Preserving the natural beauty and wildness of the Wissahickon Valley for 91 years

WINTER 2015   VOLUME 24 • NUMBER 4

It's back!

Photos from Whispers Along the Wissahickon on p. 13.

Urban Drawl performing at Whispers Along the Wissahickon – Photo by Charles Uniatowski
A MESSAGE from the DIRECTOR

What in the Wissahickon am I most thankful for? My favorite place in the park: the Great Beech Tree at the Andorra Natural Area. What in the Wissahickon are you most thankful for? FOW recently asked our Facebook friends to share with us what they are most thankful for in the park, and you can see some of their responses throughout this newsletter. Look for the .

For me, the Great Beech is an amazing magical spot that I love visiting with my children. They are awed by its size and beauty, and I think it gives them a real appreciation for the forest. Instilling the next generation with a love for natural spaces is essential for the future of all public parks, including Wissahickon Valley Park, with its fragile ecosystem surrounded by development. But it is also an extraordinary place, full of meaning for the community.

Whether you visit the Wissahickon every day or for the first time ever, the new signs will help you see this extraordinary place with fresh eyes.

Many of us who use the Wissahickon on a regular basis appreciate and love it, but we sometimes forget about elements of the park that don’t fit in with our daily routine. The new wayfinding signage system recently installed by FOW (see p. 7) can reintroduce a frequent park user to the Wissahickon. Part of the Sustainable Trails Initiative, the new signage system serves many purposes: making the park more accessible to all citizens; promoting responsible park use; increasing user safety; reducing user conflict; developing a cohesive park identity; and creating a durable signage system that is simple to maintain.

The information on the new signs can help someone who usually uses the Lavender Trail become acquainted with the Andorra Natural Area or Houston Meadow. A person who visited the Hermitage ten years ago will learn that it has been beautifully rebuilt and restored by the Fairmount Park Historic Trust and the Park Commission. The park visitor who always enters the Wissahickon from Kitchen’s Lane might try walking into the park from Pachela Field. Whether you visit the Wissahickon every day or for the first time ever, the new signs will help you see this extraordinary place with fresh eyes.

A recent study published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences shows that exposure to nature rejuvenates the brain and benefits overall physical and mental health. Perhaps walking in the Wissahickon could be your New Year’s resolution, along with joining FOW, becoming a Crew Leader or Trail Ambassador, or volunteering in the park. It is now easier than ever to find your way to a Saturday workday!

Maura McCarthy, Executive Director

What in the Wissahickon are you most thankful for?
The over six mile stretch along the Wissahickon known as Forbidden Drive.
Harry Clement

United Way Donations

The Friends of the Wissahickon can receive membership/donations through the United Way. Our United Way number is 9882. If this is the most convenient way for you to give, please do so. Visit our website (www.fow.org) to learn about the benefits of membership in Friends of the Wissahickon.
Covered Bridge in Architectural Hall of Fame

The Thomas Mill Covered Bridge in Wissahickon Valley Park was inducted into the Chestnut Hill Historical Society Hall of Fame on December 3. The Covered Bridge was one of five selected by the voters, who considered structures that: represent groundbreaking approaches to planning and design; are significant for their design, materials, craftsmanship, or style; and are of historical significance because of an association with an event or person, or by virtue of age. FOW funded work on the bridge in 1939. It was rebuilt with supporting reinforced steel rods by laborers supplied through the Works Progress Administration (WPA).

Wissahickon Named Best for Urban Hiking

Philadelphia Magazine named Wissahickon Valley Park “Best” for Urban Hiking, in no small part due to FOW’s great work on the trails and amenities of the park. This is what they had to say: “If you’ve only walked Forbidden Drive, you haven’t really done the Wiss. This 1,800-acre park has 57 miles of shaded, twisting, water-edging trails and couldn’t be more accessible. Seek out the paths that lead to the park’s many historic bridges, like the Thomas Mill covered bridge—originally built in 1737, it’s the last of its kind within city limits.”

State of the Wissahickon?

Still poor. But what can we do individually and as a community to improve the quality of the Wissahickon Creek and protect its health moving forward? Lindsay Blanton, Water Quality Outreach Coordinator for the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association (WVWA) discussed the history and development of the Wissahickon Creek and how this has impacted the health of the water at a presentation at Valley Green Inn on November 11. This event was jointly sponsored by FOW and WVWA.

What in the Wissahickon are you most thankful for?

Tree House education and FOW stewardship. And sugar maples. And the “crick.” And turtles. And wine berries. And tracks and scat. And well, the Wissahickon.

Christina Moresi

Birds and Trees at Valley Talks

FOW hosted two Valley Talks this fall at Valley Green Inn. Scott Weidensaul presented Birds, Beans, and Conservation: Simple Ways to Save Migratory Birds. Weidensaul is the author of more than two dozen books on natural history, including the Pulitzer Prize finalist Living on the Wind about bird migration. Tom Kerschner, Preserve Manager for the Natural Lands Trust, presented Creating a Better Forest. He discussed how to best manage wildlife, insects, stormwater, trees, and forest visitors. Valley Talks are sponsored by Valley Green Bank. Pictured here with Tom Kerschner are FOW Executive Director Maura McCarthy and Lesley Seitchik, Director of Marketing at Valley Green Bank.

Special Thanks to Community Fundraisers

Several community groups organized events to raise funds for FOW this fall. Hotbox Yoga in Manayunk raised $250 from a special yoga class, Chasing Trail raised $115 at a showing of the film Run Free: The True Story of Caballo Blanco, RootsRated and Timberland hosted a Pint Nite that netted $200, and Weaver’s Way Co-Op in Chestnut Hill collaborated with FOW for a Brats and Beers night that raised $225. If you or your organization has an idea for a fundraising event to benefit FOW, contact Development and Outreach Assistant Giulia Morrone at morrone@fow.org.

FOW Awarded Grant from William Penn Foundation

FOW has been awarded $540,000 from the William Penn Foundation to support its capacity to protect and restore water quality and habitat in Wissahickon Valley Park and increase its visibility as a regional leader in watershed protection. These funds will directly support several new FOW staff roles, upcoming marketing and outreach work, and work with the Tookany/Tacony-Frankford Watershed Partnership, the Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association, and other organizations.

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**TRAIL AMBASSADOR WALKS & TALKS**

Registration is recommended for all hikes (required if indicated) so that participants can be informed of weather or other emergency cancellations. Unless otherwise specified, Trail Ambassador Walks may be on rocky, rugged trails that may be wet and slippery. Wear sturdy shoes or boots with socks. Long pants are recommended for protection against occasional poison ivy and possible ticks. Bring water and a snack if desired. Unless otherwise noted, children over six are welcome if accompanied by a responsible adult. **Walks are cancelled in heavy rain or icy conditions.** For more information or to register, contact Sarah Marley at marley@fow.org.

Visit [www.fow.org](http://www.fow.org) for updated information.

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**WALKS**

**Currently Exposed Rock in the Wissahickon Gorge with Jeff Frazier**

**Saturday, December 19 • 10 am – noon**

Learn about the theories of what caused the rocks of the Wissahickon Gorge to be formed and why they are currently exposed at the earth’s surface. Explore Wissahickon Schist, with its intricate and beautiful patterns, view stream characteristics such as cut banks and deposition bars, and learn how movement of rock particles through erosion processes have shaped the landscape. *Meet at Valley Green Inn.*

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**Trails Less Traveled III: Bushwhacking in Andorra with Gerry Schweiger**

**Saturday, December 26 • 1 pm**

This walk will take hikers through an area with lots of briars, brambles, fallen trees, and scree. Hikers should wear leather gloves or thorn resistant sturdy gloves. Difficulty: challenging. *Meet at Cedars House, Northwestern Ave., and Forbidden Drive. Look for a gray Toyota Corolla.*

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**“We’re gonna do this walk regardless . . .” Year II with Bruce Wagner and Kris Soffa**

**Sunday, January 24 • 9:30 am – noon**

This hike from Cedars House to the Covered Bridge will commence regardless of the weather; we’ll go by foot, ski, or snowshoes along the Orange Trail or Forbidden Drive, depending on conditions. Traveling at a leisurely pace, we’ll enjoy the beautiful wintry landscape. Children 10+ are welcome, accompanied by a responsible adult. Registration is strongly encouraged. *Meet at Cedars House, Northwestern Ave., and Forbidden Drive.*

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**Gorgeous Gorge with Rod Barchy**

**Saturday, February 20 • 1 pm**

This walk will take hikers through an area with lots of briars, brambles, fallen trees, and scree. Hikers should wear leather gloves or thorn resistant sturdy gloves. Difficulty: challenging. *Meet at Cedars House, Northwestern Ave., and Forbidden Drive.*

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**Seeing Through the Woods with Bruce Wagner**

**Saturday, March 19 • 1 pm**

An exploration of the Wissahickon Gorge on the Chestnut Hill side, from the edge of the creek to hidden craggy heights with wonderful views. Hike along a variety of trails and little known connector footpaths and bridges, exposing the park’s geology, rugged terrain, and manmade structures from past to present. Our hike includes: rocky and steep portions. Difficulty: moderate to brisk pace. Distance: 2.5 miles. Duration: ~2 hours. Bad weather or hazardous trail conditions will cancel. *Meet at the upper parking lot along Valley Green Road.*

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**Trails Less Traveled IV: Icons of the Lower Wissahickon with Gerry Schweiger**

**Sunday, March 13 • 1 pm**

Most park landmarks are on Forbidden Drive. This walk will take hikers to some less visited places along the lower creek. We will start and finish on the Rittenhouse Trail along Lincoln Drive, and will visit the Hundred Steps, Hermit’s Cave, Lover’s Leap, and RittenhouseTown. Duration: 2.5-3 hours. Difficulty: several strenuous climbs. *Meet at parking lot on Gypsy Lane near Lincoln Drive (across from Wissahickon Hall).*

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**TALKS**

**Cedars House Talks take place at the Cedars House Café on Forbidden Drive just below Northwestern Ave.** Events are cancelled in the event of bad weather. Visit [www.fow.org](http://www.fow.org) for updates. Those who register will receive an email in the event Cedars House is closed.

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**Fishing the Wissahickon with Tony DeFazio**

**Sunday, January 17 • 2 – 3 pm**

Robert Redford’s movie *A River Runs Through It* might be an apt description for this presentation. Trail Ambassador Tony DeFazio will discuss the ecology of the Wissahickon Creek, specifically the creek’s marquee fish—trout. Thanks to the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission, the Wissahickon Creek is stocked with three types of trout: rainbows, brown, and brook trout (also known as golden rainbow). Tony will discuss what makes trout interesting and why they make the Wissahickon so attractive.

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**What’s to Love About Squirrels with Sarah West**

**Sunday, January 24 • 2 – 3 pm**

A PowerPoint presentation on why we should appreciate squirrels in spite of their rascally behavior.

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**We Have Bridges: A Photo Tour of the Bridges in the Wissahickon with Bruce Wagner**

**Sunday, February 21 • 2 – 3 pm**

From Northwestern Ave. all the way to the Schuykill River, the Wissahickon Creek and its small tributaries are constantly being crossed by bridge—from stiles to stones, from casual to historic. This presentation finds them all and illustrates the complex personality of the park.

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**Roads and Road Houses with Sarah West**

**Sunday, February 28 • 2 – 3 pm**

A PowerPoint presentation on the Wissahickon Turnpike and the Road Houses of the 19th century.

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**Grassroots Environmental Advocacy: How the NorthWest was Won with Kris Soffa**

**Sunday March 6 • 2 – 3 pm**

Hear the story behind the preservation and creation of The Upper Roxborough Historic District. This multi-part epic contains themes from the Wild West: gorgeous scenery and wildlife, a posse, and more. Learn how a community responded to a continuous development threat by taking matters into its own hands. Volunteer efforts paid off to preserve almost 700 acres of contiguous public and private land worth saving. Suitable for children 13+ with a responsible adult.

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**Understanding Horses with Cynthia Turecki**

**Sunday March 13 • 2 – 3 pm**

Have you ever wondered how a horse thinks and communicates? This presentation will help you understand the horse’s point of view. Learn how a horse sees its surroundings and thinks.

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**Butterfly Basics: Building a Butterfly Habitat at Home with Kris Soffa**

**Sunday March 20 • 2 – 3 pm**

Spring is the perfect time to transform your landscape into a haven for these gorgeous native pollinators. In this class you’ll learn basic butterfly habitat guidelines, like the benefits of pairing host plants. With a little practice, you will quickly be able to identify local butterflies and better appreciate their role as a bio-indicator species. We will discuss butterfly biology, how to raise butterflies at home, and other fascinating facts about these brilliant insects.
Make Becoming an FOW Trail Ambassador Your New Year’s Resolution!

FOW is offering a winter training session for its popular Trail Ambassador volunteer program. Trail Ambassadors are park volunteers who assist and educate people in the park with everything from directions and safety needs, to park history, flora, and fauna. Ambassadors perform their service in the park and participate in ongoing education. The application deadline is Friday, January 22, 2016.

Trail Ambassadors become experts on the Wissahickon and have the opportunity to delve deeply into their particular topics of interest, while providing a valuable public service. Trail Ambassadors share their knowledge by:

• interacting with and providing assistance to park users while walking the trails;
• staffing information tables at FOW volunteer days and events;
• leading walks in the Wissahickon Valley; and
• conducting surveys of park users and wildlife.

Training will be held at the Chestnut Hill Friends Meetinghouse on Wednesday evenings, 6 to 8 p.m., from February 10 through March 30, and on two Saturdays: March 12 and 19.

Applicants accepted into the program are required to pay a $100 registration fee, sign a one-time volunteer release form, and obtain a criminal background check and child-abuse clearance. Trail Ambassadors must be FOW members or willing to join the organization. The number of open positions is limited. For more information, program requirements, and an application form, visit www.fow.org/volunteering/trail-ambassadors. Contact FOW Outreach Manager Sarah Marley with questions at marley@fow.org or 215-247-0417 x109.

Open Space Showcase a Success

FOW and the Chestnut Hill Historical Society presented an open discussion on the protection of open space through conservation easements held by land trusts in October at Valley Green Inn. Staff from FOW and CHHS were joined by representatives from other organizations: Natural Lands Trust; Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia; Whitemarsh Foundation; and Wissahickon Valley Watershed Association. Those who attended were also treated to a screening of the trailer for the upcoming documentary based on the book *Metropolitan Paradise* by David Contosta and Carol Franklin. Pictured here is Lori Salganicoff, Executive Director of CHHS, introducing the panel.

TA Field Report

**Ambassadors:**
Jim Kohler & Carol Beam

**Date:** 10/9/15

**Shift time:** 9:30 am – 11:30 am

**Zone:** C—Rittenhouse Town

**Mode of Transportation:** Hike

**Number & Type of Interactions:** 0

**Dogs off leash:** 0

**Park damage:** We found a couple of big trees down across the trail on the far side of Lincoln Drive. They looked like they had been there for some time and were kind of tricky to get over. But this is a very under-used trail. The only other creature we saw on the trail was a white-tail deer buck.

**Shift Summary:** We walked down the bike trail from Rittenhouse, then at Ridge took the trail on the far side of the creek. That took us down Lincoln Drive, but far enough up the hill that we could enjoy the woods. We picked up a good amount of trash—empty spray paint cans are very popular under the bridge. No one was out walking, but several bicyclists passed us on the paved half of the walk. We stopped to take photos of what we thought was a primrose, and then of a juvenile great blue heron at the edge of the creek. At one point we were in the woods with so many grackles we felt a bit of Hitchcockian anxiety. They left us to ourselves and continued their own chatter.

When we came back to Rittenhouse, we admired the view of the stream. A beautiful early fall walk.

Trail Ambassadors Bruce Wagner and Lynn Mather
**Lavender Trail Bridge Replacement**

FOW replaced a pair of wooden footbridges on the Lavender Trail this fall. FOW volunteers had built and installed the bridges around 2001 to provide access over two small ephemeral streams. Since then, due to the increasing frequency of large storms and changes in development patterns in the adjoining neighborhood, the volume of stormwater flows in the streams has increased. This has led to severe erosion that has both widened and deepened the stream channels. The original bridge abutments (which support the bridges at either end) were constructed right at the stream edge and had begun to give way. Additionally, the railings had deteriorated and were at risk of failure under heavy loading.

FOW worked with Steve Thomas from Terra Firma Trails, LLC, and several volunteers to design and install the new bridges. These bridges are significantly longer, twenty-eight feet versus twelve, and are designed to rest well outside the stream channel so they will be less susceptible to failure from erosion. The new abutments are anchored into the ground at a minimum of six feet from the stream edge. Additionally, railings were installed on both sides of the bridge decks to provide better grip during wet conditions.

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**PWD Restores Banks of Gorgas Run**

By Christopher Anderson, Philadelphia Water Department

Gorgas Run is an historic tributary to the Wissahickon Creek. Once home to a thriving mill, today this stream has been damaged by the impacts of stormwater runoff. Rapid urbanization during the 19th and 20th centuries saw many streams like Gorgas Run culverted and buried underground, forming the base of our city’s sewer network. When it rains, millions of gallons of stormwater pour into our sewer system and eventually flow into our creeks and rivers. Flash flows and high volumes of stormwater runoff have damaged and eroded away the banks of Gorgas Run, destroying habitat and in many cases exposing or damaging city infrastructure located in the park.

Philadelphia Water’s Ecological Restoration Unit recently started a project to restore the banks of Gorgas Run and help protect this historic area against further damage from stormwater. Approximately 1,800 feet of stream bank from Gorgas Lane to Forbidden Drive will be stabilized to restore habitat and enhance the flow of the stream as it makes its way to the Wissahickon. This project will take roughly one year to complete and during that time access to the Yellow Trail will be restricted. Residents and park users can also expect to see heavy equipment on site. To learn more about the project, please contact PWD’s Public Affairs Team at questions@phillywatersheds.org.

Christopher Anderson is Watershed Programs Manager at the Philadelphia Water Department.

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**What in the Wissahickon are you most thankful for?**

I’m thankful for ALL of it!

*Sandy Kulczyza*
New Signage System Helps Park Users Rediscover the Wissahickon

By Henry Stroud, Project Manager

Wissahickon Valley Park’s new trail wayfinding system provides useful information to guide you in your exploration of the more than 50 miles of premier biking, hiking, and equestrian trails the park offers. Each of the twenty-five beautifully designed trailhead kiosks welcomes you and contains helpful information including a map displaying all of the park’s trails, the location of popular destinations, park rules and regulations, and location information to orient you and emergency services, if needed. Some kiosks also feature detailed descriptions of the parks many attractions including historic structures, unique habitats and colorful photos of plant and animal species you may see while exploring, as well as information about how you can help protect the park’s fragile habitat during your visit. The kiosks were handmade using sturdy, natural materials and pay homage to the longstanding tradition of craftsmanship displayed in structures throughout the park.

In addition to the kiosks, more than 125 trail markers provide important trail information including use designations (who can use which trails), distances to significant landmarks, and “help location addresses,” used to guide emergency responders. Colored blocks are used to indicate if you are on one of the park’s primary trails: the Yellow, Orange, White, or Lavender Trail. The trail markers were partially constructed using a special material, Extira, which is manufactured in Pennsylvania, and they were designed to blend in with the natural surroundings to the fullest extent possible.

One of our favorite places to explore is the Orange Trail from Hortter Street to Valley Green Road. This hiker-only section of trail closely follows Wissahickon Creek and passes close to many of the parks unique attractions. Have a picnic lunch at the Toleration Statue or snap a photo at the Fingerspan Bridge as you make your way north toward Valley Green Inn.

Turn the page and take a virtual hike with us on the Orange Trail!

Signage is a part of STI

The new signage system that FOW has developed for these trails is part of the Sustainable Trails Initiative (STI). STI is an effort to balance the impact our trails have on the environment with the need to manage the park as a recreational resource that improves the quality of life for people in the Philadelphia region. The quality of the habitat and water within the lower Wissahickon watershed is intrinsically linked to the quality of our trails and to the use of them by the 1.1 million annual visitors to the park. A new trail signage system is an important step toward delineating official trails, managing trail traffic, and connecting with trail users.

What in the Wissahickon are you most thankful for?
Upper trails for challenging MTB and trail running. Forbidden Drive for flat/easy or fast runs and bike rides with the kids. Plus: the new trail signage and maps with segment distances are really nice additions!

Bob Moore

Signage removal volunteers: Dean Rosencranz, Robin Freedman, Louis Gomel, and Doug and Charlotte Nadel.

Mike and Kate Saris using a kiosk sign on Valley Green Road

A kiosk sign at the entrance to Hermit Lane.

Four of the 125 Trail Markers throughout the park.
Take a Walk in the Wissahickon

This recommended hike follows the Orange Trail from Horter Street to Valley Green Road. Featured are highlights from the newly installed Upper Trails Wayfinding and Signage System.

Umbrella Magnolia (Magnolia tripetala) is a fast-growing tree with clusters of large (18”-20” long) diamond-shaped leaves near its branches that resemble umbrellas. These magnolias have intensely fragrant flowers that develop cone-shaped, rosy-red fruits. The trees are often found in moist understory forest settings.

The Northern Two-Lined Salamander (Eurycea bislineata) is a common greenish yellow to yellowish-orange salamander with a black or brown line running from each of its eyes to its tail and a yellow underside. It prefers shallow streambanks or hillside seeps with sandy to gravel soil. It is one of our most common stream salamanders.

Devil’s Pool: Many legends surround Devil’s Pool, a deep pool at the confluence of Cresheim and Wissahickon Creeks. Shakespeare Rock, with a carved quotation from “Two Gentlemen of Verona” (II, vii), overlooks the pool.

Climbers Rock: Downstream from Livezey Lane, a large overhanging face of Wissahickon Schist provides short climbing routes. Top anchors are used for sport climbing while easier routes provide climbers the opportunity for bouldering.

Monastery Stables: Home of the Philadelphia Sax Club, this facility offers lessons and boating. The house (ca. 1773) on the site was occupied by Joseph Gorg, who may have been the Baptist District leader for meetings in the 19th century as a stop on the Underground Railroad.

FOW Trail Work: In 2013, the Friends of the Wissahickon completed a forest restoration project along the Orange Trail Initiative. Severely eroded trails were closed and planted with sustainable trail techniques to reduce erosion and improve drainage. The Sustainable Trails Initiative is a multi-year campaign to replace and modify the existing trail network in the Wissahickon Valley Park. This Initiative will improve the quality of trails while reducing soil erosion and sedimentation impacts to the Wissahickon Creek.
Livezey House:  
Livezey House (ca. 1700), also called Glen Fern, was purchased by Thomas Livezey in 1747. He operated his adjacent grist mill as one of the largest mills along the Wissahickon Creek and within the Colonies. The house was sold to the Fairmount Park Commission in 1868.

Fingerspan Bridge:  
The Fairmount Park Art Association commissioned the sculpture “Fingerspan” in 1987 by the internationally renowned artist Jody Pinto. The sculpture was fabricated from an old ship’s staircase and functions as a pedestrian bridge. This finger-shaped sculpture was fabricated in sections and installed by helicopter.

Red Foxes (Vulpes vulpes) are typically active at dusk or at night and have an extremely broad diet, including small mammals, birds, and fruit, as well as food items scavenged from compost piles or trash bins. They are the size of a small dog with fur ranging in color from reddish-brown to flame-red with a large, bushy, white-tipped tail.

The male Wood Duck (Aix sponsa) is one of the most colorful waterfowl. These birds live in wooded swamps, streams, and ponds, nesting in holes in trees or in nest boxes installed along the water’s edge. They are one of the few duck species who can grip bark and perch on branches.

Toleration Statue:  
A gift from John Welsh, the original commissioner of the Fairmount Park Commission, the statue depicts William Penn and commemorates his extraordinary policies of toleration. The statue was created by nineteenth-century sculptor Herman Kirm and erected in 1883.

Information and trail construction project here as part of the Sustainable Stables project. Native species, and replacement trails were constructed using riparian buffers to provide a drier, safer trail surface.

The severely eroded trail system with a sustainable trail network. This will reduce erosion and sedimentation impacts to the Wissahickon Creek.
**Sign Removal**

Have you noticed something missing from the park recently? Have you been to the FOW office basement and seen the large pile of what appears to be old lumber growing steadily in the back room? If you have, then you know FOW volunteers have removed the old tombstone shaped trail signs and stashed them away to be sold as a fundraiser. Created and installed by David Bower and Chris Palmer about eighteen years ago, the signs were meant to last only a few years until a permanent solution to poor trail signage was implemented. One would assume that after eighteen years in the ground, the signs would be easy to remove, but it is a testament to David and Chris’ workmanship that our volunteers had to dig, sweat, and maybe even curse a little to get the signs out. We even used the FOW van to pluck a couple of particularly stubborn signs from the ground. Thanks so much to the volunteers who helped on two separate workdays as well as the Crefeld School Students, Sean Reisman, and everyone else who emailed to say “you missed one!”

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**Yellow Trail Maintenance**

What was supposed to be a two-day project was cut down to one because of rain. So on October 17, about forty volunteers showed up to get all the work done in one morning. With the help of FOW Crew Leaders Dan Mercer, Dave Dannenberg, and Nick Uniatowski, the large group was split up to better tackle a large project. Starting on the Yellow Trail below Saul High School and working their way back to the Pachella Field access road, volunteers re-graded inslope sections of trail, de-bermed some sections, and added some grade reversals. Some stone work was done too, including armoring an eroding bridge foundation, fixing some stone step-ups, adding some chokes, and using stone to close some braided trail sections (paths created by hikers). A rogue trail that led from the Yellow Trail down to Forbidden Drive was closed and choked up as well. A special thanks goes to Alice McBee for organizing a group of Scots in Service from The College of Wooster and bringing them to the workday.

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**Structures Crew**

I can say with certainty that when a tree falls in the woods, it makes a sound–especially when it falls on the old guard shack at Valley Green Inn. Substantial damage was done to the north half of the roof, as well as the beams and joists holding it up, when a large chunk of a tulip tree fell at the end of the summer. The guard shack is an important and historic structure, so it needed to be rebuilt to the original specifications, which proved to be a challenge due to the scroll work on the beam ends. The Structures Crew sourced some beautiful Douglas fir beams from Rittenhouse Lumber and quickly set to work carving the details into them. Next, they removed any damaged wood from the structure and began joining the new beams to the existing ones, which were structurally sound. Wood near the foundation of the structure was rotten and therefore replaced. The last step of the project is to put a fresh coat of paint on the shack and install the tin roof.

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**What in the Wissahickon are you most thankful for?**

Hiking and biking the trails and skipping rocks with my kids. Was just there today.

Jodi Walton Ash
New Crew Leader Training in 2016

Friends of the Wissahickon needs Volunteer Crew Leaders. Crew Leaders work directly with FOW's Volunteer Coordinator to help plan and lead volunteer work days throughout the park. By participating in this program, Crew Leaders become experts on FOW's work in Wissahickon Valley Park and learn about trail and habitat restoration best practices. These volunteers also have the opportunity to interact with FOW volunteers as well as FOW and Philadelphia Parks & Recreation (PPR) staff. Crew Leaders help educate volunteers on a daily basis and help FOW do more restoration work than ever before throughout the park.

Training and workshops will be held on six weekends throughout February and March 2016. Workshop topics will include:

- First Aid Training (March 19)
- Plant Identification and PPR Forest Management
- Trail Building and Maintenance
- Sustainable Trails Initiative
- Volunteer Leadership
- Beginner and Advanced Machine Operation

Visit www.fow.org or contact Volunteer Coordinator John Holback at holback@fow.org for more information. Applications are due by January 11, 2016.

Volunteer Workdays

Blue Bell Invasive Vine Cutting
Saturday, December 19
9 - 1 pm

Wednesday Workdays
Wednesdays
9 - 12 pm

Martin Luther King Day of Service
Monday, January 18
9 - 12 pm

Register with Volunteer Coordinator John Holback at holback@fow.org.

Visit www.fow.org for more details.

Why I am a Friend of the Wissahickon

I fell in love with the Wissahickon as a runner. Actually, when I moved into a neighborhood along the Wissahickon twenty years ago, I would only run sporadically. But once I started running the trails of the Wissahickon, I enjoyed it so much I just kept going, and really only stopped once my knees gave out a few years ago. Now I love the Wissahickon for the peace. I never tire of the Wissahickon because each season provides a different feeling. We are very lucky to have this forest within our city limits, something which does not exist in any other American city. But we can't take this parkland for granted. To help keep the trails maintained and marked, and the forest properly managed, I donate each year to the Friends of the Wissahickon. This is a small price to pay for the enjoyment this forest has provided me.—Dan Gordon

Dan Gordon is a long-time FOW donor, member, and volunteer. A Co-founder of the Wissahickon Wanderers, he is a real estate manager and lives in Mt. Airy.
Meet Our New Environmental Educator

by Trish Fries, Wissahickon Environmental Center

For the first time in over ten years, the Wissahickon Environmental Center will be staffed by two permanent full-time employees. Tony Croasdale has recently been hired as Environmental Education Planner.

Tony was born and raised in Northeast Philadelphia, being exposed at a young age to Pennypack Park. His father, Clyde Croasdale, was president of Friends of Pennypack Park. Tony was inspired to take up birding at age nine after visiting Pennypack Environmental Center and learning about Kingfishers. Tony has a Horticulture degree from Temple University and is completing his Master of Science degree from St. Joseph’s University. He brings many unique experiences to his educator role at the Tree House–from leading bird hikes in Brazil to performing field research in the Canadian Arctic, Alaska, Brazil, and Peru. He is a Field Trip Leader for BirdPhilly and the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, and co-hosts the Urban Wildlife Podcast. He is also a semi-retired punk rock vocalist and concert promoter.

Years ago Tony spent a summer in the Wissahickon with the Student Conservation Association leading a field crew that maintained trails. Though he grew up in Northeast Philadelphia and has spent the last several years in Cobb’s Creek Park, he has quickly grown to love the Wissahickon. Tony currently commutes by bus from West Philadelphia, which allows him the opportunity each morning and afternoon to walk through the Andorra Meadows. He keeps a daily journal of what he sees and so far he has seen a fox, milk snake, and too many birds to mention!

Jumping right in, Tony has started offering Thursday morning bird walks in conjunction with BirdPhilly that begin at 7:30 a.m. with coffee and bird watching from our new porch. All are welcome to stop by the Tree House and say hello and welcome him.

Equestrians Take to the Trails to Raise Funds for FOW

By Sue Landers and Cynthia Turecki, Philadelphia Chapter of PA Equine Council

The fall weather on Sunday, November 15, was fabulous and made for a perfect day for the Fourth Annual Ride the Wissahickon, a fundraising horseback ride sponsored by the Philadelphia Chapter of the PA Equine Council (PEC). The sky was clear and a gorgeous blue, the temperature was a balmy-for-November 58 degrees, and the Wissahickon Valley was alive with color. It was also alive with horses, as approximately twenty equestrians and their equine partners came out for the ride to enjoy the day and raise money for the Friends of the Wissahickon.

Many of the riders and mounts were from local barns in the Wissahickon–including Monastery Stables, Northwestern Stables, and the host barn, Courtesy Stable. Some riders from outlying suburbs–some for the first time—made the journey to experience the park. The horses participating made a handsome group and included bays, chestnuts, sorrels and grays, a buckskin, and a palomino. Both English and Western disciplines were represented.

The marked ride started and ended at Courtesy Stable and took participants through the Houston and Andorra Meadows, in the woods near the Wissahickon Environmental Center, and on Forbidden Drive along the creek.

Several FOW Trail Ambassadors joined the group: Carmella Clark, Diane Garvey, Sanna Randall, and Cynthia Turecki. Other supporters of the ride included Chapter members and park enthusiasts Sue Landers and Andrea Shumsky.

To learn more about the monthly event Horses in the Park, the Philadelphia Chapter of PEC, or about riding horses in the Wissahickon, email phillypec@gmail.com or send a message via Facebook at www.facebook.com/phillypec.

At this year’s event, donations peaked just over $2,000. Proceeds from several past rides have also been donated to FOW and used to rebuild the Warming Sheds at Valley Green Inn, fund new trail signage, and support the Sustainable Trails Initiative. Funds from a ride in 2011 were donated to the Philadelphia Police Department Mounted Patrol Unit. The Philadelphia Chapter feels strongly about giving back to the park, as it is an oasis from the city and a place to enjoy horses and nature. Members routinely help with trail maintenance as well. “FOW is very grateful to the Philly Chapter of PEC for their years of support,” said Maura McCarthy, FOW Executive Director. “We urge park users to attend Horses in the Park, held once a month at Valley Green Inn.”

What is BirdPhilly?

BirdPhilly is an initiative of the Delaware Valley Ornithological Club. Founded in 1890, the DVOC has been based at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia since 1891. The DVOC runs field trips throughout the tri-state region, however BirdPhilly focuses on trips within Philadelphia city limits in collaboration with Philadelphia Parks & Recreation and the Fairmount Park Conservancy.

The goal of BirdPhilly is to increase interest and awareness of Philadelphia’s birds by providing quality birding experiences on expertly guided field trips. All field trips are free unless the site charges an admission fee. These trips are open to children, adults, and well behaved pets. BirdPhilly also participates in DVOC’s Philadelphia Bird Race to raise funds for conservation and research projects. Learn more at www.birdphilly.org.

Trish Fries is an Environmental Education Program Specialist at the Wissahickon Environmental Center (Tree House) for Philadelphia Parks & Recreation.

Photo by Steven Powell
After taking a year off to celebrate FOW's 90th Anniversary, Friends of the Wissahickon hosted the popular fall celebration Whispers Along the Wissahickon on October 23. Held at the Wissahickon Environmental Center (WEC) in the Andorra Natural Area, FOW was able to showcase the new porch installed on the Tree House. FOW worked with contractors, architects, and conservators to design and build the porch. Volunteers painted the porch in August, which will be used by WEC staff for outdoor educational programs.

Presented by Best Nest, Whispers Along the Wissahickon has become a fall tradition for many Philadelphia families and tickets sell out quickly every year. The event would not be so successful without the help of the staff from the Wissahickon Environmental Center, PPR Groundskeeper Steve O’Kula, and many great volunteers. FOW is also grateful to all our sponsors and local merchants who donate goods for the event.
Pennsylvania Master Naturalist Training Announced for Spring 2016 in Philadelphia Region

By Ellyn Nolt, Master Naturalist

In the spring of 2016, Pennsylvania Master Naturalist is partnering with Friends of the Wissahickon to prepare citizens to become volunteer leaders in their communities through natural resource conservation education, citizen science, and stewardship. Pennsylvania Master Naturalist is a citizen volunteer initiative with three key components: an initial fifty-five-hour volunteer training, annual volunteer service, and continuing education in the natural sciences.

Building Volunteer Leadership for Community-based Conservation

Master Naturalist volunteers design and pursue a wide variety of service projects: habitat restoration and native plantings, nature walks and interpretive displays, publications on natural history, water quality monitoring, and supporting the natural resource conservation efforts of partnering organizations. Since 2010, Pennsylvania Master Naturalist volunteers in Southeastern Pennsylvania have:

- engaged in more than 13,600 hours of conservation service
- contributed $309,000 in conservation value and impact to numerous regional partners
- reached over 18,000 people through education and outreach initiatives
- improved 795 acres of habitat through stewardship service
- dedicated themselves to 3,822 hours of continuing education in the natural sciences

Interested Applicants

Once accepted into the Pennsylvania Master Naturalist program, participants attend initial intensive training sessions. This natural history training includes fifty-five hours of classroom (weekday evenings) and field sessions (Saturday). Following this training, participants engage in thirty hours of service in the first year and eight hours of continuing education in order to become certified as a Master Naturalist Volunteer. Participants also complete annual service and continuing education hours to maintain their status as Master Naturalist Volunteers.

Spring training for Friends of Wissahickon will begin in April and run through early June. Specific training dates will be announced in December. The finalized training schedule along with the application and information about training can be found on Pennsylvania Master Naturalist's website at www.pamasternaturalist.org under “Become a Master Naturalist.”

Ellyn Nolt is Program Coordinator at Master Naturalist. For additional information or questions, contact her at progcoord@pamasternaturalist.org or 717-368-4899.
Award-winning Photographer Celebrates Twenty Years of Wissahickon Photography

Local photographer Melvin A. Chappell, whose work is regularly featured in FOW’s online and printed publications, is celebrating twenty years of photographing the Wissahickon Valley with a new book containing twenty-eight of his favorite photos of the park. The book tells the stories of the people and the artists who have made the Valley what it is today.

Chappell is an award-winning photographer, whose work has been used by FOW and other organizations, such as Historic RittenhouseTown and the Morris Arboretum. His photograph of the Indian Statue won Best in Show in FOW’s Biennial Photo Contest in 2008. Many of his photographs can be found in numerous private and public collections around the world, including the permanent collections of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the Museum of Modern Art.

To purchase The Wissahickon Valley: The Photography of Melvin A. Chappell, email machappell@earthlink.net. The book is also available at www.blurb.com and at the Woodmere Art Museum gift store (www.woodmereartmuseum.org).

Hikes in the Wissahickon

Trail Ambassador Walks

Registration is recommended for all hikes (required if indicated) so that participants can be informed of weather or other emergency cancellations. Unless otherwise specified, Trail Ambassador Walks may be on rocky, rugged trails that may be wet and slippery. Wear sturdy shoes or boots with socks. Long pants are recommended for protection against occasional poison ivy and possible ticks. Bring water and a snack if desired. Unless otherwise noted, children over six are welcome if accompanied by a responsible adult. Walks are cancelled in heavy rain or icy conditions. For more information or to register, contact Sarah Marley at marley@fow.org. Visit www.fow.org for updates

More information on p. 7 and at www.fow.org.

Currently Exposed Rock in the Wissahickon Gorge with Jeff Frazier Saturday, December 19 • 10 am – noon

Learn about the theories of what caused the rocks of the Wissahickon Gorge to be formed and why they are currently exposed at the earth’s surface. Meet at Valley Green Inn.

Trails Less Traveled III: Bushwhacking in Andorra with Gerry Schweiger Saturday, December 26 • 1 pm

Hikers should wear leather gloves or from resistant sturdy gloves. Difficulty: challenging. Meet at Cedars House, Northwestern Aves. and Forbidden Drive. Look for a gray Toyota Corolla.

“We’re gonna do this walk regardless . . .” Year II with Bruce Wagner and Kris Soffa Sunday, January 24 • 9:30 am – noon

This hike from Cedars House to the Covered Bridge will commence regardless of the weather, along the Orange Trail or Forbidden Drive, depending on conditions; traveling at a leisurely pace. Children 10+ are welcome, accompanied by a responsible adult. Registration is strongly encouraged. Meet at Cedars House, Northwestern Ave. and Forbidden Drive.

Gorgeous Gorge with Rod Bartchy Saturday, February 20 • 1 pm

This hike includes rocky and steep portions. Difficulty: moderate to brisk pace. Distance: 2.5 miles. Duration: ~2 hours. Bad weather or hazardous trail conditions will cancel. Meet at the upper parking lot along Valley Green Road.

Seeing Through the Woods with Bruce Wagner Saturday, March 12 • 10 am – noon

We will walk from Cedars House to the Orange and Lavender Trails, up to the city, and down to the Covered Bridge at a leisurely pace. Children accompanied by a responsible adult are welcome. Difficulty: easy pace, rocky trails. Wear sturdy boots or shoes; bring water; dress for the weather. Distance: 2.5 miles. Duration: 2 hours. Extreme conditions cancels. More info. from bwagner@temple.edu. Meet at Cedars House, Northwestern Ave. and Forbidden Drive.

Trails Less Traveled IV: Icons of the Lower Wissahickon with Gerry Schweiger Sunday, March 13 • 1 pm

We will start and finish on the Rittenhouse Trail along Lincoln Drive, and will visit the Hundred Steps, Meri’s Cave, Lover’s Leap, and Rittenhouse Town. Duration: 2.5–3 hours. Difficulty: several strenuous climbs. Meet at parking lot on Gypsy Lane near Lincoln Drive (across from Wissahickon Hall).

Appalachian Mountain Club Delaware Valley Chapter www.amc.org

Tuesday Nights in the Wissahickon. Casual social hike through hills of Wissahickon Gorge. Bring water and a flashlight or headlamp. Always an option for dinner following the hike. Meet at Brunn’s, at the corner of Germantown and Northwestern Aves. at 6:30 pm. Nasty weather will cancel the hike. If doubtful check the status of the hike at www.amcdv.org/AMCCalendar.php or contact a Leader: David Stein, 215-508-5915; Pat Naismith, 610-639-3670. Dec. 15, 22, 29.

Wissahickon Wednesday. Moderate paced hike through the Wissahickon Gorge. Bring rain jacket, at least a quart of water, and lunch. Meet at Germantown and Rex Avenues at 10:30 am. Take the Chestnut Hill East or West train to Valley Green Inn. This is a combined hike with Valley Forge Audubon. An optional “Dutch Treat Dinner” at the Yu Hsiang Gardens Two, 7630 Germantown Ave., will follow the hike. Leaders: Gary Riggs, 610-716-7624; Michael Alger, 215-233-0916, amca@comcast.net.

Philaventures www.philaventures.org

Last Sunday of Month—Wissahickon Hike. An opportunity to walk at a moderate pace with a talkative group of LGBT+ folks who like fresh air and exercise! Some ups and downs and uneven paths are found along the way, so wear proper footware and be ready to hike. Meet at 2:00 pm at Cosimo’s Pizza, 8624 Germantown Ave. at Bethlehem Pike (the top of Chestnut Hill). Registration with the hike leader is required. Bert G. at bert2345@comcast.net.

Batona Hiking Club www.batona.wildapricot.org

New Year’s Day Hike. 5-6 miles. Meet at Valley Green Inn at 1 pm. There are parking lots at the bottom of Wissahickon Green Road and along Valley Green Road. From here, walk down the hill to Valley Green Inn. This is a combined hike with Valley Forge Audubon. An optional “Dutch Treat Dinner” at the Yu Hsiang Gardens Two, 7630 Germantown Ave., will follow the hike. Leaders: Gary Riggs, 610-716-7624; Michael Alger, 215-233-0916, amca@comcast.net.

What in the Wissahickon are you most thankful for?

Just hiked through Houston Meadow this morning.

Monika Hemmers
CALENDAR OF EVENTS IN THE WISSAHICKON

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

THIRD SUNDAY OF EVERY MONTH
Wissahickon Restoration Volunteers (WRV) lead a service project from 10 am–12 pm as part of their on-going restoration activities. Project details and directions to the worksite will be posted on the WRV website at least one week prior to the event: www.wissahickonrestorationvolunteers.org. For info. and to RSVP, contact WRV at 215-951-0330, ext. 2101 or wrv.info@rhd.org.

EVERY TUESDAY
Friends of the Wissahickon volunteers repair and build structures in the Wissahickon from 9am to 1:30pm. For more info. and to register, contact Volunteer Coordinator John Holback at johnholback@fow.org or 215-247-0417 x107.

EVERY WEDNESDAY
Friends of the Wissahickon, Various Park Locations, 9 am–12 pm. Can’t volunteer with FOW on the weekends? Still want to help out? Come work with the Wednesday morning crew. This group is ready to take on whatever needs to be done that week. Always a good time! Contact Volunteer Coordinator John Holback at johnholback@fow.org or 215-247-0417 x107.

EVERY SATURDAY

Friends of the Wissahickon workdays in the park are held most Saturdays from 9am–1pm, unless it is a holiday or there is inclement weather. Projects include trail maintenance, invasive weed removal, planting, and clean-ups. Visit www.fow.org/volunteering/upcoming-workdays for updates and info on future projects. To register, contact Volunteer Coordinator John Holback at johnholback@fow.org or 215-247-0417 x107.

FIRST SATURDAY OF EVERY MONTH
Wissahickon Restoration Volunteers (WRV) lead a service project from 10 am–12 pm as part of their on-going restoration activities. Project details and directions to the worksite will be posted on the WRV website at least one week prior to the event: www.wissahickonrestorationvolunteers.org. For info. and to RSVP, contact WRV at 215-951-0330, ext. 2101 or wrv.info@rhd.org.

THIRD SATURDAY OF EVERY MONTH
Friends of Cresheim Trail conducts ongoing workshops in order to enhance the evolving trail system in the Cresheim Creek area. Meet at the entrance at Lincoln Drive and Alnwick Lane at 10 am. Volunteers should wear long pants, long sleeves, sturdy shoes, polo top by is present. All tools, including gloves, are provided. Coffee and snacks served. Contact: Info@cresheimtrail.org or 215-715-0956.

HISTORIC RITTENHOUSE TOWN
Historic RittenhouseTown offers classes, workshops, and events for individuals and families to learn about the craft of hand papermaking and other aspects of Philadelphia’s early history. Classes, workshops, and events are designed to include hands-on learning experiences. For more information visit www.rhd.org or call 215-247-0417 x107.

RUNNING CLUBS

EVERY THURSDAY
Wissahickon Wanderers Trail Run, 4.5 miles. Starts 6:30pm sharp at Valley Green Inn. No fees. All runners, speedos, skill levels welcome! Fun food and Cash Bar afterwards courtesy of the Valley Green Inn. For updates and more info visit www.wissahickonrun.com.

EVERY SATURDAY
Shawmont Running Club, Starts at Northeast Ave. & Andorra Rd. (north end of Forbidden Drive). From 2nd Saturday in May thru 2nd Saturday in Oct. start at 9:00 am. From 3rd Saturday in Oct. thru 1st Saturday in May start at 8 am. Dances are at the discretion of runners. All levels welcome. Emphasis is on fun! More info at www.shawmontrunningclub.com.

For a listing of more events this fall, visit http://www.fow.org/calendar.

JOIN US ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

WISSAHICKON ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER
Registration is required for all programs unless otherwise noted. The Tree House is open the second Saturday of every month, 10 am–4 pm.

CAMPFIRE COOKING • SATURDAY, JANUARY 9 • 11AM - 1PM
Enjoy making a lunch over the campfire; cook hot dogs on a stick, grill veggies, bake potatoes in foil, brownies in an orange, and cake in a Dutch oven. Learn some new recipes and tricks for your next camping trip. $5.00/person. Registration required. All ages

OWL WALK • SATURDAY, JANUARY 15 • 7PM
January is a great time to hear owls because Great Horned Owls are breeding, and wintering species like Saw-whet and Long-eared Owls may be present. We will have a short talk about our local owls by the fire, and then head out on the trail to visit the woods and Andorra Meadow to listen for owls. We will keep an eye out for other nocturnal animals like woodcock, fox, and flying squirrels. Registration required. All ages—must be able to be quiet.

FULL MOON HIKE • FRIDAY, JANUARY 29 • 9 - 10:30PM
Hike by the light of the full moon and discover the tree silhouettes against the moonlit sky. Maybe hear the hoot of an owl, and warm up around the campfire. Registration required. Preschool hike: parents with toddlers can join us on a short night hike around the tree house. 6 - 6:30pm. Family hike: ages 5 and above. 7 - 8:30pm.

SEEDS AND SPARRROWS • SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 6 • 10AM
There is still a lot to see in the winter. This walk will focus on winter plant identification and winter birds. We will identify trees by bark and buds and herbaceous plants by seeds and fruits. The meadow is a terrific location for wintering sparrows, rabbits, and bluebirds. Coffee and feeder watching at 9:30. All ages.

For information or to register, call 215-685-9285 or email WEC@phila.gov.

Future calendar listings for the newsletter may be placed by contacting the Friends of the Wissahickon at 215-247-0417 or office@fow.org. The Calendar of Events in the Wissahickon may also be viewed on FOW’s website www.fow.org, which contains updates on our events, including cancellations.