

Field Notes

From Schiff Nature Preserve



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

PLEASE CONSIDER GIVING
TO OUR EARTH DAY APPEAL

16th Annual Environmental Film Festival

Amalia Duarte, Trustee and chair of the Environmental Film Festival

This year, at our annual Environmental Film Festival being held on Saturday, June 7, we are thrilled to screen the award-winning movie “Clear Day Thunder: Rescuing the American Chestnut.” This film tells a familiar story for anyone who’s had to remove a dead ash tree from their property. At the turn of the 20th century, a deadly blight accidentally brought into the U.S. from Asia devastated the majestic American Chestnut tree. Within two generations, this iconic tree was nearly extinct.

But today, there is hope! This newly released, beautifully shot documentary tells the story of passionate citizen scientists and researchers who are working to restore this important, revered tree species. Forest reforestation is important to us locally as we witness the demise of the ash tree while invasive plants such as Aurelia, Oriental Bittersweet, and Multiflora Rose are reducing the ability of native plants

to survive in our forests. Attendees are sure to be inspired by the work of these committed community activists who are



making a difference and leaving a legacy for the future.

This is our 16th Annual Film Fest, and once again, we’ll be enjoying our film under the stars in our pop-up “woodland theater!” Join family and friends for an evening like no other. The evening starts with a hay ride or leisurely hike up to the Wood Badge Lodge. Attendees are encouraged to pack a headlamp, a picnic dinner or snacks, and BYOB. We provide the fixings to make s’mores at the fire pit, plus fresh popcorn and water. As we wait for the sun to set, we play a few rounds of trivia for Schiff prizes and enjoy the beauty of our precious preserve.

Sponsors are always sought to help defray the costs of this event! It is a great opportunity for sponsors to promote their services and show their support for Schiff, joining the 30 local businesses in our Business Partner for a Greener Community program (see website). Thank you to our sponsors for making this event possible: Backer Farm, Summit Soundz, and Mikula Web Solutions.



Mendham Troop 1 Celebrates 90th Anniversary At Schiff Nature Preserve

Bryan Hill, Scout master Mendham Troop 1

ON SATURDAY, MAY 17, TROOP 1 - MENDHAM will be celebrating the 90th Anniversary of its founding. Troop 1 was founded by Scouting legend and Mendham resident, William “Green Bar Bill” Hillcourt at the Schiff Scouting Reservation in 1935 when Schiff was the epicenter of the modern Scouting movement.

As the Troop 1’s Scoutmaster for the next 16 years, Green Bar Bill developed the “Scout-led” system of Scouting used across the United States of America. This system, developed

at Schiff by Troop 1, remains a core principle of Scouting to this day. It is a significant part of what makes the Troop 1 experience so effective in developing tomorrow’s leaders. Modern Scouting is forever tied to Troop 1, Schiff Nature Preserve, and Green Bar Bill.

Please join us in celebrating the foundation of Troop 1 and our continuing collaboration with Schiff Nature Preserve. Troop 1 will be holding a Scout Day in the morning and the formal Anniversary Celebration in the afternoon

of Saturday, May 17st. Current Troop 1 Scouts will present Troop 1 and Schiff historical memorabilia and tell Scouting stories from today and the past. W. Barry Thomson will be hosting an educational talk and Schiff Scouting Lecture. Former Scouts will have the opportunity to give testimonials on how Troop 1 and Scouting has positively affected their lives. Troop 1 will also be collecting Troop 1 and Schiff Scouting memorabilia in anticipation of starting a Troop 1 Museum in the near future. Please join



**Troop 1 Mendham
90th anniversary!**

Mendham Troop 1 invites you to its 90th anniversary celebration!

INFO	PURPOSE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location: 339 Pleasant Valley Rd. Mendham Township, NJ • Contact: bryanalanhill@gmail.com • Date: 5/17/25, time TBD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep the legacy of Troop 1 and Green Bar Bill alive • Relive your scouting days! • Recognize the power and purpose of Troop 1 and scouting

SCHIFF NATURE PRESERVE
Education • Preservation • Stewardship

us in congratulating Troop 1 on their anniversary. Interested in attending? Contact bryanalanhill@gmail.com.

Board of Trustees

Marissa S. McDonnell, M.D.
President
Mendham Township

Janis Slutsky
Secretary
Mendham Borough

Alan Weinsten
Treasurer
Mendham Township

Pat Charney
Mendham Borough

Amalia Duarte
Mendham Township

Robert Osner-Hackett
Mendham Township

Ken Rendall
Peapack

W. Barry Thomson
Williamsburg, MA

Tom Wells
Mendham Borough

Staff

Dorian von Aulock
Executive Director

Chet Komoroski
Land Steward and
Volunteer Project Manager

Holly Puleo
Membership and
Bookkeeping Coordinator

Christi Lorenson
Summer Nature Program Co-Director
Program & Events Coordinator

Jennifer Chmura
Summer Nature
Program Co-Director

2025 Music in the Woods Series

Our recent community survey revealed that our visitors and members have come to highly value and appreciate Schiff's Music in the Woods (MITW) concert series. The series started in 2013 as a way to attract new visitors to the preserve, but has quickly become a favored program.

Attendees hike about a half hour along the white and red trails to reach our outdoor Amphitheater which provides a beautiful natural backdrop for the visiting musical talent.

On concert days, the Amphitheatre and surrounding areas are filled with the sounds of local NJ musicians and our attendees having a great time under the canopy of the preserve. This year will feature the return of a few of our favorites and some new talent to Schiff. The May 18th concert kicks us off with one of our returning favorites, The Joe Cirotti Quartet. With Mike Alexander joining on



the mandoline, Cirotti, Lister, and Coyle are sure to impress and entertain with their virtuoso and command of audience favorites in a variety of genres. From there we will host two more favorites: The Outcrops on June 22 and The Mountain Jam Band on July 13. Our new acts for this year are Gypsy Jazz with Cirotti, Lister, Alexander, and Fischetti on August 10, and Jerry Go Round on Sept 7th.

Each concert creates a unique and wonderful sense of community for visitors of all ages as the music and nature brings people together in a moment of shared joy. Guests may bring beverages, snacks, and pillows for their comfort. A 3:30 pm arrival allows for the 30-minute walk uphill

on irregular terrain to the venue. Parking at the Nature Center is limited, so carpooling is suggested. Walk-ins from Brookrace or ride-ins on bike are always welcome, however, advance ticket purchases are required. Current Member fee is \$20. Schiff membership and MITW ticket bundle pricing is \$65. The non-member fee is \$25. Ticket proceeds directly support the musicians and Schiff. We encourage our Music in the Woods guests to consider becoming members and welcome them to return for hikes, programs, and special events.

Summer Nature Program Plans for 2025



Nurturing a love for the environment in today's children is crucial for protecting our natural spaces tomorrow. That's the driving force behind Schiff's Summer Nature Program (SNP), led by Co-directors Christi Lorenson and Jennifer Chmura. Christi and Jennifer have combined their years of expertise and passion for the outdoors to craft a program that connects children, ages 6-16, with the wonders of the natural world.

Schiff's Summer Nature Program runs for the first four weeks of July, Monday through Friday, from 9:00 AM to 2:00 PM.

While the daily schedule and program topics evolve each year, SNP's core remains constant: a dynamic blend of science, sustainability, environmental education, and creative arts. This summer, get ready for exciting new themes including "Habitat Heroes," "Shelter Seekers," "Creatures Great and Small," and "Explorers of the Preserve." Young adventurers will enjoy hands-on experiences including daily hikes, stream explorations, animal tracking, shelter building, wineberry picking, and nature-

inspired games and crafts. And, of course, no Schiff summer is complete without our signature tie-dye creations!

This summer we're expanding our horizons (and our space!). In addition to the beloved Nature Center and Native Plant Garden, we will also be utilizing the beautiful Wood Badge Lodge. This spacious and welcoming facility will serve as an indoor and outdoor hub for games, activities, and educational sessions between hikes. Also new this summer, we have invested in a misting tent to help our young explorers beat the summer heat and stay comfortable. Between daily explorations, children can step into this cool oasis and enjoy a gentle mist, leaving them feeling refreshed and ready for their next adventure!

Give your child the gift of nature this summer. Visit our website at <https://www.schiffnaturepreserve.org/summer.cfm> to learn more and register today!

www.schiffnaturepreserve.org • 973-543-6004

Spring Emergence of Flora & Fauna at Schiff

As the frost of winter fades, Mendham bursts into life with a vibrant display of spring flora and fauna. Nestled in the rolling hills of Morris County, Schiff Nature Preserve is home to a diverse array of plants and animals that thrive in the warming temperatures and longer days.

One of the first signs of spring is the emergence of wildflowers. Skunk cabbage is among the earliest bloomers, often pushing through snow-covered ground in wetlands. By mid-spring, delicate trilliums, bloodroot, and Virginia bluebells carpet the forest floor, while bright yellow marsh marigolds thrive in damp areas. In meadows and along roadsides, common blue violets, the state flower of New Jersey, add a splash of color. Meanwhile, towering red

maples, flowering redbud and dogwood trees begin to bud, their blossoms signaling the full arrival of the season. While

and the flowering buds of taller trees within the preserve.

The warming weather also brings a flurry of animal activity,

filling the air with song. Many species of woodpeckers, including the striking pileated woodpecker, can be seen foraging for insects. Amphibians, like spring peepers and wood frogs, emerge from hibernation, their calls echoing around vernal pools. Mammals become more active as well. White-tailed deer graze in open fields, red foxes hunt for small prey, and chipmunks scurry about in search of food. The first black bears of the season may even be spotted wandering through wooded areas in search of early food sources.

Spring in Mendham is a season of renewal, with nature awakening in full force. Whether hiking through Schiff Nature Preserve or simply enjoying a backyard garden, there's no shortage of natural beauty to appreciate.



hiking one needs to keep one's eyes out for the low growing habits of trilliums and bloodroot

Birds such as eastern bluebirds, red-winged blackbirds, and warblers return from migration,

Maple Sugaring Demonstration Days at Schiff

Here at Schiff, Maple Sugaring Demonstration Days are a crowd favorite. With just a handful of Maple Sugaring demonstrations available to the public in Morris County, we were thrilled to host two days of Maple Sugaring events that featured two sessions on Saturday, March 1 and Sunday, March 2. With over 100 guests here at the Preserve over the half warm, half chilly March weekend, our trustees, staff, and volunteers provided a family friendly, hands-on educational and recreational program.

Guests enjoyed learning how to identify and tap the trees,

seeing the laborious and time consuming boiling process, and tasting some of Schiff's own maple syrup. Many of our guests opted to take the hike to the maple grove, while others enjoyed a variety of handmade maple infused treats.

With over 30 maple trees tapped on the property, we collected 70 gallons of sap to boil down resulting in about 4 pints of precious syrup. We thank our guests, Scout Troop 1 for their assistance in leading hikes, and our volunteers for helping us to offer such delicious baked goods for making this event a success.





Come Out & Play

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

- Sun, May 18 **MUSIC IN THE WOODS** The Joe Cirotti Quintet
Sat, June 7 **ENVIRONMENTAL FILM FESTIVAL** Clear Day Thunder: Rescuing the American Chestnut
Sun, June 22 **MUSIC IN THE WOODS** The Outcrops
Fri, April 25 **SINGING BOWL MEDITATION**
Sun, May 11 **FULL MOON HIKE**
Sun, July 13 **MUSIC IN THE WOODS** The Mountain Jam Band



Deer Management & Drone Use at Schiff Nature Preserve

Since 2004, Schiff has operated a deer management program as a means to achieve the goal of reducing the deer browse of the native flora population and allow it to recover. This, combined with our prescribed burn, are our primary means for reducing the invasive plants found in our preserve.

For years, we relied upon a count of the deer harvested, along with a night time survey of the deer to determine our success. That survey was typically done one night during the hunting season

and involved walking through the woods with flashlights, spotting the eyes of the deer in the lights. Conducting a deer count in this manner has been shown to be very haphazard and usually leads to an undercount of the actual deer population.

This past December, we worked with Professor Jay Kelly of Raritan Valley Community College to perform a deer count using drone technology. Dr. Kelly has studied and written numerous papers on the impacts of deer populations on the forests in New Jersey. Dr. Kelly's team flew their drone, equipped with a night vision camera, over the preserve to get a more accurate count of the deer in the area. They included a buffer around the preserve to capture those migrating outside of the property. The drone survey was accomplished in a single night. Local police departments were apprised of the team's launch locations throughout the night, with no incidents reported. While we wait for the final report, our Land Steward made some observations based on his time spent with the survey team. As expected, much of the deer population was residing on neighboring private property during the night. And, raccoons and coyotes were noted over all of the preserve.

The number of deer harvested over the recent years points to a possible reduction of the local herd, but the drone survey results are needed to confirm it.