saturday, March 27

Environmental Education Center

11 a.m. to 4 p. m.

Presented by: Various artists

From the subtle crafting of a bird's feathers in wood to the expert brush strokes on canvas, this spring Wildlife Art Expo offers a unique glimpse into the world of nature as captured by Pennsylvania artists. Join us to share their skill and observation as portrayed through wildlife art. Talk with the artists, marvel at the artwork, be inspired, buy a gift or add to your collection. This art show makes a great outing for an early spring day.

RETURN OF A SYMBOL

At first glance it was just a dark dot against the gray clouds in the eastern sky. It was moving fast and soon began to take shape. There was no mistaking the long outstretched wings of the bird as it came above the distant trees. Neither could I mistake the way it cruised through the air covering the distance with ease. As it angled across the lake, I saw the flash of white from its tail. The body was dark brown. A second or two later its head caught the light. It was white also. The bird was, of course, an adult bald eagle.

Twenty years ago, the thought of seeing a bald eagle at Lake Killisnoqua was a dream. The reality was that bald eagles were extremely rare birds in Pennsylvania. After all they were listed by both Federal and State governments as endangered species. During the mid- to late 1990s scattered observations of bald eagles at Montour Preserve trickled in. These were usually brief appearances by the big birds during spring and fall migration. One would be here during the morning and gone by afternoon.

It is difficult to imagine just how abundant bald eagles were at one time. Researchers believe that before European settlers arrived on America's doorstep bald eagles existed along the Atlantic coast from the tip of Florida north to Labrador. Their range also stretched from Baja California to Alaska on the Pacific coast. Eagles inhabited every large river and lake across the continent, nesting in forty-five of the lower forty-eight states. There could have been as many as half a million of these magnificent birds.

And what birds they are. Weighing ten to fourteen pounds with a wingspan of six to seven and a half feet, bald eagles are big birds. Their long, broad wings are designed for soaring which they do with ease, accompanied by occasional wing-flapping. This method of flying allows them to conserve energy as they migrate or search for fish.

It is because of fish that bald eagles began to decline. Europeans settled along coastal regions, lakes and rivers. They turned to an abundant and easy source of food: fish. With direct competition for the mainstay of their diet, human activity around nesting sites and habitat destruction as people cleared land for farms and towns, the bald eagle population began to slip away. Bald eagles were in decline as early as the late 1800s. By the 1930s, people became aware of the decline in eagle numbers and protection was offered in 1940. But by that time the pesticide, DDT, was in widespread use causing a devastating blow to eagle survival as they consumed fish laced with the chemical.

The eagle glided over the lake, slowly descending closer to the water. With no perceptible change in direction it reached down with a taloned foot, making a grab in the water. As it swung up and around, I could see the squirming carp clutched tightly in its feet. It landed on the lakeshore where for the next hour it ate

its fish dinner. Then it waded into the water to bathe. After that it flew to a tall pine and spent the rest of the day digesting its meal.

Bald eagles have made a fantastic come back. Through protection, a ban on DDT, and reintroduction programs, bald eagles have fought their way back. Their numbers keep increasing and the population expanding. Today's estimates indicate that there are about 10,000 nesting pairs of bald eagles. Over 100 of those are in Pennsylvania. So, as bald eagle numbers increase, the chances of seeing a bald eagle in our state also rise. The frequency of eagle sightings at Montour Preserve is no longer rare. In fact, as I write this in early December, there has been an adult bald eagle here at the lake for a least three weeks and a report of a juvenile bird as well. Now our dreams turn to a pair of eagles nesting here at the lake.

For more information about birds of prey at PPL facilities, visit www.birdsofpreyatppl.com. Or attend the upcoming program, "Birds of Prey at PPL," scheduled for Jan. 14, 2010 at Holtwood Environmental Preserve. For more information about this program, visit www.pplpreserves.com.

Jon D. Beam
Senior Naturalist

Winter hours: The Visitors Center will be open one weekend day (usually Saturday) from mid-January through March on the days of a regularly scheduled program. The hours for that day will be 8 a.m. to 4 p.m. It will also be open weekdays.

From the Montour Preserve staff to all our visitors of the past year: We thank you for your support, suggestions, critiques, observations and donations. We wish you a very Merry Christmas, healthy and happy New Year and look forward to your return visit in 2010. And for all of you who did not have an opportunity to visit in 2009, we also wish you a wonderful new year and thank you for your interest in the preserve. Happy holidays to all.