

Wissahickon Nature Club

Speaker

Thursday, December 12, 7:30 pm. Kate St. John will present **Peregrine Falcons - A Success Story**. This will be our annual Christmas Cookie party.



We will be taking our annual winter break during January and February 2020

Don't miss our next meeting. March 12, 2020 - **John Canning** will present **Riverview Park and the Early Years of Wissahickon and Nature Cabin**

Winter, a lingering season, is a time to gather golden moments, embark upon a sentimental journey, and enjoy every idle hour. John Boswell



*Merry Christmas
Everybody!*

What to look for:

**Gulls, sleet, Canvasbacks, turkey leftovers
and Christmas trees for sale**

..... A Phenologic perspective: November 27 through December 25, 2003

by **Chuck Tague**

Phenology: a branch of science dealing with the relationship between climate and periodic biologic phenomena (as bird migration and plant flowering)

The Winter Solstice occurs at 2:04 a.m. EST on December 22, 2003. Winter is close at hand. Rejoice in the precious few sunny days. Search for green in the late autumn woods. Look for shade tolerant hemlocks beneath the canopy, layers of Mountain Laurel on the dry ridges, Great Rhododendron along the stream banks, hillsides of Christmas Ferns, carpets of club mosses, mats of true mosses and splatters of lichens.

Shuffle through the fallen leaves, feel the refreshing sting of the first wind-driven sleet on your face and rejoice in the natural wonders of the season.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

TREASURER'S REPORT

ACCORDING TO TREASURER, DIANNE MACHESNEY

Previous balance	\$1415.21
Deposits dues	\$ 25.00

New Balance	\$1440.21
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79% of our members have paid their dues. If you are part of the delinquent 21%, please bring your dues to the December meeting or mail to our Treasurer. @ 105 Lindley Lane, Pittsburgh, PA 15237-1805. Thank you.

Thank you

Monica Miller for crafting our traditional Christmas Holiday favors.

Thank you

Dianne Machesney for providing the apple cider and for all you do for our Club.

Congratulations

To George Bercik for becoming an honorary member of our Club.

Celebrate the Solstice. The days will soon be getting longer!

Ice: In December, as the days get shorter, the angle of the sunlight less direct and the temperatures lower, look for more and more ice. As the northern lakes freeze, gulls and waterfowl move into western Pennsylvania, sometimes in great numbers. After clear, calm nights a thin skin forms over ponds and lakes, but often this layer of ice disappears during the day. Later the ice becomes more permanent and thicker. Open water becomes hard to find and the few water birds that remain congregate along the rivers and larger lakes that are the last to freeze. Water that is artificially agitated or heated doesn't freeze. In cold weather look for water birds in acid mine treatment ponds or near industrial outflows.

Because of the mild weather many **Waterfowl** are still north of Pennsylvania. Check flocks of Canada Geese for Snow Geese, Ross' Geese or White-fronted Geese. December can bring unusual ducks and gulls to the rivers. Also keep an eye out for Snow Buntings and Northern Shrikes.

Examine **winter weeds** sticking through the snow. Look for **American Tree Sparrows** feeding in weedy patches. Check groves of spruces and other evergreens for owls, northern finches and other seasonal gifts. Will we be blessed with redpolls and crossbills?

Good numbers of Northern Harriers are hunting grassy fields and reclaimed strip mines. Could this indicate a good showing of winter raptors? Look for Short-eared Owls, Northern Harriers, Rough-legged Hawks and maybe Snowy Owls.

Golden Eagles and Red-tailed Hawks continue to pass the Allegheny Front in December.

Some Flowers persist due to the extraordinary mild weather. Look for flowers, especially in wind-sheltered but sunny spots. You may find blooming Queen Anne's Lace, Dandelion, Common Evening Primrose, Common Chickweed, Spotted Knapweed, Butter-and-eggs, aster species, a few hardy goldenrods, Witch Hazel and Winter Cress. What will be the last bloom of December? Watch out for "jaggers."

Many plants have sharp projections on their stem or leaves. These protect the plant from animals that might eat leaves, steal fruit or otherwise damage the plant. Spines are modified leaf parts that are hard and pointed. Thorns are modified stems. Prickles are outgrowths from a stem or leaf.

Beaver Activity: My field records from **December 3, 1994** note heavy beaver activity along Raccoon Creek in the Wildflower Reserve at Raccoon Creek State Park. Fresh stumps of American Beech, Ironwood and American Hornbeam lined the high stream bank. At Riverside Park on Pittsburgh's South Side I noticed several gnawed willows.

Beaver, the largest rodents in North America at 40 to 60 pounds, are active all year. Their main winter food is the inner bark of deciduous trees. In late autumn beavers busily prepare for winter by stockpiling green sticks underwater near their lodge or burrow. Water temperature below the ice will never go below 32°F. A study cited in *Life in the Cold*, (Peter Marchand 1991) measured a difference of as much as 35°C (63°F) between the inside of beaver lodge occupied by two huddling beavers and the outside air. With a good food source, the animals do not need to go out when outside temperatures are low.

Esther's Christmas Colors: **Esther Allen** finds her favorite holiday decorations in nature. Holly trees are already decorated with red berries. Red Osier Dogwood has bright red twigs. Sassafras has green twigs. Red Maple has silvery gray twigs with reddish tinged tips. White Birch has beautiful bark.

Mobile decorations, moving from tree to tree, are cardinals Blue Jays, American Robins and House Finches.

Look for the next issue of the Nature Observer News before December 25, 2003. When you receive your next Nature Observer, it will be winter. Festive holiday lights will brighten the long, dark nights. Jumping mice will be in a deep sleep and the Scarlet Tanagers and Baltimore Orioles will be in their tropical homes. Will there be snow on the ground on Christmas?

Happy Holidays