

FWCCSP RECORD

Newsletter of the Friends of White Clay Creek State Park

Friends of White Clay Creek State Park
P.O. Box 9734
Newark, DE 19714-9734
www.whiteclayfriends.org

Volume 11, No. 1

June 2008

Friends Increasing Aid to Disadvantaged Students in Park Programs

Recently, the Friends' executive committee voted to increase our budget to support the park's efforts to reach out to disadvantaged students to enable their participation in education programs run by the park staff. Specifically, up to \$1,800 of additional funding has been allocated for two purposes.

One expenditure is to provide "goodie bags" for children participating in an after-school program sponsored by the Latin American Community Center. The bags include several nature-related items, such as a hand lens, bug box, crayons, mineral sample, and a field guide, to enable the students to continue their involvement in nature after they return home. The other item provides scholarships for up to six students from the after-school program to attend a week-long summer camp in the park.

Angel Burns, our Nature Center Manager, delivered the goodie bags to the students on May 30 at a last day fiesta complete with music, parents, and homemade food. Angel commented, "Giving out these bags was the most incredible feeling! It was like I was some kind of super hero! Some kids loved the field guides, while others loved the little mineral gems! The kids were very thankful, but I am also thankful to the Friends for enabling me to be the one to deliver these goodies to the kids. I will never forget it."

New Trail Work Project Leaders Recruited

Mike Ott and Joe Castagnola have recently agreed to lead our trail work project. Thus, after a hiatus of about six months, we will once again be doing trail work in the park. The new leaders will be scheduling one weekend work morning per month for volunteers to work on trail upgrades or maintenance in the park.

If you are interested in improving the trails in our park, please contact Mike (302-738-6652) or Joe (610-255-0365) to receive notices of upcoming trail work projects. Scheduled work dates will be listed on our web site (www.WhiteClayFriends.org) as soon as they are available.

Special Newsletter Supplement Gives Behind-the-Scenes Look at Park Ranger's Job

Ever wonder what our Park Rangers do to earn those big bucks? Think it's a cushy job being outdoors and enjoying nature all day? Think again. An article by Christa Stefanisko, car-

ried at the end of this newsletter as a special supplement, takes a look behind the scenes at some of the responsibilities of our Rangers. It's interesting reading.

Support Group Formed for Judge Morris Estate

Last year, the Friends formed a special group to focus specifically on the needs of one of the park's most notable historic structures, the Judge Morris Estate. Currently numbering about 25 volunteers, the group has helped the park put on various activities, including Mystery at the Mansion, World War II Storytelling, Holiday Tea, and Mother's Day Brunch. As a JM volunteer, you could find yourself as a character in our bi-annual "mystery", or help decorate the mansion at Christmas with fresh greens, or serve tea and apple pie at the World War II Storytelling event. There is always a need for more volunteers to support these activities. If interested in volunteering or if you would like additional information on any of the programs, please feel free to contact project leader Cathy Duffus at jimncathy@verizon.net

Nest Cameras Providing a Show

Again this year our nest cameras at the Nature Center are providing dramatic views of songbirds raising their young. First came the phoebes, back in April. They built a new nest above the entrance door on the porch. A miniature camera was installed to follow developments via a monitor in the center. For more than a month, the phoebes laid their eggs, incubated them until hatching, and brooded and fed the nestlings leading up to the fledging of 4 new phoebes about three weeks ago. The parents promptly started a new clutch, and currently there are four new eggs in the nest, being incubated for a second brood.

The other camera is an infrared unit mounted in a bluebird box behind the nature center. As in past years, this box was taken over by house wrens. The wrens are currently incubating their clutch of seven eggs.

The show can be viewed any day when the nature center is open. In particular, the center is open on weekends from 11:00 am to 4:00 pm. Sunday open hours are made possible by Friends volunteers, who are present to greet visitors and provide information about the park.

Bluebird Monitoring Program Receives Renovations

Significant improvements to the White Clay Creek bluebird nest box program began last fall and winter when Friends volunteers constructed over 30 new cypress nest boxes, installed a total of 18 new boxes, and replaced and relocated many others. The boxes were numbered, and data on elevation, box height, and entrance hole orientation were collected for Cornell University's Nestwatch Program. Also, this spring 8 new nest boxes were constructed and installed in the fields near the end of Corner Ketch Road. In addition, the Friends were informed of several additional nest boxes on the Kranz Farm that had been installed years ago.

The total number of boxes we are now monitoring is 84! In April, after a training session, 15 volunteers began weekly monitoring which will continue through the end of August.

The boxes are already home to many bluebirds, tree swallows and a few wrens, and we are looking forward to a very successful year for the program.

New Web Site Nearly Ready for Launch

For several months, volunteers have been working with Mako Web Design, a website design firm, to refresh and improve our web site. Pat Walters, principal of the design company, has generously offered his services for free.

While much of the content is similar to what has been on our existing site, the new site should be more visually appealing and easier to navigate. We expect the new site to be launched in the next few weeks – check it out at www.WhiteClayFriends.org.

Kestrel Box Tenants Needed (of the Right Kind)

This year, Friends volunteers revitalized the American Kestrel nest box project, installing four new boxes and maintaining one additional box from those that were installed several years ago. The new boxes were mounted on existing utility poles and barns in the park, which enabled us to get the boxes higher up and in locations that should be more attractive to kestrels.

Unfortunately, the boxes are also attractive to European Starlings, and it's been an ongoing battle to try to keep the starlings out to provide opportunities for kestrels. So far, we have no kestrels – perhaps it will require a year or two for them to find the boxes. Currently, two boxes are unoccupied, one is being used by Northern Flickers (members of the woodpecker family), and two boxes are still being used by starlings, despite repeated evictions.

The kestrel box project is motivated by a desire to help rebuild the kestrel population in the Eastern U.S. Although the reasons are not fully understood, kestrel populations have declined dramatically in this area. Possible reasons advanced by experts include West Nile virus infections and predation by Cooper's Hawks. In any event, efforts to help these beautiful small falcons recover their population are definitely in order.

Summer Concert Series is Underway

Once again, the park has scheduled an outstanding concert series this summer. As in previous years, the concerts are on Wednesday evenings, from 6:30 pm until about 8:00 pm, at the Carpenter Recreation Area. Bring a picnic supper, blankets or lawn chairs to sit on, and top off the evening with some cool water ice sold by the Friends. This is truly a great way to spend a summer evening.

The concerts are free; however, park entrance fees are in effect. Call the Nature Center (302-368-6560) for updates on delays or cancellations due to weather conditions. The remaining concerts are listed below.

June 18	Tuesday Mountain Boys (Bluegrass)
June 25	New Direction Band (Reggae, Calypso)
July 2	Melton Brothers and Alfie Moss (Jazz, Motown & Blues)

July 9	Steve Lewis Band (Swing & Big Band Music)
July 16	Sin City (American Honky Tonk)
July 23	Almost Fab (Beatles Tribute Band)
July 30	Harry Spencer Band (Jazz)
August 6	Dukes of Destiny (Roots and Rhythm Blues)
August 13	Planette Folle (Cajun Jazz, Zydeco)
August 20	The Rivers Rockabilly Trio (Rockabilly, 50's, 60's Rock & Roll)
August 27	Beach Bumz Band (Beach music, Jimmy Buffet, Beach Boys)

If you are interested in helping with the water ice sales, please contact project leader John Schwander at 302-733-7901.

Reusable Household Items are Needed at the Nature Center

The items listed below are needed for use in the summer camps to be held at the Nature Center. Please collect and drop off these items at the center.

- Fruit/veggie or dip trays with dividers
- Microwave food trays with or without dividers
- Cardboard tubes from paper towel and toilet paper rolls
- Plain white paper plates
- Small baby food jars or other small jars with lids
- Big Rubbermaid tubs with or without lids
- Plastic containers with lids: Rubbermaid, Tupperware, etc
- Cork board
- Egg cartons

Membership Support is Appreciated – Keep Renewals Coming!

We thank all of our new and renewing members for their support of our organization. We are now about 470 members strong. There are still some members who need to renew, and we ask that they send in their dues to help us continue to improve and preserve the park.

Memberships are \$15 for families, \$10 for individuals, and \$5 for students. No special form is needed; just send dues checks payable to Friends of White Clay Creek State Park to P.O. box 9734, Newark, DE 19714-9734.

Calendar of Scheduled Activities

June 16	Executive Committee and Advisory Board Meetings
August 11	Executive Committee Meeting
September 8	Executive Committee Meeting

September 14	Newark Community Day
October 13	Executive Committee Meeting
November 10	Executive Committee Meeting
December 8	Executive Committee Meeting

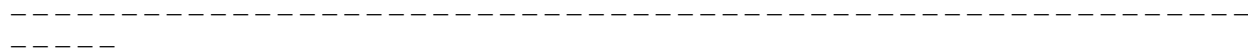
Note – A schedule of trail work dates should be forthcoming in the near future. Check our website – www.WhiteClayFriends.org – for updates.

Projects and Project Leaders

Adopt-a-Highway: Dee and Dick Benson, 410-398- 4180
Adopt-a-Trail: Mike Ott, 738-6652
Advocacy: Andy Urquhart, 239-2471
Birders Guide: Gene Hess, 738-4690, and Andy Urquhart, 239-2471
Bluebird Boxes: Wendy Keeports, 234-2935
Bolcan Scholarship Funds: Angel Burns, 368-6560
Judge Morris Support Group: Cathy Duffus, 731-9794
Kestrel Boxes: Andy Urquhart, 239-2471
Historical Booklet: Debbie Keese, 369-9128, and Andrea Cassel, 737-3319
Light Construction: Nick McFadden, 368-6900
Member-led Park Programs: Angel Burns, 368-6560
Nature Center Staffing: Jim Ries, 239-1658
Nature Center Exhibits: Andy Urquhart, 239-2471
Newark Community Day: Open
Oral Histories: Andrea Cassel, 737-3319
Park Office Plantings: Wendy Keeports, 302-234-2935
Reforestation: Christa Stefanisko, 369-1933
Trail Benches: Andy Urquhart, 239-2471
Trail Improvement Work: Mike Ott, 738-6652 and Joe Castagnola, 610-255-0365
Water Ice Sales: John Schwander, 737-7901
Wayside Historical Markers: Open
Website: Rick Hall, 831-1295
Wildlife Habitat Protection: Andy Urquhart, 239-2471

Executive Committee

President: Andy Urquhart, 239-2471, aurqu@aol.com
Vice-president: Wendy Keeports, 234-2935, wkeeports@comcast.net
Secretary and Newsletter Editor: Dick Benson, 410-398-4180, rbenson6@comcast.net
Treasurer: Ken Daws, 737-8120, wahkegan@hotmail.com
Membership Chair (Acting): Lisa Wool, 562-9788, lwool@delawareestuary.org
Projects Committee Chair: Jim Ries, 239-1658, dries@udel.edu



Membership Application

Join us! If you are not already a member and would like to join, please return this form with your check made payable to Friends of White Clay Creek State Park. Annual dues are \$5.00 for

students, \$10.00 for individuals, and \$15.00 for families. Any extra donation with your dues would be appreciated and put to good use.

Name(s) _____

Address _____

Phone (____)_____ E-mail _____

Friends of White Clay Creek State Park, Inc.
P.O. Box 9734, Newark, DE 19714-9734
Special Supplement Article, FWCCSP RECORD, vol. 11, no. 1

The Work of White Clay Creek State Park Staff

By Christa Stefanisko

Oh for the life of a park ranger – wandering through the woods, enjoying the sunshine and fresh air, listening to the singing of the birds and the chirrup of frogs, stopping to chat with park visitors to give them directions or point out and name the flora, fauna, and historical sites. Rangers have the opportunity to live right in the park in one of the many park buildings, with “just” the additional job of maintenance and upkeep of those old buildings and facilities.

The members of the Friends of White Clay Creek State Park know there’s a lot of work involved in maintaining and managing the park. The volunteer efforts of the Friends stand testimony to the amount of work involved.

Those who visit the park frequently see not only the ordinary work of the park staff such as collecting fees, providing park programs and education, maintaining facilities, opening and closing gates, checking fishing and hunting licenses, or directing traffic. As one of many visitors, I’ve seen only glimpses of what goes on, but what I have seen leaves me with a real appreciation for the park staff and the work they do, especially some of the more difficult aspects of their job.

For those who may not have as much opportunity to see what goes on, and in recognition of the efforts of the park staff, following are a few of those glimpses to highlight the less visible parts of the work the park staff does.

January 2008, I managed to slide off Chambers Rock Road on the ice and, almost defying physics, to slip my van between two posts and under the wire cable strung between those posts, into the field where the Friends planted trees a few years ago. This was accomplished with no injury to me and no damage to the posts or my van except for tearing off the passenger side mirror. After I called AAA for a tow-truck, I contacted the park in hopes that someone might be nearby who could unlock the cable so the tow truck could pull my van out of the field. I reached

a ranger but he was tied up helping with a bad traffic accident up by Deerfield. It reminded me of all the times I've seen park staff directing traffic or otherwise assisting with an accident, particularly on Thompson Station Road. The ranger expressed that he was glad I hadn't been hurt and came by to unlock the cable after he was done assisting at the accident scene.

In autumn of 2007, I parked my car near the office by Thompson Station Road, prior to going for a run on the trails. A large dog was wandering around the parking lot, looking a bit confused. I assumed that the dog's owners would be coming down the trail shortly, but as the dog continued to pace, I wondered if it was lost or abandoned. I approached the dog and got to within a foot before he began to growl threateningly. I backed away and headed out on the trails to run, still hoping an owner would be coming along soon. I returned from my run in a little less than an hour to find the dog now standing at full alert, every muscle tensed, with a low threatening rumble emanating from its chest. Four members of the park staff stood in a large semi-circle around the dog, assessing how to handle the situation. Their main tools appeared to be some beef jerky and a long pole with a noose at the end. They had positioned a park vehicle between the dog and where my car was parked. At that point, they had emptied the parking lot of other visitor's vehicles. They were facing a large, powerful animal. In passing conversation, I noted that I'd seen the dog an hour ago and wondered if it had been abandoned because its behavior seemed agitated, confused, defensive, and upset. The ranger closest to me said that he thought it had been abandoned and, despite the threat this animal posed, opined that the animal had a right to be upset. A few weeks later I saw a pit bull loose in the Judge Morris area. The dog stayed around for at least a few days before the park staff dealt with that one as well. These are just the ones I saw. In conversation with one of the rangers, he just shook his head in dismay at people who abandon their animals in the park.

I went for a run on the trails in the park in late autumn of 2001. When I stopped atop a small hill to adjust the fastenings on my jacket I looked up a side trail to my right which led to an opening in the woods and saw a park ranger at the top of the trail with a big County Police officer standing behind him. I hollered up asking if everything was okay, and the ranger replied, "We have a situation up here. Everything's under control." I continued on my way but soon met some folks who told me, "There's a dead body up there." I later learned it was ruled a suicide, not something you think about dealing with as part of the job of a park ranger.

One autumn I saw a deer along Foxden Road, obviously injured but very much alive, lying half in and half out of the road. It was near rush hour. Traffic was slowing and weaving around the deer as it lifted its head and watched the passing vehicles. I stopped by the park office, rapped on the door, and reported the deer to the ranger who answered. "All I can do is put it down," he told me. "I know," I said, and left him to that unenviable task. It reminded me of other times I have seen park staff near the edge of a road, pulling a dead animal out of the line of traffic. I'm sure it's not the first time one of them was called to put an injured animal down.

A few years ago a helicopter passed near our home in the evening, shining its lights into the park. It turned out that the pilot was aiding park staff as they searched for a lost hiker. They found the man, uninjured but a bit confused. Aiding lost and bewildered visitors, or at times mounting a search operation, are just part of the park staff's job.

In addition to aiding and protecting the public, the park ranger's job includes dealing with lawbreakers, vandals, and people abusing alcohol or drugs in the park, with the potential risks involved in that work.

These examples are food for thought for those of us who enjoy the park and benefit from both the visible and hidden work of the White Clay Creek State Park staff.