

## **Youth Birding Program at Willistown Conservation Trust**

For over 30 years, Willistown Conservation Trust (WCT) has focused on land protection and habitat conservation in the greater Willistown area in Chester and Delaware Counties 20 miles west of metropolitan Philadelphia.

In May 2009 with the funds from the DVOC Conservation Grant, WCT created the Rushton Woods Bird Banding Station, which ignited a successful, self-sustaining program where science and education go hand in hand. The overwhelming popularity of this program persuaded the WCT Board of Trustees to create an official Bird Conservation Program, which is dedicated to protecting and restoring migrating, wintering, and breeding bird habitat throughout the Upper Ridley/Crum IBA. In 2012, our banding station banded over 1000 birds of 70 species, including 263 Northern Saw-whet Owls and was visited by over 3000 members of the general public who received education in issues of bird and habitat conservation.

Our PA Young Birder program, which began in the spring of 2011 with the help of DVOC's Adrian Binns, is a bird club for girls and boys between the ages of 8 and 12. The club meets once per month at our Rushton Woods Preserve, and the goal is to connect the participants with nature on an intimate level through birds. They learn how to use binoculars, go on bird hikes, write poetry, make art, observe bird banding, and explore nature through fun educational activities timed to the seasons of the natural world. (See attachment A for topics.) Turnout ranges from 15 to over 50 participants, depending on the program.

Additionally, we provide education programs for schools ranging in age from elementary to college. (See attachment B) These programs include hands-on learning opportunities including bird banding, sustainable farm tour, and woodland ecology walks. Another facet of our education program is involving school children from underserved areas within Philadelphia and West Chester, PA who attend our programs to learn about birds, science and conservation.

With additional support, we could accomplish the following goals:

- Improve an education program that invites the public to observe birds “in the hand,” learn bird ID skills, interact with field researchers collecting scientific data on bird communities, and gain a bird’s perspective on current habitat restoration efforts and sustainable farming practices at the site.
- Educate children of all ages about avian behavior and ecology, natural history, the status of threatened and/or endangered species effects of environmental disturbances, habitat conservation and land-use management issues.
- Develop future curriculum and evaluate its effectiveness.
- Provide additional learning aids for field courses such as magnifying glasses, writing and drawing supplies, field guides, and preserved wildlife specimens.
- Develop teaching tools such as a Rushton Field and Activity Guide and educational posters.

- Utilize modern technology that will enhance educational efforts. For example, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology has developed apps for iPads to help children discover and learn about birds. Using an iPad in the field would enable the students to be more engaged with the learning process and bridge the gap between technology and field science.

WCT's Bird Conservation Program forges new ways for people to foster connections with the outdoors that will build the foundation for them to become more actively involved with land conservation.

Thank you very much for considering our organization for this wonderful opportunity. Please don't hesitate to call Lisa Kiziuk at 610-353-2562, ext. 25 or 610-331-5072(cell) with any questions regarding this program.