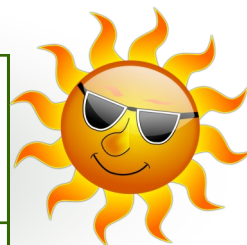




Spring/Summer 2016



Friends of Memorial Lake and Swatara State Parks



Inside this Issue:

<i>In Loving Memory</i>	2
<i>Spring Ephemerals</i>	3
<i>Black Rat Snake</i>	4
<i>Hummingbirds</i>	5
<i>Meet the Friends</i>	6
<i>Spring Volunteer Activity</i>	7
<i>Upcoming Events</i>	8

Officers:

President-Joe Dehner
VP-Dave Ravegum
Treasurer-Ric Miller
Secretary-Margaret Hummel

Committee Points of Contact:

member@friendsofswatara.org
 trails@friendsofswatara.org
 nature@friendsofswatara.org
 history@friendsofswatara.org

Newsletter Editor

Barbara Ritzheimer

President's Message

I am sure everyone is happy to say farewell to winter and welcome another spring and summer season.

The park is coming alive with growth and activity, standing ready to provide recreation for the thousands of diverse visitors. It is amazing to find a venue like this that is rich in wildlife related opportunities, while still supporting hiking, biking, boating, horse back riding, and fossil hunting: all this close to areas of significant population.

Unfortunately, this gem only exists because of a large investment of financial and human capital. In 2015, volunteers generously donated 2,377.5 hours of effort. Their time was allocated to the maintenance of trails, equipment, facilities, sponsored events, plus the preservation of wildlife and historical sites.

Membership in our friends group is \$10.00 for an individual and \$15.00 for a family. We also encourage monetary donations of any size. Naturally, since we are a 501(c)(3) corporation all donations are tax deductible.

Our organization is different from most. We will not sell your name; we will not continue to solicit additional funds; we will not call you to volunteer for projects. All activities and projects are posted on Facebook, the Friends website (friendsofswatara.org), and the park's website. If you want to donate a few hours of physical activity, just call the contact number. Group activity has also been a valuable source of volunteers. So, if you are involved with an organization who would like to help, we would be happy to accommodate you.

I would like to acknowledge all of our 2015 volunteers for their herculean effort. A special thanks also goes out to the parks' staff for their cooperation and technical assistance on our projects. With their help, we achieve synergistic success.

Visit us at the park and share your opinion of the facilities. Additionally, please consider a small donation to support our volunteers. Thank You.

Joe Dehner 717 329-3924



PARK OFFICE - 717 865-6470

In Loving Memory of our Dear Friend, Richard H. Light

On April 21, 2016, we lost a wonderful friend of nature, dedicated teacher and charter member of Friends of Memorial Lake and Swatara State Parks, Richard Light.

Richard was a self-taught naturalist who enjoyed sharing his knowledge of area flora and fauna, particularly that of Swatara State Park. At the time of his passing, Richard had accumulated over 25 years of service as a volunteer at the Park. In addition to his service as a volunteer, he was a member of Quittapahilla Audubon Society, Lancaster Bird Club, Entomology Club, Muhlenberg Botanical Society, Lancaster Herpetology Club, Monroe Valley Chapel, the Historic Preservation Trust, Lebanon Valley Conservancy, Manada Conservancy and Friends of Memorial Lake and Swatara State Parks.

Richard could be found on an almost daily basis in the Park hiking the trails, maintaining one of the historic canal locks, watching the Raven's nest, surveying shrews, ducking the Red Shoulder Hawks, tagging wood rats, and photographing wildflowers. Richard also kept track of the Pileated Woodpeckers and Hummingbirds nesting in the Park as well as the amphibians inhabiting the Park's many vernal pools and wet land areas. Richard used his knowledge of nature to host countless educational nature tours for park visitors and fellow volunteers.

One of Richard's special friends in the park was a wood rat named Woodie. Richard would tap on the rock that Woodie lived under and Woodie would come out to eat the peanut butter Richard brought him. He also had a special ruffed grouse, Ruffles, who would come running whenever Richard's white truck would come up Old State Road into the Park.

During his educational programs and tours, he always told people to take 2 steps and then stop for 5 minutes to observe nature. That's what he did one day, when he saw something run away from him. It was Momma Ovenbird. If he had taken another step, he would have stepped on her nest of eggs!

Richard noticed and marveled at the beauty of our natural surroundings. He did not miss the incredible wonders of God's plants, birds, and animals. His gifted mind, creativity, and inventive talents will be missed by all. Celebrate Richard's life by taking a walk in the woods, taking two steps and then standing five minutes to observe.

Donations are being accepted by Friends of Memorial Lake and Swatara State Parks for the purchase of a memorial bench in remembrance of Richard's contributions to Swatara State Park. Donations may be sent to FOMLSSP, 18 Boundary Road, Grantville, PA 17028. All contributions received exceeding actual costs will be given to the Lebanon Valley Conservancy in his memory.



Spring Ephemerals

Spring is the perfect time to get outside if you are someone who loves to look at wildflowers. The first flowers up in the spring are called spring ephemerals. Ephemeral means to last only for a short time. Spring ephemerals start to show as soon as the weather begins to warm up a bit and disappear as soon as it really warms up. They do not die; they simply go dormant to reappear again in the next spring. If the summer is cool and moist, spring ephemerals may actually continue to bloom into the summer season. The flowers pop up about the same time that the first insects go out in search of food. They provide food for insects when nothing else is blooming yet.

Bloodroot is one of the earliest spring ephemerals. The flowers are white and open during the day and close at night. Flowers only last for a day or two. It is called Bloodroot because it has reddish-orange sap when cut. If growing conditions are good, Bloodroot will spread and form colonies in an area.



Rue Anemone can also be found in early spring. The flowers are white but much smaller than Bloodroot. It prefers to grow under deciduous trees in dappled sunlight. It, too, will grow in colonies if the conditions are right. Look for leaves that are shaped somewhat like a duck's foot.



Another early spring flower to look for is Trout Lily. It gets its name from the mottling on the leaves which is similar to a Brook or Brown Trout. The flowers are yellow and bell-shaped.



Virginia Bluebells are usually found in areas that are a little more moist than most of the flowers mentioned previously. They bloom in April and May. The flowers start out pink when the first appear and then turn light blue.



Dutchman's Breeches have fern-like leaves. The name comes from the flowers which appear to be a pair of bloomers hanging upside down.



All of these flowers can be viewed in Memorial Lake and Swatara State Park. So the next time you are out for a walk in one of the parks, be on the lookout for spring ephemerals. Since most of April has been very cool this year, they may still be blooming into May.

Species Spotlight: Black Rat Snake

Recently, our Facebook page pictured a large Black Rat Snake spread across the branch of a tree. The picture reached over 53,000 viewers. A majority of the comments were positive, but several raised areas of concerns.

Over the years, snakes have been characterized as something evil. In fact, they do not pursue humans and will do almost anything to avoid humans. It is important to realize that snakes are an intricate part of the environment and should not be hunted or destroyed.

Twenty-one species of snakes can be found in Pennsylvania; only three of them are venomous: the Northern Copperhead, the Timber Rattlesnake, and the Eastern Massasauga Rattlesnake (which is only native to a few western counties of the state).

You may encounter either the Northern Black Racer or the Black Rat Snake, as pictured on Facebook, in the parks. Of the two, the Black Rat Snake is an excellent climber and uses trees to flee from predators and hunt. It may also inhabit farm buildings functioning as an important control of rodents and other small animals.

Black Snakes are egg-laying and breed in spring. The snakes are territorial and will fight for the right to mate. Females lay between 6 and 24 eggs in July. A female is only capable of reproducing once every two to three years in cold climate zones but will reproduce annually in areas with moderate climates.

The Black Rat Snake may use underground sites, decaying trees, tree holes, and sheltered buildings to nest. Anywhere from 10 to 60 adults may form a hibernating group that may also include other snakes such as Copperheads and rattlesnakes.

The mortality rate for young snakes is high. They succumb to freezing temperatures, hawks, other snakes, and humans. The hatchlings remain near their birth sites for one or two years, using them to hibernate in the winter. We also mention the Black Racer because records show it will feed on juvenile rattlesnakes thus helping with population control. There is no scientific evidence that Black Racers are immune to rattlesnake venom, but they usually eat their prey headfirst so the venomous snakes probably aren't able to bite the racers. Black Racers are also extremely fast which allows them to grab the rattlesnakes before they can react.

Individuals of the Black Rat Snake may reach lengths of 7 to 8 feet and are the longest snakes naturally occurring over their broad, geographic range over the eastern United States. They also have a wide range of color variations. You may observe gray and even yellow plus a series of white spots and speckles running along its sides.

All snakes in Pennsylvania are protected by Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission regulations. Please respect their value to the natural heritage of Pennsylvania and preserve their existence.

Photo on Page 5



This fine specimen was sighted by Friends Group Member and DCNR Conservation Volunteer Pat Shipe while he was doing trail maintenance.



Ruby-throated Hummingbirds eat twice their weight every day. They eat mostly flower nectar but also catch insects for protein. Before they migrate, they store a layer of fat equal to half their body weight. Adult males do not help in raising the young. By late July or early August, most of the adult males are already heading south. Adult females and young birds follow them a little bit later.

Memorial Day: Meet the Friends Group



Please join us on Memorial Day, Monday May 30, 2016 at the Trout Run Trailhead. We are having a “Meet the Friends of the Parks” day. We will share information about Memorial Lake and Swatara State Park. It will also give you the opportunity to sign up for membership in the Friends group and learn about volunteer opportunities in the parks.

If you are not yet a member of the Friends group, we would love to have you join. There is no requirement to do any volunteer work if you become a member although we would love to have you join in our activities.

There are a number of activities in which the Friends group participates to help with the smooth functioning of the parks and provide a pleasant experience for visitors to the parks.

Some of our members have been working on maintaining the existing trails. Maybe you have seen the photos on the Facebook page of all the trees that were cleared from the trail after the winter snow storms.

Others are more concerned with the natural resources. Our Natural Resources Committee explores and identifies the parks’ natural resources. This committee organizes several activities such as Moth Night and Astronomy Night for anyone interested in learning more about the world around us.

The Friends also are trying to preserve the remains of the Union Canal in Swatara State park. There are several locks which are still standing in the park. Vegetation has to be cut back repeatedly so that the locks are not covered up and eventually destroyed. We also provide interpretive tours of the canal for park visitors.

If you are the kind of person who is more inclined toward communications, the Friends are always in need of people who can prepare publicity and contact news outlets to inform the public about our activities.

Of course, fund raising is always a need for our organization. If you enjoy organizing or helping with fund raising projects, perhaps you might consider offering some assistance to the Friends group.

We are in the process of trying to increase our membership base. If you feel you might want to help in that area, consider volunteering for the membership committee.

Once again, no one is forced to volunteer for any of these committees if he or she becomes a member. There is a general membership meeting once a year in March that all members are encouraged to attend. The Board of the Friends of Memorial Lake and Swatara State Parks meets every other month on the third Monday of the month. Every member is invited to attend these meetings.

Volunteer Service

A big thank you to our group of dedicated, hardworking, enthusiastic volunteers working at Memorial Lake and Swatara State Parks. Over the months of March and April volunteers recorded a record 549.5 hours of service. A summary of reported hours is shown below.

Mifflin Trail Maintenance	4.0 Hours	Kiosk Erection	21.0 Hours
State Park Lane	15.5 Hours	Memorial Lake General	12.0 Hours
Bear Hole Trail	81.0 Hours	Amphibian Walk	8.0 Hours
Portage Trail	4.5 Hours	Swatara General Support	42.5 Hours
Swatara Rail Trail	124.0 Hours	Driving Tour Attendant	60.0 Hours
Moonshine Trail	4.0 Hours	Chipper Maintenance	21.0 Hours
Swatara Trailheads	4.0 Hours	Canal Lock Maintenance	9.0 Hours
Swatara Water Trail	9.5 Hours	Invasive Plant Control	8.5 Hours
Swopes Valley Boat Launch	2.0 Hours	Veterans Festival 2016	30.0 Hours
Great American Cleanup	55.0 Hours	Friends Group Projects	36.0 Hours

Why all the trail work this spring? The heavy wet winter snows resulted in an unusually large number of fallen trees and limbs on the trails. Volunteers also had to deal with two large fallen tree that completely obstructed navigation on the Swatara Creek in the Green Point Narrows area. As always, I want to thank the full time staff for making it possible for our volunteers to contribute as much as they do. The Park Manager and staff govern the amount of volunteer service contributed to our park complex.

Article Submitted by Dave Ravegum, Volunteer Coordinator

A Little Commonsense and Courtesy Go A Long Way!

Swatara State Park permits hunting in designated areas. However, within these areas, game laws and park rules prohibit hunting in planted, unharvested, agricultural fields and within 150yards of houses (safety zones). Hunters in Swatara State Park share the park with all other visitors — hikers, bikers, horseback riders, etc.; so, please don't place your portable tree stand on horse, hiking, or biking trails. Properly tagged and identified Tree Stands may be placed on state land two weeks prior to archery deer season and must be removed two weeks after the late flintlock deer season.. Please do not litter recreational trails and roadsides with gut piles, hides, feathers, or other discarded bird and animal parts.

Parking is permitted at all trailheads in designated stone and macadam parking areas, but not in the grass and not along roads. Ruts caused by vehicles damage mowers and create more work for maintenance staff. Please do not park in front of or block trail gates and bollards as Maintenance, Utility, Law Enforcement, and Emergency Vehicles access the park at these locations.

Answers to Fall/Winter 2015-2016 Newsletter Railroad History Quiz

The first photo is the Strause Lumber Company train that ran east across the Swatata from Inwood for 7 miles to present day Camp Strause. The second photo is of the maintenance crew and trolley at the trolley and maintenance shed just east of the Suedberg railroad station.

Upcoming Events

May 14	All Day	PA Migration Count
May 16	7:00pm to 9:00pm	Board Meeting, Vista Room, Community Club, FTIG
May 30	9:00pm to 4:00pm	Meet the Friends Trout Run Trailhead
June 12	8:30am to 10:30am	Bird Walk North End of Swatara Rail Trail
June 18	8:30pm to 2:00am	Moth Night Meet at Wagner's Pond
July 18	7:00pm to 9:00pm	Board Meeting, Vista Room, Community Club, FTIG
August 7	1:00pm to 4:00pm	Fossil Site and Lock 5 - Meet at Swopes Valley Trailhead
August 12	8:30pm to 10:30pm	Astronomy Night Trout Run Trailhead

**For More Details on Natural Resources Events, email nature@friendsofswatara.org
For More Details on all other Events, email history@friendsofswatara.org**

Moth Night has become an annual event for the Friends of Memorial Lake and Swatara State Parks. We have been trying to catalog the different species of moths found in the parks. Bring a chair and some snacks and enjoy an early summer night learning about moths and other night creatures. We have often seen a variety of insects and bats drawn to the lights. Last year we got the chance to watch a Cicada hatching. How long you want to stay is entirely up to you.

Astronomy Night is another laid back event. Bring a chair and some snacks, sit back, and relax. A pair of binoculars and a night sky app or star map are also helpful. This is the time of the Perseid meteor shower so maybe we can see some of the meteors that night. Again, how long you stay is up to you.

Fossil Site and Lock 5 Tour is roughly a 2 mile round trip hike that is shine only (automatically canceled if it rains) from Swopes Valley Trailhead along Bear Hole Trail to the Union Canal Company's Branch Canal Lock 5. After a brief narration at Lock 5, we will return to Bear Hole Trail and the Fossil Site.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

**Membership applications may be downloaded from our Website:
www.friendsofswatara.org**