

# Field Notes

From Schiff Nature Preserve



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## Schiff Natural Lands Trust's Blairsdon Fundraiser Exceeds Our Wildest Dreams

Dr. Marissa S. McDonnell, *President and Development and Outreach Committee Chair*



Blairsdon

On September 23rd, Schiff members and guests experienced a delicious farm to table dinner prepared by Chef David Felton at the spectacular turn of the century mansion Blairsdon in Peapack-Gladstone. The blustery day began with landscape tours led by local historian and Schiff Trustee, W. Barry Thomson, and Ania Baas, an authority on the original Blairsdon landscape architect James Leal Greenleaf.

A champagne reception and mansion tour was the prelude to a cocktail hour featuring

period cocktails in the Long Gallery. Schiff President Dr. Marissa McDonnell and fellow trustees and co-chairs Robert Osner-Hackett and W. Barry Thomson welcomed the 160 guests with a toast. A gift of a rare book set on the Blairsdon architects, Carrière and Hastings, was presented to host Anthony Melillo in appreciation of his generosity.

The theme of the evening was preservation, conservation and the relationships that enable these important endeavors. Perhaps Schiff was destined to hold an event at Blairsdon. The Williams family, who built the manor house Brookrace and owned the property that was eventually to become the Schiff Nature Preserve and Brookrace neighborhood, were friends of the Blairs who built Blairsdon. The Williams held the property that was eventually to become Schiff Nature Preserve and the Brookrace neighborhood.

Representatives of Alstede Farms in

Chester and Sky Acres Winery in Bedminster spoke about their environmentally sound food and wine production methods. The mouthwatering dinner featuring pasture raised beef from River Bend Farms was enjoyed in the formal entertaining rooms on the main level of the mansion, each with their own sweeping view of the Somerset Hills. Throughout the evening, guests enjoyed the classical music provided by Chester Baroque Orchestra and an extensive multimedia display of historic items related to Schiff and Blairsdon. Blair descendent Nick Villa, lent his magnificent oil painting of Mr. Blair's four-in-hand road coach, *Defiance*, and a friend of Schiff brought his 1921 Silver Ghost Rolls Royce, adding a touch of elegance. Area designers beautifully styled the main floor rooms and exterior with items for purchase that evening, donating a portion of the proceeds to Schiff.

A wonderful evening was made perfect with the generous support guests, partners, and sponsors, notably Marcella Luxury Living, Clem's Ornamental Iron Works, Mendham Capital Management, Turpin Realtors, Dentistry of Mendham, and Hans Clothier.

## Schiff Invites In Memoriam Gifts as a Means to Create a Legacy

One of Schiff Natural Lands Trusts' basic tenets is to provide open space and maintain trails for the public to enjoy. Some of our members and supporters find time spent in nature provides them with a sense of wonder, solace, and peace that can be restorative to their health. Connection to a special place and the desire to create a legacy of support is a deeply personal and private decision.

For those who feel a connection to Schiff Nature Preserve, we welcome the creation of a memorial legacy. Schiff

Nature Preserve, and the Great Meadow specifically, held special meaning to Lauren Mulcahy, who enjoyed almost daily walks in the preserve. When she passed away, the Mulcahy family and others made donations to Schiff with a request to purchase and install a "park" bench in her loving memory. The bench dedicated to Lauren is located on the red trail, overlooking the meadow, and provides preserve visitors a rest stop to reflect on the tranquility that time on these trails brings to us.

Other benches, picnic tables, and trees have been added to the preserve to commemorate various occasions, such as birthdays, as well as in memory of our neighbors, friends, and trustees. Gifts in honor of a loved one such as these benches or the purchase of a native tree establish a legacy in a loved one's honor, while also supporting Schiff as we continue to improve our visitor experience. With each bench purchase and installation, we will provide more places for rest and reflection. With each tree purchase, we increase the presence of native species within the preserve, enriching our local wildlife habitat and

diversifying the forest. We thank all of the families who have donated their resources and time to improve Schiff. Please contact the office at [info@schiffnaturepreserve.org](mailto:info@schiffnaturepreserve.org) with inquiries on ways to create a legacy here at Schiff.



Lauren's Bench

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## Schiff's Summer Nature Program for Kids Turns 20!!

Schiff's 2023 Summer Nature Program celebrated twenty years of "Wild Things Happening Naturally" with an assortment of trailside fun and exploration! Schiff's Summer Nature Program offers a special experience – born out of a commitment to create a community where our natural connections to each other and to nature prove to be the most vital inspiration for

summer smiles. At the same time, the seed of an idea to preserve this fragile habitat is planted.

The 20th season of SNP continued Schiff's mission of preservation, education, and stewardship with its young people. A medley of SNP activities provided the opportunity to forge connections with each other, as well as the streams, meadows, and woods around Schiff. The SNP tie-dye tradition swirled to life with another round of gorgeous t-shirts. Guest speakers from the Morris County Division of Mosquito Control, Morris County Parks, and Rutgers Master Gardeners helped children learn about their environment and the importance of balance in our local ecosystems. Everyone sang songs, played nature games, navigated the terrain, completed scavenger hunts, built shelters, told campfire stories, picked wineberries, simulated predator-prey relationships, and observed wildlife.

The program's long running success is attributed to our dedicated staff and the community of families who attend and support Schiff. We extend a BIG thank you to all who have helped make SNP what it is today! We look forward to sharing the next twenty years of Schiff's Summer Nature Program with you.

## News from the Conservation & Stewardship Committee

If you enjoy the trails and scenery of Schiff Nature Preserve, give thanks to our Land Steward and the Conservation and Stewardship Committee (C&S). The C&S Committee is responsible for maintaining Schiff properties and facilities. Using our Land Management Plan as a guide, the conservation and stewardship activities are intended to foster best practices in land stewardship, sustainability, and environmental education. Monthly meetings allow planning for the

future while also assessing our progress. Along with Schiff's Development and Outreach and Finance and Administration committees, C&S is one of three Board Committees that steer the land trust's activities.

The tasks of the C&S Committee occur year round. Spring is an exciting time when we plant native tree seedlings, prepare for a controlled burn and place the nest boxes for bluebirds, wrens, and tree swallows. Summer is the most challenging time of year since many invasive shrubs like autumn olive and multiflora rose seem to grow back as soon as we turn our backs from trimming! Summer also brings land preparations for Schiff's Summer Nature Program. Program attendees enjoy the groomed trails and the rest and play spots prepared for them. Fall storms often require the committee to remove debris and fallen trees from the trails, while ensuring the roads are passable and trails well marked. Fall brings the start of our deer management program, while winter brings the preparations for the tapping of our maple trees and the culminating Maple Sugaring Open House in March.

Next time you are at Schiff and see a group of people with loppers, clippers, shovels or chain saws, give them a wave and a thumbs up! They are the members of Schiff's Conservation and Stewardship Committee at work. Interested in becoming involved? New members are welcome to join the Committee. Everyone is also welcome to come out for the monthly Volunteer Work Sessions, held year round to assist the Land Steward with the seasonal project list. Come on out and get your hands dirty with us at Schiff.



## 14<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL FILM FESTIVAL REMINDS US OF THE POWER OF LOCAL ACTIVISM

The annual Environmental Film Festival never fails to inspire, whether the focus is on organic farming, ethical questions about eating meat, or quiet tales of scientists working to solve problems!

This past June, under a beautiful almost-summer sky, the event began with the ever favorite hayride through Schiff, courtesy of Backer Farm, from the Nature Center up to the outdoor “theater” by Wood Badge Lodge. Guests packed snacks and adult beverages, while Schiff provided fresh popcorn, water and s’more supplies. While waiting for evening to fall, we played a few friendly rounds of Schiff and nature trivia questions.

Then, as dusk deepened, the first film “Wonder Meadow,” a short by Julia Schnarr, was screened. Schnarr, a young filmmaker, was in attendance and discussed how she created the film and her plans for the future.

Next came the night’s feature: “Saving the Great Swamp.” This film by Scott Morris documents how a Morris County grassroots movement stopped construction of an airport in the pristine natural place that became a federal National Wildlife Refuge. The film showcases how determined activists can make a difference right in their own backyards. Guests enjoyed a Q&A session with the longtime manager of the Great Swamp, Bill Koch.

We are grateful to our sponsors for making this event possible: Advanced Eyecare Center; Bailey Funeral Home; Breakaway Prep; Headquarters Financial Group; and Mikula Web Solutions.



We hope to see you next year for the 15th Annual Environmental Film Festival! Save the Date, Saturday, June 1, 2024, for a hike or hayride to the event site, followed by an evening of inspirational movies that are guaranteed to touch your heart, expand your knowledge and, perhaps, even motivate you to take action within your own community.

## Fundraising Efforts Fund Exit Drive Paving

This past fall, Schiff completed a major capital improvement, repaving the exit drive and the speed bump on the way into Schiff. This is a BIG accomplishment for Schiff, made possible in part by our Schiff members and donors who financially support our conservation and preservation efforts and Schiff’s prudent fiscal practices.



This major infrastructure investment is the result of years of planning; an effort to improve the safety of the road, and address stormwater and erosion challenges that a steep grade exit drive presents. Small pot holes had quickly grown into tire swallowing pits, erosion ditches were expanding, and much of our gravel was going down the storm drains. The paving company installed Rip-Rap (large stone) in the culverts along the right side of the drive, which serves to slow and direct stormwater and reduce the amount of small debris entering the catch basins. The contractor also regraded the drive to control the flow of the run-off, installed a berm in the lower sections of the drive to keep the run-off from cascading onto neighboring property, and repaved the drive at its original width, allowing for walkers and drivers to coexist safely.

In the coming years, we hope to raise additional funds for paving the remaining portion of pavement that constitutes the entrance drive. With the generous support from our members, daily hikers, runners, and dog walkers, we remain hopeful that we can accomplish this next major infrastructure improvement soon. If you enjoy a walk or hike at Schiff on a regular basis, feel free to contribute to these improvements via a Donate QR code, our kiosk collection boxes, the donation page of the website, or by mail. We appreciate our communities’ dedication to Schiff Natural Lands Trust.

## Wildlife Chronicles of Autumn into Winter

As the leaves transform into a vibrant tapestry of red, orange, and gold, Northern New Jersey comes alive with an array of fascinating wildlife. From the majestic birds migrating south to the elusive mammals preparing for winter, the fall season offers a unique opportunity to witness nature’s wonders in this diverse region.

Northern New Jersey is a haven for birdwatchers, boasting a diverse avian population that only intensifies in the fall. One of the most anticipated events is the migration of raptors, including hawks, eagles, and falcons. Schiff’s trail system offers several scenic overlooks which provide spectacular vantage points to witness these magnificent birds as they ride thermal currents on their journey south.

Northern Jersey is also home to a variety of swampland that is a haven for both resident and migratory bird species. Visitors can observe waterfowl such as the wood duck and green heron, while the vast marshlands provide a perfect habitat for songbirds like sparrows, warblers, and red-winged blackbirds.

While the dense forests and sprawling meadows of Northern New Jersey may appear tranquil, they are teeming with life, much of which becomes more active in the fall months. White-tailed deer, an iconic species in the region, are frequently seen foraging in the Great Meadow at Schiff and surrounding woodlands as they prepare for the winter ahead.

The white-tailed deer are just one of many animals, however, that call our backyards their home. Northern New Jersey is home to a variety of mammals, such as black bear, gray squirrels, Eastern Cottontail Rabbits, and the elusive Eastern Coyote. Observing these creatures in their natural habitat can provide a unique insight into their behaviors and adaptations that help them thrive in our region.

Due to the abundance of open space, Mendham is a treasure trove of wildlife. Schiff Natural Lands Trust continues to play a crucial role in ensuring the continued well-being of the wildlife in our community through initiatives like habitat restoration, land conservation, and public education.

## Come Out & Play

Discounts for Members. More Info @  
[www.schiffnaturepreserve.org](http://www.schiffnaturepreserve.org)

- Fri, Jan 19 **Singing Bowl Meditation**
- Fri, Jan 26 **Full Moon Hike**
- Sat, Jan 27 **Volunteer Work Session**
- Fri, Feb 16 **Singing Bowl Meditation**
- Fri, Feb 23 **Full Moon Hike**
- Sun, Feb 25 **Volunteer Work Session**
- Sat & Sun, March 2 & 3 **Maple Sugaring Open House**
- Fri, Mar 22 **Full Moon Hike**
- Sat, March 23 **Volunteer Work Session**
- Sun, April 27 **Volunteer Work Session**



## Music in the Woods Concerts Bring Nature & Music Lovers Together

Schiff's Music in the Woods concert series, begun in 2013, was always intended to attract new visitors by offering a unique way to enjoy the open space with the sounds of local NJ musicians. Since 2018, Schiff has hosted and produced 25+ concerts, bringing music to the woods for nature lovers to enjoy.

The 2024 lineup will feature some of our returning favorites: Joe Cirotti, The Outcrops, and Chuck Wood, while also welcoming some new talent to our stage: MaryByrd, The Mountain Jam Band, and Cold Hill (to perform as part of our 40th Anniversary), a local Mendham band playing ALL original music.

The majority of funds raised by these concerts is paid directly to the musical talent. Each concert creates a unique and wonderful sense of community and excitement as the music and nature brings people together in a moment of shared joy. We encourage our Music in the Woods guests to consider becoming members and welcome them to return for hikes, programs, and special events.

## Schiff Natural Lands Trust to Celebrate 40<sup>TH</sup> Anniversary in 2024



2024 WILL MARK THE 40<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY of the incorporation of Schiff Natural Lands Trust as a 501(c)(3) non-profit, member-supported land trust. In 1984, the certificate of incorporation set forth the mission and purposes of the new organization, which were:

- (1) To acquire, hold, protect, conserve and manage ...the property formerly constituting the Schiff Reservation.
- (2) To acquire...additional real property... for the purpose of increasing the protection and enhancement of the natural values of the Schiff Tract.
- (3) To conserve, maintain and enhance the open space, scenic and recreational values of all real property...which this Trust may at any time own or hold...and
- (4) To provide opportunities for the general public to enjoy...the Schiff Tract and other real property...owned... by this Trust.

As we begin our 40th anniversary year, the Schiff mission and purposes remain as clear and critical as they were in 1984. With the support of our members, trustees, and dedicated staff we have stayed true to that mission, making steady and significant progress on preserving and restoring critical lands while also offering a wide variety of recreational and educational opportunities to both our members and the general public.

Since 1984, we have built an organization that now consists of more than 315 members, managing four separate nature preserves in Mendham and Chester, including our original and our largest tract, the Schiff Nature Preserve, the adjacent McVickers

Brook Preserve, the Mt. Paul Preserve, and the Mosle Nature Preserve and Recreation Area. Traversing these preserves are more than 12 miles of maintained trails for passive recreational use.

In addition to the lands we manage, Schiff runs a wide array of programs throughout the year for people of all ages. During just the past year we had more than ninety planned events attended in total by several thousand people. These events included the popular Summer Nature Program for kids ages 6 to 13; our Environmental Film Festival, now in its 15th year; Music in the Woods, a monthly series of concerts from May through October in our woodland amphitheater; school field trips for kids in grades K through 5; a maple sugaring open house in the spring; and environmentally themed scouting programs for boys and girls in recognition of our history as the Mortimer L. Schiff Scout Reservation, which formerly served as the national training center for the Boy Scouts of America. We provide hiking opportunities every day of the year and are particularly proud that during the Covid pandemic, when most public parks and land preserves were closed to the public, Schiff's trails remained open.

Planning has already begun for our 40th anniversary! Stay tuned to our monthly e-blasts to learn more in the coming months. We hope you will continue to support Schiff as a member—or become one—and be a part of our celebration as we honor the wisdom and foresight of our founders and acknowledge all that has been accomplished during the past four decades to preserve and protect our natural environment, educate the public, and offer opportunities to learn about and enjoy the natural world.