

Field Notes

From Schiff Nature Preserve



339 Pleasant Valley Road, Mendham, New Jersey 07945-2922 • 973.543.6004 • www.schiffnaturepreserve.org

National Wildlife Federation Habitat Certification for Schiff

Ken Rendall, Trustee

This past summer, Schiff Natural Lands Trust earned its National Wildlife Federation Habitat (NWFH) Certification. The certification recognizes our ongoing efforts to maintain our property in a way that promotes the welfare of wildlife that live within the preserve. Schiff was able to get this designation by meeting the certification requirements of the application.

As a private homeowner, you can earn certification by ensuring that your yard offers a number of different criteria that support wildlife. You'll need to provide food, water, shelter, and places for different species to reproduce and raise their young, in addition to using sustainable or wildlife-friendly landscaping practices. You can find more information by



googling wildlife habitat certification or going to the NJ Audubon website.

When you get out and walk along our trails, you may come across any variety of animals we hope to help. Chipmunks, rabbits, and turtles are among those on the smaller end of the spectrum, while larger animals include foxes, coyotes, deer, and black bears. And although the preserve does operate a Deer Management Program, there is no hunting allowed of other

animals. The hunting is focused solely on reducing the herd size to a more sustainable level for the size of the preserve.

For bird watchers, the Mount Paul Preserve in Chester has naturally evolved into a bird haven. The meadow and wetlands draw numerous varieties of birds to the old quarry site. The North Branch of the Raritan River along Union Schoolhouse Road is a place where some have been lucky enough to spot an eagle or two fishing. Blue bird boxes around the Great Meadow and in Mount Paul Preserve provide homes for pairs to raise multiple broods of chicks in a year. We hope the new bat boxes mounted throughout the preserve will help our bat population to thrive. All of these options help provide more habitat for the many types of creatures who make their home at Schiff. Maybe you'll want to do the same where you live?

Schiff's Board of Trustees Suffers Losses and Gains

Pat Charney, Trustee

This year, Schiff has experienced a number of changes in the composition of its board of trustees. Sadly, our longtime treasurer, Joe Gomeringer, passed away last May. Joe contributed countless hours of his time, immeasurable amounts of energy, and even his accounting firm's resources to Schiff for over 20 years. He was also the repository of a wealth of Schiff history, from how the preserve came to be, to details regarding the

various deeded land trusts, and so on. Joe helped make Schiff what it is today. We thank him, from the bottom of our hearts, for his years of service and meaningful contributions.

Schiff also lost former trustee and board secretary Bill Sandelands in October. Bill served on the board from 2019-2021 and brought his legal expertise to the table to aid in managing easements and tax exemption issues. Bill and his family lived in the Mendham area for 24

years, the last 12 of which were as a neighbor to Schiff. Bill enjoyed hiking the local trails and cycling through the New Jersey countryside.

Both men will be dearly missed. Our thoughts go out to their families, friends, and colleagues.

Additions to the board include two local residents. Bob Osner-Hackett, a Brookrace resident, teaches middle school science in the Mount Olive school system. Bob brings his biology and ecology

background and optimistic enthusiasm to the group, especially the Development and Outreach Committee, hoping to help Schiff meet and exceed its goals for years to come.

Tom Wells, a long time Borough resident, is putting his long and impressive career in conservation to use at Schiff. Tom's years spent at the Nature Conservancy, as director of the Green Acres Program for NJDEP, and at the New Jersey Conservation Foundation give



Joe Gomeringer

him the unique expertise that is valuable to any land trust. We welcome Bob and Tom to the Board.

Board of Trustees

Marissa McDonnell
President
Mendham Township

Alan Weinstein
Treasurer
Mendham Township

Pat Charney
Secretary
Mendham Borough

Amalia Duarte
Mendham Township

Bob Osner-Hackett
Mendham Township

Ken Rendall
Peapack

Janis Slutsky
Mendham Borough

Barry W. Thomson
Williamsburg, MA

Tom Wells
Mendham Borough

Staff

Dorian von Aulock
Executive Director

Chet Komoroski
*Land Steward &
Volunteer Coordinator*

Holly Puleo
*Membership &
Outreach Coordinator*

**Jenny Chmura &
Christi Lorenson**
*Summer Nature
Program Co-Directors*



Programs for our Youngest Stewards Have Expanded

Developing a sense of wonder about nature from a young age is the focus of the Fledglings spring program for preschoolers. An offshoot of the popular Summer Nature Program, this program utilizes experiential learning along

with art, literature, and play to bring the outdoor world into the minds and comfort zones of children 3 to 5 years old. The day starts with a mini lesson such as insects in our forest, followed by a trail hike with backpacks full of water and snacks. Though the day starts with a theme, the lessons expand with the curiosity of the children; a tree lesson can easily turn into one about worms and mushrooms. After an exploratory walk to any of the Schiff “hot spots” like Critter Cove, the Pine Grove, or the Lean-to, we stop for a snack and a story.

Free play is an important element of the program, so time is set aside for the imagination and curiosity of the children to take over. At Critter Cove the children have made forts, discovered many toads, set up a bake shop with leaves and sticks being served as muffins, and transformed a large fallen log into a school bus. With each encounter we are helping the children develop an environmental ethic, especially in how to handle, or not handle, living animals. Our “one finger touching” rule is key to understanding how to be gentle with the environment and with each other.

Schiff Nature Preserve Partnered with Chef David Felton for Fourth Annual Farm to Table Benefit Dinner

Event Held at the Brookrace Manor House, Saturday, September 24th, 2022

On a gorgeous fall evening Schiff held its 4th Annual Farm to Table Benefit Dinner at the historic Brookrace Manor House situated below the preserve.

Renowned Chef David Felton created a memorable culinary event featuring seasonal vegetables and fruits sourced within five miles of Schiff. Guests were seated on the sweeping lawn of the private estate overlooking Lake Therese and a neighboring farm. The evening inspired diners to reflect on their food sources as they enjoyed the company of Schiff staff and board, neighbors, and friends, both new and old.

Supported by several of Schiff’s Business Partners for a Greener Community, Chef Felton designed a three-course menu that celebrated:

- Seasonal fall vegetables and fruits grown and donated by Alstede Farms in Chester;
- Pasture-raised angus beef donated by River Bend Farm in Far Hills;
- Foraged ramps, maple syrup, and hand-picked

mountain mint from Schiff Nature Preserve.

Chef Felton’s menu was paired with fine wines recommended by Sky Wines selected to complement the seasonal flavors.

“I’m thrilled to join local businesses in support of Schiff’s important mission of preservation, education and appreciation of this community’s natural resources,” said David Felton. “Schiff is a vital steward whose dedication to the air, water and soil in our area helps make it possible for us to enjoy nutritious, fresh ingredients grown on our local farms.”

Schiff’s President and host of the event, Marissa S. McDonnell, MD commented, “We are so grateful for the donations of produce and protein from our local farmers. Their support, through membership in Schiff’s Business Partners for a Greener Community, helps make these unique benefit dinners possible so that we may raise needed revenue for projects within the preserve.”

Local resident and member of Schiff Nature Preserve,

Tracy Budnik commented, “A quick walk around the grounds revealed more than just the beauty of Schiff’s Nature Preserve. I immediately felt the joyful passion and commitment of the Trustees to the stewardship of one of my family’s favorite open spaces in Mendham. We enjoyed a truly decadent dinner where nature’s full colors were on display on our plates and our tablescape!”

Also commenting was Schiff member and Mendham resident Holly Suminski, “This was a lovely event, beautiful table settings, divine meal, and perfect weather. Thank you to all the talented people at Schiff that worked so hard to create a perfect evening.”

Schiff would like to thank our partners Alstede Farms, River Bend Farm, Middle Valley Farm, Wendover Farm, CocoLuxe Fine Pastries, and Country Nursery for their generous support. We thank our guests and volunteers for helping us hold a most beautiful and enjoyable evening that exceeded our fundraising goals.



Summer Nature Program for Kids Instills Reverence for Nature

Co-Directors of Schiff's Summer Nature Program for Kids, Christi Lorenson and Jennifer Chmura, truly believe teaching our youth the importance of environmental conservation and preservation is the key to instilling a rooted love and appreciation

for nature and all its beauty for generations to come. For 19 years, Schiff's programs have provided a place where children could safely unplug and connect with the natural world around them. Children can make lasting connections with people and the environment that do not involve TV, cellphones, or the internet. "Things with Wings," "Tracks and Traces," "No Backbone Needed," and "Rock and Roll with Schiff" are just a few of the programs offered this summer. Each week children explored the many habitats of Schiff as they hiked, crafted with nature, and enjoyed activities including shelter building, stream exploration, picking wineberries and so much more! Given Covid-19 health and safety concerns, we operated at 50% capacity this summer and are planning to increase capacity in 2023. The success of Schiff's Summer Nature Program is all thanks to the work of

our dedicated staff and our community of supporters. We are very excited to continue our 20th year of operation in 2023, so please stay tuned for what we have in store by visiting our website to learn more!

"Our daughter absolutely LOVES her time at Schiff! She comes home energized and excited to talk about all her adventures. Her favorites are tie dye days, picking wineberries. and, of course, the trip to the stream. The counselors are wonderful - our daughter talks about them year-round and is always thrilled to see them the next time camp is in session! Thank you, Schiff!" — C. Patullo, 2022

"Every year our kids count down the days until the Schiff Summer Nature Program. It is their absolute favorite! They learn so much and have a blast every day. Thanks for the perfect summer memories!" — C. Mitchell, 2022

Film Fest Highlights Local Activism



We hosted another wonderful evening of films, conversation, and popcorn under the stars at our 13th Annual Environmental Film Festival in June! The event started with a hayride up to Wood Badge Lodge, courtesy of Backer Farm, where everyone gathered outside at picnic tables. We played a few rounds of environmental trivia and enjoyed bring-your-own snacks and beverages. Fresh popcorn was passed around, and then at sunset, the films began, casting a glow in the outdoor theater.

Our feature film "Giants" told the uplifting story of how a suburban neighborhood organized to stop developers from felling three giant sequoia trees. It showed how local activism can make a difference when residents

band together in unity.

Following the film, Chris Neff, our local celebrity photographer and Director of Communications at NJ Audubon, showed some of his beautiful nature photos. He described the amazing diversity of birds and other wildlife in the Mendhams and how even small-scale development can prove damaging. He reinforced the film's message about how we must speak up to protect our fragile environment. Because once it's gone, said Neff, it's gone, and the displaced species never return.

The evening ended with a hayride back to the Nature Center. We are grateful to Backer Farm for offering hayrides and to our sponsors: Advanced Eyecare Center; Bailey Funeral Home; Breakaway Prep; Headquarters Financial Group; and Mikula Web Solutions.

This annual event features new films and themes each year and is a truly unique way to visit Schiff. Mark your calendars for June 3, 2023, for the 14th Annual Environmental Film Fest! We'll see you next year at the movies!

3rd Annual Gingerbread House & Holiday Plant Sale Now Underway

As this issue of Field Notes hits your mailbox, the third annual gingerbread house and plant sale will be underway at Schiff. Orders for gingerbread houses, holiday plants, and a wren house will have been taken for several weeks and soon the buyers will be enjoying their purchases.

This year, in addition to the one-of-a-kind gingerbread chateau and holiday greens options that have been offered in the past, Schiff is offering a wooden bird house built specifically for wrens. Our partnership with Wild Birds Unlimited of Denville, and Jim Walker specifically, allowed us to offer a product that so perfectly aligns with Schiff's goals. Wild Birds Unlimited is one of Schiff's Business Partners for Greener Community. We thank Jim for his support of Schiff.

Orders for the plants, gingerbread houses, and bird houses were due in mid-November with two pick up date options for gingerbread houses: Saturday, November 19th, as well as Saturday, December 3rd. Pick up for holiday plants is the morning of Saturday, December 3rd only.

Thanks to all who supported Schiff's prior sales and this year's sale; we appreciate your patronage. We hope this year's buyers are as happy with the impressive holiday plants and truly unique gingerbread house kit as they have been in the past.



Schiff Nature Preserve
339 Pleasant Valley Road, Mendham, New Jersey 07945

Come Out & Enjoy Schiff

Discounts for Members. More Info @
www.schiffnaturepreserve.org

November 26, 2022 (Saturday) 9:00 am–11:00 am
Volunteer Work Session

December 9, 2022 (Friday) 6:00–7:30 pm
Full Moon Hike

December 10, 2022 (Saturday) 9:00–11:00 am
Forest Bathing Walk

December 11, 2022 (Sunday) 8:00–10:00 am
Sunday Morning Fitness Hike

December 15, 2022 (Thursday) 4:00–5:15 pm
Santa's Wild Home

December 16, 2022 (Friday) 7:00–8:15 pm
Singing Bowl Meditation

December 18, 2022 (Sunday) 10:00–12:00 pm
Volunteer Work Session

December 21, 2022 (Wednesday) 5:30–7:00 pm
Volunteer Work Session



Looking Ahead to 2023

Maple Sugaring Open House is scheduled for Sunday, March 5, 2023, along with a day reserved just for Scout troops on Saturday, March 4. In addition to learning the rich history of sugaring in our area, the program includes an introduction to the maple sugaring process, from finding a maple tree in winter, to how to tap the tree and why we tap maples this time of year.

2023 promises to be a fantastic season of Music in the Woods featuring returning NJ talent such as The Joe Cirotti Trio, Pyrenesia, and Widely Grown. Kicking off the season on April 23 with an indoor show in the Nature Center, we welcome Tom Rice & Friends back for an evening of blues, soul, and 60's and 70's rock 'n' roll. A longtime member of Schiff, Tom Rice & Friends are destined to get your toes tapping and your heart pounding. Later in the season, we look forward to hosting some new talent to our in the woods stage: The Outcrops, Nick Dunbar and the Sad Cowboys, and Wilma.

Wildlife Chronicles; Coming of Winter

FALL IS HERE and winter is quickly approaching. Animals are scurrying around to prepare themselves for the long slumber that lays ahead. Winter is a time for life to slow down for all. Bats, bears and snakes are among a host of animals that employ a variety of physiological strategies to combat what to us humans are extremely challenging conditions. Hibernation is just one of many strategies that allow our forest friends to thrive from season to season.

It's as if nature is taking a much-needed break. But don't be fooled, there is more activity in our natural communities than meets the eye. Bald Eagles will be busy preparing their nests for the newest chicks. This early nesting and egg laying gives them an advantage as chicks will be ready to fly in Spring when fish and small mammals

will be more plentiful as a food source.

While the black bear population of New Jersey does not technically hibernate, they do employ strategies to face the harsh winter months. Black bears in our area enter a state of torpor where their body temperature decreases and their metabolism slows, falling back on the fat reserves they stored up in the months prior to winter.



Gray Squirrels will be plentiful and can be seen dancing up and down the trees in a mating ritual that begins in January and continues throughout the early months of the new year. Other wildlife moving about the preserve in winter are the deer, fox, coyote, shrews, and mice. Look for their tracks in the mud or freshly fallen snow. Winter is a season that offers a vastly different view of a thriving preserve. Come out and enjoy a hike and see how alive winter can be!