



Middle Creek in Motion

Summer 2024

Another Chapter Comes to a Close at Middle Creek

Middle Creek has as much tradition as it does change. There are regular volunteers, hunters, and visitors that have been coming to Middle Creek for decades. Habitat is always being altered and enhanced to make the best possible conditions for wildlife. And over the last 51 years, there have been four different managers at the Visitors Center: Charlie Strouphour, Ed Gosnell, Jim Binder, and Lauren Ferreri. Each one has left their own important, unique, and lasting impact. All previous managers had retired with the Game Commission at Middle Creek.

Lauren's time at Middle Creek came to a conclusion in late April when she was promoted to Bureau Director of Information and Education in Harrisburg, replacing Steve Smith, who is now the agency's Executive Director.

For everyone who has had the privilege to work with Lauren or has gotten to



know her over her 8 years at Middle Creek, this change is no surprise, it was only a matter of time before she moved up to a bigger and better calling!

Lauren had an unusual path to becoming the manager at the Visitors Center, at least compared to her three predecessors. Lauren started with the Game Commission in 2012 as a biologist aide, trapping deer in the Southeast Region, then in 2014, moved into a biologist position in the Northcentral Region. There, she discovered the rewards of sharing her passion about wildlife, and began assisting with educational programming in addition to her primary duties. She also worked for a time in a clerical role at the Southeast Region Office, selling hunting licenses and talking to the public about their wildlife interactions and concerns.

Many things are unrecognizable at Middle Creek to those who haven't visited in a while, and nearly all say that's for the better. The Visitors Center got major renovations, new interactive displays, and an addition of the Conservation Heritage Museum thanks to the efforts of the Conservation Officers of Pennsylvania.

It's been a team effort, but we know Lauren won't be a stranger, we look forward to working together in a different capacity going forward!

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Photo by Middle Creek Staff

Important Reminders!

Summer brings about many highly anticipated changes at Middle Creek. Lots of long, warm days, along with annual and monthly public programs, including archery events.

Visitors should expect to see some changes on the landscape. Seasonal drawdowns for wading and shorebirds will be occurring again, as well as nets up for invasive carp trapping and the potential for work to begin on some wildlife viewing areas (mentioned in the Fall 2023 edition, with more info coming this fall).

Some annually important dates to also look out for this summer will be for hunting licenses sales and special permits, including Middle Creeks special hunts. More info can be found on huntfishpa.pa.gov.



Chronologs: A Way to Track Changes at Middle Creek Through Community Science

There are many ways that one can participate in scientific research, even without a fancy scientific degree. It's called community science and has been around for quite some time. It's been made even more accessible with technology.

Some famous examples include SETI: the search for extraterrestrial intelligence, that uses background data computing on home computers to interpret radio signals received from space. Another is eBird, where people can submit their birding sightings as a list and scientists can use that data to look at long-term trends.

One easily accessible option for community science here at Middle Creek is called Chronolog. At three locations on the Wildlife Management Area (Stop 1, 2 [Willow Point], and Stop 3) there are small plastic frames you can set your cellphone on and take a landscape photo. When you scan the QR code that's attached to the same post, you can submit that photo to an online database where you can view those photos like a timelapse.

Over time with many photos, Middle Creek's ever shifting habitat can be viewed from the point-of-view of a time traveler. [Check it out!](#)

Wanted: A Framer and Some Patches

People come to the front desk of the Visitors Center for nearly every reason under the sun. The most common reason is to ask a question. Another popular reason to visit may be to purchase the newest patch to keep their collection going.

Whether one is buying a patch or not, many gaze up at the wall at our big game mounts and also our framed sets of Working Together for Wildlife patches. We have a complete set on display from the original osprey in 1982 to the cedar waxwing in 2012. Working Together for Wildlife patches are still going strong, with one released every year. That means, by 2027, we will be able to fill a new frame on the wall. It's a display we'd like to keep going.

If anyone is skilled at making frames like the ones we currently have, we'd be interested in having one donated along with anyone who would be willing to donate patches from 2013 to 2021. Please stop by the front desk if you would be interested and we can help you take any necessary measurements, or email us at middlecreek@pa.gov.



Meet Middle Creek's 2024 Summer Intern

Our 2024 intern for the summer is Alice Hoover, and she doesn't have the typical background of interns past. Growing up on her family's dairy farm, she is used to working with animals, working outside, and doing hands-on work, but wanted to expand outside her comfort zone to work with animals that are a little more "wild."

Education wise, she also has a different and very diverse experience. She attends Saint Francis University in Loretto, PA, Cambria County majoring in biochemistry while also minoring in both accounting and education.

When looking for potential summer internships, she was encouraged by some family to check out internships with the Game Commission and was immediately interested in not only the people aspect of Game Commission work, but also the native wildlife species that have been here for millennia and what goes into managing them.

Hearing about how employees' daily tasks can be so varied every single day, that excited her as she is uninterested with the monotony of many other jobs. The point of an internship should be to try many different things, learn a lot, and see if those activities should be part of one's career, according to Alice. Working at Middle Creek seemed to fit that bill.

Alice seems a little intimidated by everything right now, only being on the job for less than a week, as of this writing. She said there is just so much to learn, she wants to preface everything with, "I'm not sure, but I'm still learning!" The good news is, Middle Creek is a place where skills and knowledge are picked up so quickly because one interacts with so many people and gets asked so many questions that you must find an answer to. She just doesn't want to tell anyone the wrong information.

When asked about public speaking, educating groups, and interacting with so many new people, this is something Alice feels she'll get a good handle on quickly. She was her county's Dairy Princess, which is a program you may be familiar with if you've ever attended the Pennsylvania Farm Show. Through this program, Alice has interacted with large groups of people at events, spoken on radio, and helped to promote an entire industry by explaining dairy to groups from very young children to senior citizens. That's definitely the spread of age groups one must interact with at Middle Creek.

If you see Alice around Middle Creek or at one of our events, be sure to say hello!

New Volunteer Newsletter and Ways to Stay Informed

There is always lots of interest in volunteering at Middle Creek. The main activities have been working in the gardens, monitoring eastern bluebird nest boxes, and maintaining our hiking trails. However, there are occasions where volunteer help is needed outside of those areas or on random days when volunteers don't typically meet. It's been difficult to reach a large group of volunteers who expressed interest about these opportunities. **(Continued on Page 6)**



Editor's note: a HUGE thank you to all who offered their photographs for this newsletter.



One reward of having healthy and diverse habitat is occasionally getting a sight of some brilliantly colored insects, such as this ebony jewelwing. Some insect species need water for the development of their nymph stage, including members of the dragonfly and damselfly Order: Odonata. Although the adults look colorful and stunning, the nymphs often look, well, creepy. But beauty is in the eye of the beholder! These insects are predators and can be important controls of many other species we swat at when near wetlands.

Photo by Lori Joy

Many people ask “what birds are worth looking for right now” when they stop at the Visitors Center. This sighting is a good example of why it is sometimes more prudent just to get out look for yourself! By the time VC staff found out about this bird and stopped by to take a look, it had already moved on. This scissor-tailed flycatcher is common to the southcentral US and Central America, but can be a rare sighting across the rest of the US. Preferring open habitats with dispersed shrubs and small trees, Middle Creek certainly wasn't a total alien place for this bird to decide to make a stop.



Photo by Mike Bachleda



Although a common bird species, it always seems like one cannot see enough of this colorful bird. In our area, they can be seen year round, but many migrate through. During their migration, one is more likely to suddenly see numerous birds appear on a plant still bearing fruit than one individual alone. It can be exciting, but they can move on as quickly as they appear. Native plants they prefer include dogwoods, serviceberries, hawthorns, winterberries, and of course their namesake: the eastern red cedar. Cedars like disturbed, open areas with lots of sun and can benefit numerous species.

Photo by April Olson

A New Way to Learn about Middle Creek on the Willow Point Trail

There's a new way to learn about Middle Creek while taking a stroll down the Willow Point Trail.

We recently installed six posts with QR codes that link to interactive StoryMaps, which share information on various habitats we manage, waterfowl migration, and also the positive impacts that ecotourism has on the local communities and their economies. Specifically, the StoryMaps cover fields, riparian areas, forests, wetlands, snow goose migration, and ecotourism.

That last one may seem a little unusual to some people, or maybe it elicits views of lush jungles in Costa Rica. Ecotourism is often geared towards viewing parts of the ecosystem, like threatened or endangered wildlife in their natural habitats. Certainly, Middle Creek meets that definition as habitat practices such as delayed hay harvests, prescribed fires,

and seasonal water drawdowns provides uncommon and diverse habitat which therefore attracts a high diversity of native wildlife.

However, ecotourism in a way is essentially a part of Pennsylvania's booming outdoor recreation industry. People find immense relaxation, enjoyment, and health benefits by getting outdoors. Whether that is done by viewing wildlife, hiking, hunting, fishing, boating, biking, camping, or so much more, the activities that are allowed at Middle Creek and the diverse habitat and wildlife all contribute to a part of the big picture.

Special thanks to Visit Lebanon Valley for helping with the ecotourism StoryMap. Be sure to keep your eyes open to find and scan all six QR codes with your phone the next time you go for a stroll down the Willow Point Trail.



Carp Tales

Targeted removal of non-native carp will be starting up again this year. You may see remote-controlled poles with nets out in the lake.

Carp in Middle Creek's lake recently reached a point where their density has been causing major negative impacts on the ecosystem. They have been out-competing most other species of fish, preventing the growth of aquatic vegetation, and the increasing bottom-stirring action of the carp re-suspends nutrients in the water column which have increased the severity of algal blooms.

Last year, we removed 4,674 carp and this year we will be comparing results to see if the removals are impacting the overall population. All native fish caught are released back into the lake.

Less non-native carp means larger fish sizes due to less competition, greater populations of other native species, more aquatic vegetation, benefits for wildlife, less severe algal blooms, and a healthier ecosystem! We are interested to see how our removals impact the overall population and if other measures need to be taken.



New Volunteer Newsletter and Ways to Stay Informed (Continued)

Now, there is a new way to stay informed and for us to get the word out about sudden volunteer needs. Much like this newsletter and how one signs up for it, a new volunteer newsletter will be going out on occasion.

To sign up, visit the link below, or scan the QR code. We hope to see you soon!

bit.ly/middlecreekvolunteers



Lots of Work Completed at Middle Creek's Spring Volunteer Day

At Middle Creek's Spring Volunteer Day on Saturday, April 23rd, we had over 30 participants show up and help with gardens and trails.

Several units came out to help on our trails from the Pennsylvania Dutch Council. In addition to some members of the local community, scouts from Troop 417 - Schaefferstown, Troop 44 - Lititz, Troop 142 - Lititz, Troop 83 - Leola, Troop 88 - Millersville, and scouts from Wunita Gokhos Order of the Arrow Lodge 39 joined forces to build 76 feet of boardwalk keeping hikers out of muddy sections of trail, and replaced a 14' footbridge that was beginning to shift due to a washout.

At our gardens, many weeds were pulled from our new paver path to prep it for mulching, and the garden around the electrical units were edged and mulched.

Thank you to all the volunteers who came out to keep Middle Creek looking good and keeping trails resilient for our many users!



Express Your Artistic Abilities

Using chalk as a medium on a chalk board, there is now an "Art Wall" situated on the back side of the Visitors Center near where the paver path ends, on the outside wall of the Conservation Heritage Museum.

Come share your artistic skills and show off how the natural world inspires you! Once the board fills up, we will wipe it off every so often to create a fresh canvass for the next group of artists.

We can't wait to see your creations!



Upcoming Events at Middle Creek

June 20th - September 22nd

Wednesday, June 26th from 5:00 - 7:00 PM at the Willow Point Archery Range: General Archery Event

If you're thinking about getting into archery as a sport or getting into archery hunting, this event will help you learn the basics! All ages and skills welcome. Equipment provided.

Wednesday, July 3rd from 5:00 - 7:00 PM at the Willow Point Archery Range: General Archery Event

Wednesday, July 10th at 6:30 PM in the Auditorium: Borders for the Birds and the Bay – Field Border Incentive Program

Planting grass borders creates habitat for wildlife while improving soil, water, air quality, and preventing erosion. Pheasants Forever is partnering with the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, and the Chesapeake Bay Program to provide financial incentives for the installation of field borders along crop fields. Landowners can receive a one-time payment to install native or introduced grass borders. Examples include little bluestem, deertongue, switchgrass, orchardgrass, and wildflowers. Each planting is tailored to the acreage and landowner preferences.

Wednesday, July 17th from 5:00 - 7:00 PM at the Willow Point Archery Range: General Archery Event

Saturday, July 27th at 10:00 AM: Fly Fishing Fundamentals

This program is designed to benefit those new to fly fishing. Taylor Helbig, fly fishing guide with Sky Blue Outfitters, will share fundamentals of the sport to help beginners prepare for targeting a variety of fish species. He will introduce fly concepts, equipment, key principles of fly casting, presenting a fly, landing and releasing fish, and more.

Friday, August 2nd from 12:00 - 5:00 PM; Saturday, August 3rd from 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM; and Sunday, August 4th from 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM at the Visitors Center: Wildlife Art Show

Meet Pennsylvania's most talented wildlife artists and their extraordinary artwork. Paintings and limited edition prints will be available for sale. The Art Show is hosted by the Pennsylvania Game Commission. Come spend a day at Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area Visitors Center. Educational booths and a food truck will also be on site.

Wednesday, August 7th from 5:00 - 7:00 PM at the Willow Point Archery Range: General Archery Event

Wednesday, August 14th at 6:30 PM in the Auditorium: Trout Stocking Reform: A Desperately Needed Lifeline for PA Streams

Each year, a minimum of 5.5 million trout are stocked in PA. These species are predominantly invasive brown and rainbow trout, considered by the scientific community to both be in the top 100 most harmful invasive species worldwide out of around 5000 known invasive species. They have been shown to harm native aquatic species all around the world, and PA is no exception. In this talk, the negative effects of stocking streams, barriers to stocking reform, and what you can do to advocate for desperately needed stocking reforms will all be discussed in depth.

Wednesday, August 21st from 5:00 - 7:00 PM at the Willow Point Archery Range: General Archery Event

Saturday, August 24th at 10:00 AM: Identifying Incredible Edible Mushrooms of PA

Join us for an educational walk at the Middle Creek to learn about the many mushrooms that grow in Penn's Woods. We'll be discussing the basics of mushroom biology and identification, how to distinguish differences between edible fungi and their poisonous look-a-likes, where to get started looking, and some of our favorite ways to cook with them. Whether you're entirely new to wild mushroom hunting or a seasoned forager, all are welcome to join us for an enjoyable morning meandering for mushrooms!

Upcoming Events at Middle Creek

June 20th - September 22nd (Cont.)

Saturday, August 31st at 9:00 AM at the Willow Point Parking Lot: Wild Goose Chase 5k Run/Walk and 1/2 Mile Kids Fun Race

This will be the 4th annual Wild Goose Chase 5K and 1/2 Mile Kids Fun Race at Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area. All proceeds will benefit wildlife education and habitat management at Middle Creek. More information, including how to register, can be found here: <https://bit.ly/4btEwUU>.

Wednesday, September 11th at 6:30 PM in the Auditorium: Traveling with Towhees: Motus Bird Migration Tracking at Middle Creek and Beyond

This program will focus on bird migration research at Middle Creek using the Motus Wildlife Tracking System. You will learn about the birds that have been detected by the local Motus receiving station and the pathways that those birds have taken. There will be a specific focus on Eastern Towhee migration and the role that Middle Creek is playing in documenting the first migration pathways of this species.

Saturday, September 7th from 1:00 - 3:00 PM at the Willow Point Archery Range: Crossbow Event

If you're thinking about getting into archery hunting, this event will help you learn the basics of crossbows! All ages and skills welcome. Equipment provided.

Sunday, September 22nd from 11:00 AM and Throughout the Day: Birding on the Habitat Hayride

Join Lancaster and Lebanon's bird clubs on National Hunting and Fishing Day's famous Habitat Hayrides to look for birds and learn about the habitats that those species utilize. Please note that seating on the hayrides is limited and are first come, first served. Numerous hayrides will run throughout the day. Rain cancels this event.

Sunday, September 22nd from 11:00 AM - 5:00 PM: National Hunting and Fishing Day

Join us at the Middle Creek Visitors Center for our annual National Hunting and Fishing Day Celebration where we will have plenty of activities and local organizations to learn about wildlife, hunting, fishing, and much more! There will be a food truck on site and educational sessions in the auditorium.



Photo of sora by Joe Endy