

THE GREAT OUTDOORS



Eagle Eyes

The Cumberland County NJ Eagle Festival

J. Morton Galetto, CU Maurice River

Each year there is a marvelous opportunity to gain greater insight into the NJ Delaware Bayshore's avian denizens, especially our eagles and their avian compatriots like raptors and waterfowl. This year's festival is happening in just a little over a week, and it's a super way to spend your Saturday on February 1st.

This will be the 20th year for the Cumberland County, NJ Winter Eagle Festival. I've had the great pleasure of being involved since its inception and each year it just keeps getting better. Many organizations are involved in providing numerous opportunities to enjoy the day. The County Freeholders/Cultural and Heritage Commission/Staff orchestrate the event

while CU Maurice River, NJ Audubon, Conserve Wildlife, Bayshore Center at Bivalve, Natural Lands, Association of Environmental Commissions, South Jersey Lands Trust, local historic societies, The Nature Conservancy, Clay College, Woodford Cedar Run, and PSEG all host various aspects of the day. A great assortment of both indoor and outdoor activities is offered.

The day begins at 7a.m., prior to check-in, with a Sunrise Walk off Turkey Point Rd. At 8 a.m. come to the Mauricetown Firehall at 9544 Noble St., Mauricetown and register at the reception desk for a map and schedule of events.

The firehall hosts presentations beginning at 10 a.m. and ending around 4 p.m. The line-up of presenters this year features great outdoor experts and enthusiasts.

I will be the first presenter, so expect my usual antics mixed with lots of facts and odd encounters with barred owls. The next two speakers are the beloved naturalists and authors Pat and Clay Sutton. Pat will address common backyard birds and how to attract them to your yards, and Keynote Speaker Clay will be debuting a new presentation: "All about Eagles." He has completed over 30 years of observations of eagles and other local avian species for CU Maurice River and other groups so he knows whereof he speaks! From the Burlington County Parks system we have invited naturalist Jennifer Bulava to present "Birds and Bare Branches." And finally the famed Emile DeVito, Ph.D. from the NJ

Conservation Foundation will complete the indoor portion of the day with “A Pine Barrens Extravaganza.” Emile has a presentation style all his own, so you surely won’t want to miss his talk.

Other indoor activities include Woodford Cedar Run, which will have live raptors with natural history interpretation by their staff. Clay College and the Cultural Heritage Commission will offer arts and crafts for families. Non-profit organizations and commercial exhibitors will man booths and tables. The firehall volunteers will be selling local fare including refreshments and lunch, with their famous fried oysters and clams on offer. Also the Bayshore Center in Bivalve’s Café will be holding a Souper Fest featuring 10 varieties of soup from 11am -2pm.



Photo credit: Luke Jones

Concurrently five outside viewing stations will have interpreters helping you to spot and understand our avian residents. There is a series of wonderful guided walks, and in fact I will be

leading a hike with my sidekick Christine Brown at noon, beginning at Berrytown Rd. If you come, I would love to meet some of my readers, and you're going to adore my favorite Brit – Christine. Natural Lands will be leading interpretative walks as well on their remarkable bayshore preserves. A schedule of these walks will be available at the firehall.

On the other side of the river, the Maurice River Historical Society will have the East Point Lighthouse open for visitation. Go visit this historic structure that has been newly refurbished and still operates to aid ships in navigating the mouth of the Maurice.

It is traditional at the conclusion of the festival for people to amass along Turkey Point Rd. to try to spot some owls. Presenters, walk leaders, and the day's coordinators often turn out and offer lots of fun dialogue about owls, and generally it's a time for a bit of innocent joking as well.

Each of the local conservation/environmental organizations will have a table at the event to let you know about upcoming programs and possibilities to further engage with the natural history of our region. CU Maurice River will have its 2020 calendar available for festival participants. If you are unable to attend, our calendar is also online at cumauriceriver.org.

As a follow-up to the festival two of our top-notch naturalists, Mary Watkins and Tony Klock, are leading a walk on February 8th. It's billed as

“The Duck Waddle” and is a great way to discover lots cool information about waterfowl. Then on February 22 I will do a walk in which we learn about our old-world vultures; in other words, I’m going to “carrion” about these birds.

A myriad of offerings is in the mix at the Eagle Festival. Come out, listen to the speakers, explore the offerings at the tables, and discuss with representatives the many ways to discover our region. You’ll be glad you did!



Scroll down to see NJ’s Eagle Recovery story

NJ's Bald Eagle Story

In 1967 the American Bald Eagle, our nation's symbol, was considered endangered in all of the lower 48 states. Its decline was due primarily to chemical exposure to organochlorines and insufficient protections on many fronts. Persecution by people - e.g. shooting, trapping, poisoning, nest and habitat destruction - were also factors.

No reliable population data existed for NJ prior to declines caused by persecution and pesticide use, although NJ is believed to have had at least 20-some nests in the Delaware Bayshore region in the 1950s, before the population collapse.

The primary chemical culprit was DDT, employed for mosquito control beginning in 1945 and ending with a ban in 1972. Although the chemical did not kill the birds outright, it rendered their egg shells so fragile that they were crushed during incubation.

By 1970 only one nesting pair remained in NJ's Bear Swamp, Cumberland Co. NJ. This nest was still present in the early 80s.

The federal ban of DDT, in conjunction with restoration efforts by NJ's Fish and Wildlife beginning in 1982, have resulted in a steady recovery of a species that otherwise would have been extirpated.

NJ Biologists employed many wildlife restoration techniques, beginning with fostering chicks in the Bear Swamp nest and eventually rearing chicks from other regions to imprint to the Bayshore Region (hacking). Many nesting site protections were also instituted.

By the year 2000 there were 23 pairs in the state. By 2005 this number had more than doubled to 48. In 2010 the multiplier effect took numbers to 82 and by 2015 – 150 pairs!

Today Bayshore eagles have fanned out to populate many counties in NJ. This year the statewide population is 211 pairs, up 7 pairs from last year. The nesting population produced 248 young, and at least 184 are known to have fledged!

Other states also instituted recovery plans, each through massive efforts. The US government was able to remove the bald eagle from the list of Endangered Species in 2007, a testament to a national resurgence of this icon made possible by protections and restoration efforts.

Source: NJ DEP, Fish and Wildlife, Endangered and Nongame Species Bald Eagle Project Report, 2019

This is a very abbreviated synopsis of the heroic efforts to recovery bald eagles in NJ. [Click here](#) to see this year's report