

# Field Notes

From Schiff Nature Preserve



**SAVE THE DATE**  
Environmental Film Festival **June 3**  
Farm to Table Benefit Dinner **Sept 23**

339 Pleasant Valley Road, Mendham, New Jersey 07945-2922 • 973.543.6004 • [www.schiffnaturepreserve.org](http://www.schiffnaturepreserve.org)

## Winter Land Management Strategies

**Ken Rendall** Trustee, Conservation and Stewardship Committee Chair

Many people might think that summer is our busiest time at Schiff Natural Lands Trust, but in fact winter is quite busy too as we work towards achieving the goals of our Land Management Plan (LMP), found on our website. The ten year plan outlines the goals and strategies we use to manage the 768 acres of open space here in the Mendhams and Chester. During the winter, we continue to manage and monitor the preserve by focusing on the overall ecological maintenance of the property, non-native invasive species management, and white-tailed deer control efforts.

The deer management program works to help reduce the deer population which, left unchecked, will decimate native flora, allowing the invasive populations to thrive. Our program incorporates NJ's deer hunting regulations and is limited to a number of qualified hunters. Reducing the population of

deer in our area gives native flora a chance to grow, allowing the forest floor to provide food and cover for the many animals on property.

The use of prescribed burns is recommended as a best practice for land owners by the New Jersey Forest Fire Service (NJFFS) to help reduce the population of invasive plants, reduce the forest fire fuel loads, and improve soil quality. Used by many municipal and state agencies, the NJFFS advises us to carefully consider the areas to be burned each year utilizing a rotational plan. Burning back the invasive population allows native plants an opportunity to re-establish. The accumulation of leaf litter is also reduced while carbon is returned to the soils, improving their overall health. Before

the NJFFS carries out the actual burn, we prepare the areas by installing fire breaks and clearing areas around sensitive plantings and outbuildings to be protected from the burn.

During the winter, we also plan for the coming of planting weather. Planting native seedlings and shrubs is another component of the LMP, aimed at helping the land achieve and maintain a healthy balance of native plants. We select and order bare root seedlings in late winter to ensure a spring delivery. The seedlings are generally planted in areas that were previously burned.

With no winter lull, you can see the activities of Schiff Natural Lands Trust are year round. These strategies help us to limit the browsing of native flora and reduce the invasive plant population, while planting native seedlings and shrubs improves the balance in the land to benefit all creatures that make it their home.



## Save the Date for Schiff's Farm to Table Benefit Dinner at Blairsden

**W. Barry Thomson, Trustee**



**ON SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 23,** Schiff Natural Lands Trust will hold its fifth annual Farm to Table fundraising event at Blairsden, the iconic and historic estate in Peapack-Gladstone that has been described as "one of the finest examples of Beaux-Arts architecture in America."

Designed by the prominent New York firm of Carrère & Hastings—architects of the New York Public Library—Blairsden was planned and built between 1898 and 1903 on the 500-acre country estate of Clinton Ledyard Blair, his wife Florence Osborne Jennings, and their four daughters.

Blairsden and the Schiff Nature Preserve share several historical and physical connections. Both properties were originally developed as grand country estates during the so-called "Country House Era" by socially prominent families that knew one another, and both properties are situated along the flowing waters of the North Branch of the Raritan River.

The late-afternoon and evening event will include a reception featuring traditional Gilded Age cocktails on the terrace, where guests can enjoy the expansive views overlooking Ravine Lake and the Somerset Hills. Dinner will follow with a

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seasonal menu of locally sourced foods prepared by the renowned, award-winning chef, David C. Felton. Mr. Felton was formerly the chef at two of the area's top restaurants, Ninety Acres at Natirar and The Pluckemin Inn.

Tours of the legendary mansion will be given by Schiff trustee and local historian, W. Barry Thomson, along with archival visual presentations of the historic estate and the Blair family.

Earlier in the day, Thomson and landscape designer Ania Baas, an authority on Blairdsen's original landscape architect, James Leal Greenleaf, will lead walking tours of the historic estate's grounds. Using archival images and present-day videography, the tours will describe the elaborate landscape scheme for the property, from the approach roads up to the hilltop Italian gardens with their many water features.

Formal invitations to these events will be distributed in August but mark your calendars now! The Farm to Table dinner will be limited to 150 guests, and each of the two landscape tours will be limited to 40 guests. Members

of Schiff will be afforded the first opportunity to purchase tickets, so to ensure your place at the table, we encourage you to join Schiff, if you are not already a member. It is simple to join on our website, [www.schiffnaturepreserve.org](http://www.schiffnaturepreserve.org).

Business sponsorship opportunities for the event are also available. For more information, contact Executive Director Dorian von Aulock at [dorian@schiffnaturepreserve.org](mailto:dorian@schiffnaturepreserve.org).

This highly anticipated event presents a unique opportunity to visit this iconic estate and support Schiff and its mission of protecting and maintaining precious open lands.

## Franklin Parker Bridge Rebuilt with the Help of Volunteers

This past November, during a Volunteer Work Session, a large party of staff and volunteers replaced the thirty foot long wooden bridge spanning McVickers Brook. The group was organized by Conservation & Stewardship (C & S) Committee chair Ken Rendall and Land Steward, Chet Komoroski. The participants were hunters in the deer management program, members of the C&S Committee, and several other volunteers. On that same day, another group of volunteers performed invasive plant removal in the Great Meadow under the direction of Trustee Janis Slutsky.



The parking lot on Pleasant Valley Road was transformed into a staging and cutting area as the existing bridge was demolished, new planks were cut, thirty-foot beams were fashioned and then shoulder-carried into place on the existing footings. Once there, the top of the beams were flashed to inhibit water intrusion and the planks fastened in place.

The bridge, which had stood for ten years, required replacement because of structural rot resulting from exposure to the elements. It was a challenging project that required planning, preparation, and the generosity of our volunteers' time and equipment. We would like to express gratitude to Blue Ridge Lumber for their generous contribution of materials and to our volunteers who donated some seventy five hours of labor to this project.



## Summer Nature Program Turns 20!

Schiff's Summer Nature Program (SNP) is turning 20 and Co-Directors Christi Lorenson and Jennifer Chmura couldn't be more excited to celebrate with the children, families, and staff who have made so many wonderful SNP memories year after year. Plans to celebrate 20 years of fun in nature's summer sun involve weekly guest speakers and campfire gatherings with tasty trailside treats!

Every year, a new curriculum is created for SNP, always integrating science, sustainability, the environment, and art. This summer's program themes include Trail Mix, Tales of Tails on Trails, Oh Deer... We're 20!, and Camouflage, Colors & Colorings. Children will spend their time at Schiff embracing nature through hiking, habitat exploration, shelter building, animal tracking, wineberry picking, and nature inspired games and crafts, including Schiff's signature tie dye t-shirt making! Schiff's Summer Nature Program strives to make every child's experience one that builds confidence, friendships, enthusiasm, and a deep appreciation for the natural world around them. Registration is currently open. Please visit our website to learn more.



## Join us in the Woods for the Schiff's 14th Annual Environmental Film Festival



The Environmental Film Festival (EFF) held at the Wood Badge Lodge area of the preserve is one of Schiff's signature events. It's intended to build community, and inspire and educate our members and

friends. For the past fourteen years, the film festival has served as a "friend maker," offering visitors an unusual and unique way to explore the preserve. At this year's EFF, to be held on June 3rd, attendees can opt to take the hayride or hike to the Wood Badge Lodge area for socializing with others while enjoying roaring fire in the fire pit in advance of the movie. With the fire pit aglow and the popcorn machine popping away, folks of all ages will join us for an environmentally-oriented film with a light tone, hopefully leaving us enlightened and perhaps called to take action.

Past films have taught us about the effects of light pollution on the mating success of fireflies, the complicated reality of our agricultural food system, the complexity of how we can make our clean energy future achievable, the equally complicated reality and abundance of food waste in our country, the inspiring stories of young field biologists, and most

recently, the grassroots efforts to successfully save Portland Sequoia trees.

This year we'll invite our guest speaker to launch the evening, making use of the time waiting for dusk. Guests are encouraged to pack a picnic dinner. We will have free popcorn, water, and (sweet and savory) snack boxes for purchase. At the conclusion of the movie, all are welcome to join the hayride back down to the Nature Center parking lot.

Schiff's EFF has been supported and sponsored by many local businesses over the last few years: Backer Farm has provided the hayrides, while our sponsors Advanced Eyecare Center, Bailey Funeral Home, Breakaway Prep, Headquarters Financial Group, and Mikula Web Solutions have provided underwriting to make the evening possible. We thank them for their support and encourage our friends and members to attend this fun and informative evening.

## New! Heritage Merit Badge Program

With its rich historical connection to scouting, Schiff Nature Preserve has long offered programs for Cub and Girl Scouts in their pursuit of nature-related badges, as well as assistance to individual scouts in pursuit of environmentally themed Gold Award and Eagle Award projects.

Schiff is proud to announce a new Badge Program for scouts who wish to earn their Scouting Heritage Merit Badge. Few, if any, places are more central to the heritage and history of scouting in this country than Schiff. In this Badge program, which can be found on the Scouting page of our website, participants learn about the Scout's rich history through exhibits and an illustrated historical presentation in the Nature Center. The presentation is followed by a hike across the preserve focusing on sites and



structures central to Schiff's scouting history while also glimpsing at the Brookrace manor house—once the headquarters of the Schiff Scout Reservation. For nearly 50 years, from 1932 to 1979, the land that is now Schiff Nature Preserve was the Schiff Scout Reservation, the first permanent National Training Center for the Boy Scouts of America.

The long and rich history of scouting at Schiff—including the establishment of the American Wood Badge leadership program and the important roles played by William "Green Bar Bill" Hillcourt, James E. West, Sir Robert Baden-Powell, and many others—is essential to an understanding of scouting heritage. We hope and encourage current scouts to sign up to earn the Scouting Heritage Badge here at Schiff Nature Preserve. More information can be found on our Scouting page of our website.

## 2023 Season of Music in the Woods

2023 promises to be a fantastic season of Music in the Woods (MITW). Schiff's MITW program is intended to offer participants a unique way to enjoy the preserve with the sounds of some local NJ musicians. This year all but the last of the Music in the Woods concerts will be held outside in our Amphitheater. After making the 20 minute hike up to the outdoor venue, our guests are rewarded with a natural stage backdrop, stadium bench seating, and the opportunity to enjoy a picnic or beverage along with other nature and music lovers.



This year we'll feature returning NJ talent such as The Joe Cirrotti Trio/Quintet (May 21), Pyrenesia (July 30), and Widely Grown (September 10). Kicking off the season on May 21 with an outdoor show in the Amphitheatre, we welcome Joe Cirrotti with his quintet for an afternoon of blues, bluegrass, and rock 'n' roll. A local favorite, their musical skill and chemistry are sure to get your toes tapping and your heart pounding. Later in the season, we look forward to hosting some new talent to our wooded stage: The Outcrops (June 25), Nick Dunbar & the Sad Cowboys (August 27), and Wilma The Band (October 22). NEW this year, we will offer a membership incentive and prepaid snack boxes for our MITW attendees to enjoy. Held once a month from May to October, on Sundays from 4- 6pm, we hope to see you there.



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

## Come Out & Play

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

### Schiff Natural History Walk Series- Mt. Paul

April 29, 2023 (Saturday) 9:00 – 10:30 am

### Full Moon Hike

May 5, 2023 (Friday) 7:00 – 9:00 pm

### Yoga @Schiff Nature Preserve

May 9, 2023 (Tuesday) 10:00 – 11:15 am

### Sunday Morning Fitness Hike

May 14, 2023 ( Sunday) 9:00 – 11:00 am

### Music in the Woods- Joe Cirotti Quintet

May 21, 2023 (Sunday) 4:00 – 6:00 pm

### Environmental Film Festival

June 3, 2023 (Saturday) 7:00 – 10:00 pm

### Critter Cove Story Time

June 8, 2023 (Thursday) 10:00 – 11:00 am

### Yoga @Schiff Nature Preserve

June 13, 2023 (Tuesday) 10:00 – 11:15 am

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