

Wissahickon Nature Club

www.wissahickonnatureclub.com

Announcements

Treasurer's Report

According to Treasurer

Dianne Machesney: 412.366.7869

Previous balance: \$1005.02

No activity

In Memoriam

Melvin Madeoy, Marlow Madeoy's father,
Nancy's father-in-law

Ross Little, Melissa Little's brother

Our Next Speaker

November 12, Thursday, 7:30 p.m.
Judy Stark will present **Gardens Around the Globe**. Judy will talk about some of the special features of five gardens from: PA (Longwood), OH (Stan Hywet), Vancouver (VanDusen), HI (National Botanic Garden) and Ireland (Powerscourt).



Bonaparte's Gull by Chuck Tague

OCTOBER 29, 2015



October 29, Thursday, 7:30 p.m. **Don Weiss** will present **Mammals of North America**. Today's program is Mammals of North America which, while it falls far short of being a complete inventory of the over 490 different species, will be an enjoyable journey. <http://www.donweissphotography.com>.

Worth Repeating: To contemplate nature is to restore peace of mind.
Harold L. Ickes

Gull Squall, by Chuck Tague

The sky over the rivers was an ominous gray, exceptionally dark, even for Pittsburgh in December. Snow clouds wrapped around West End and Mount Washington.

I looked down stream from the Point. The Allegheny blended with the Monongahela to form a wide round pool. The water lacked the directional character of a river; it looked more like a lake or a bay. The steel-colored surface rolled and foamed. Waves broke on the concrete at my feet as snow flurries swirled around me. The wind cut through my scarf and my face tingled. I tightened my collar, secured my wool cap and scanned the blurry horizon with my binoculars.

Soon the swirling snow obscured the West End Bridge. I swayed with the rhythm of the waves and the wind. Overhead a gull squealed. I was no longer in Pittsburgh but standing on a ship in the North Atlantic.

A gull glided through my binoculars. I followed it and found three more. They dipped into the waves then rose on the wind. Another gull called above me. A dark "w" dropped through the snow and spiraled slowly down.

The squall passed and I saw three gulls circling above. One of the gulls squealed and several answered. A dozen white birds danced across the waves. High over my head birds swarmed through a break in the mist. I tried to count the gulls but gave up at two hundred. It sounded like a feeding frenzy at a fishing pier.

A gull soared past me at eye-level. I raised my glasses and examined the large white bird. A dark band that circled its beak told me it was a Ring-billed Gull, the species of gull that commonly feeds on the river. It looked at me and squawked.

Celebrate Nature

Botanical Society of Western Pennsylvania

Loree Speedy 724.518.6022

loreespeedy@gmail.com

<http://www.botsocwpa.org/>

Meeting

Meetings have moved to the **Ford-Mateer Classroom** of Carnegie Museum of Natural History, 4400 Forbes Avenue, Pittsburgh, PA (Oakland).

For details go to <http://www.botsocwpa.org/>
November 9, Monday, 7:15 p.m. Horticulture trainer will speak on **Local Plants of**

Economic Value

December 14, Monday, 7:15 p.m. **Holiday Wild Foods Party**. Bring a wild foods dish to share and 12 photos.

Environmental Book Club

Kim Metheny kmetheny@hotmail.com

Chriss O'Lare colare@outlook.com

Meet at the Panera on McKnight Road.

Upcoming Books

November 16, Monday, 7:15 p.m. **Mother Nature is Trying to Kill You** by Dan Riskin

The Western Pennsylvania Mushroom Club

wpamushroomclub.org

Cecily Franklin cs4wpmc@gmail.com

412.781.6581

Meeting

November 17, Tuesday, 7:00 p.m. **Pot Luck Dinner and Member Photos**.

For the Pot Luck, bring something for 6 – 8 people. Your choice, does not need to mushroom related (cultivated mushrooms only if mushroom based). The categories are: Appetizers, Salads, Hot, Dishes Cold Plates, Casseroles, Desserts

The Club will provide soft drinks, plates, dinnerware, napkins, take home boxes.

Please bring no more than 15 pictures for a short presentation on a flash (thumb) drive or CD. JPG format preferred and the slide show does not need to be in a presentation program. Just the pictures will work. Topics: mushrooms, vacations, hobbies. Let's see what you are doing in your life. (no politicking, please).

Meet at Beechwood Farms Nature Reserve, 614 Dorseyville Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15238.



Loggerhead Shrike by Chuck Tague

Three Rivers Birding Club

Bob VanNewkirk, President

412.366.1694

www.3rbc.org

Outings

November 7, Saturday 8:00 a.m. **Yellow Creek joint outing with the Todd Bird Club**. Meet **Margaret Higbee** at the park office located on Route 259 just off Route 422 east of Indiana. Allow an hour and 30 minutes to drive from Pittsburgh. Yellow Creek State Park has been the prime outing location for the Todd Bird Club since the club was created. The park has a wide variety of habitats and a large lake that attracts a wide variety of waterbirds and sometimes exciting rarities.

November 22, Sunday, 8:00 a.m. **Moraine State Park**. Meet at the Moraine State Park day use area (south shore) in the first parking lot on the right. From I-79, take route 422 east toward Butler and exit at the Moraine State Park exit. When you reach the end of the ramp turn left and travel straight into the park until you see the first major parking area on your right. Water fowl and late fall migrants make this outing a highlight of the season. Allow one hour driving from Pittsburgh.

The snow picked up and I could only see a group of thirty gulls floating off the Point. They rose and fell with the waves along a line where the light-colored Allegheny met the dark waters of the Mon.

It was early December in 1983. Until then most of my adult life had centered around downtown Pittsburgh. I left the city several times, but I always returned. For twenty years I commuted to college, graduate school and jobs all within walking distance of downtown. I crossed the rivers at least twice a day. I saw gulls often but I quit telling people about them. They always told me they were only big white pigeons.

I stood on the Point for the next hour.

The snow squalls came and went, and with each break gulls dropped from the sky. A mound of snow piled up on my collar. My breath formed tiny ice balls on my mustache but I didn't want to turn away from the waves, the wind or the birds.

Then a buzzy sound turned my attention from the clouds. A delicate, white bird landed gently on the water. It was close enough that I could see its clear dark eye. I counted nine just like it swimming off the Point. They were gulls, but much smaller and cleaner looking than the Ring-bills.

Their long necks stood erect and their bills were thin and pointed. There were tasteful dark smudges behind each eye. One of the small gulls took off from the water and buoyantly circled the floating flock.

The wind whipped the water and stung my face, but the tiny gull cut through the air with ease. It twisted and hovered only inches from the river. Thin feet brushed the water and it dipped and flew away with an invisible prize. It circled around and rejoined the flock.

I never imagined these birds existed. I opened my shiny new copy of Peterson's Guide to the Birds. As I flipped through the pages my glove-less fingers shivered and burned. After several agonizing minutes, I identified the graceful birds as Bonaparte's Gulls.

I made a decision as I watched those gulls off the Point. Behind me was the madness of the city, ahead of me a blurry world of adventure and unknown wonders. What else had I missed? What other marvelous creatures waited for me to discover them? I chose my course and set my sails. Forget common sense; to hell with responsibility; I sailed ahead and never looked back.