



*A Good Trail Mix*

WheatonArts Wildlife Trail is a great collaboration.

At Wheaton Arts and Cultural Center in Millville, the fires burn brightly in

homage to the distinctive glass industry in southern New Jersey. There, glass blowers and other artists join to delight visitors. Witness the masters at the replica of the TC Wheaton Glass Factory, who take molten glass and shape it into all manner of lovely objects. Tour the largest museum of American glass in the nation, attend a variety of annual festivals, shop glass galleries, see artist demonstrations, and be welcomed by the WheatonArts knowledgeable staff—all this at Cumberland County's most visited tourist destination. Some 60,000+ people seeking a grand mix of art and cultural heritage have made this a mecca. Add to that the General Store, where the candy counter offers old-time favorites, and all manner of sweet surprises unfold to delight children and adults alike.

WheatonArts has long been combining art and the environment on their 45-acre campus. Their staff has worked with the Cumberland County Improvement Authority in helping visitors to understand recycling and reuse. Each spring they co-present an Eco Fair where in recent years CU

Maurice River has brought in nationally known speakers as a highlight. The Master Gardeners and Rutgers Extension Center have provided plantings and a rain garden.

Over the past few years, WheatonArts and CU Maurice River (CU) have teamed up to offer yet another visitor experience—a nature trail. CU has planted hundreds of trees and shrubs and created lots of wildlife habitat features. This collaboration is made possible by our devoted staff and many volunteers. Other conservation organizations, local experts, and designers have joined us to transform what was a small-gauge rail-bed into a nature trail. These efforts were supported by a National Park Service grant that enabled the signage and our staff's coordination. We have also had the expert guidance of our Director of Wildlife Management Allen Jackson, a retired U.S. Fish and Wildlife biologist, and Program Manager Karla Rossini. You need not pay admission to walk this trail (nor to shop in the museum stores), but our guess is once you have visited WheatonArts you'll be asking how to become a member.

At the gatehouse you can pick up a map if you're a newbie to the trail. Along the path you'll find interpretative signs on many topics, including stewardship tips entitled "What You Can Do" to make a difference for the natural communities it features. There are also more than two dozen informative tree identification boards. The first in the series of signs begins at the circular entrance drive opposite the admissions gate. Surrounding the first sign are bird nesting boxes with species usage explanations.

Your adventure begins on the first walkway to the right. The second interpretative board stands adjacent to a bird feeding station where people of all ages can watch some local avian specimens enjoying a snack. The stewardship tips here deal with attracting and enjoying birds at your own home. Afterwards it is off to the Rutgers/Master Gardener installed rain garden. This interpretative sign has lots of beneficial facts about rain gardens, which get precipitation back into our drinking water supply vs. directly into storm drains and worse, where it is lost. The route next takes you to the

section of trail where visitors can see examples of the many wild places in Cumberland County.

The entrance sign to the wooded portion shows some of the wonders of our area. Here the trail winds through a wooded section on the path once taken by a small-gauge train, paralleling a lovely pond. Visitors will learn about wood ducks, fish and other pond creatures, vernal pools, snake hibernation, and how to make suitable wildlife habitat at your home, while viewing a diversity of trees and shrubs typical of the wooded areas of southern New Jersey. We think the facts compiled on these boards will be of interest to experts and neophytes alike. (All signs can be read in English or Spanish on our website.) And who knows, you might just see the resident otters, this year's wood duck broods, a frog or two, a red-tailed hawk, a flying squirrel, a great horned owl, and yes, even an eagle. Hikers and wildlife experts along the pathway have identified all of these and many more.

We hope that visitors will return to extend a day trip into a weekend

excursion, exploring the many large preserves and State Wildlife Management Areas present throughout our region. Locals may just be inspired to spend more time in the natural areas of South Jersey as well. Hope to see you on the trail! CU Maurice River offers many different hikes and excursions; visit our website to find out more.