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Photo by Bradley Maule
During the past month, I’ve been to more in-person meetings and events than I have over the past two years. That includes FOW events that drew larger-than-usual numbers, such as Harvey Street and Bells Mill cleanups and our annual summer Ice Cream Social, attended by a record 425 people! On each occasion, I heard the same comment: “Isn’t it nice to be together in person?” Yes, it is. Welcome back!

Welcome back to the new and improved Wissahickon bike trail bridges at Ten Box, reopened after a months-long construction collaboration between Philadelphia Parks & Recreation and FOW (p. 2). And, after five years, welcome back to Tony Croasdale, who returned to the Wissahickon Environmental Center as environmental education program specialist after serving in the same role at the Cobbs Creek Community Environmental Center (p. 11).

From park cleanups to guided hikes to public meetings, there are many opportunities for coming back to visit and learn about the Wissahickon and support FOW in our ongoing efforts to make the park better and better. If you’d like to join one of our volunteer crews, we’re recruiting Trail Ambassadors and Crew Leaders through December 31. Read details on page 5.

We love when people attend our events, but it’s about more than just the numbers. Whether you join us at our Valley Talks, (p. 6) and the All Trails Challenge (p. 2), or donate on #Giving Tuesday or buy gifts of membership for others, you’re helping FOW support trail and watershed conservation. You’re also helping us continue to spread the word about who we are and what we do, and the many benefits of spending time in nature.

For over 20 years, one special person helped us do this work by overseeing FOW’s office operations and so much more. Our dear friend Audrey Simpson retires at the end of this year after 22 years as our business manager. Throughout constant changes, she was a source of stability and always-welcome humor. We pay tribute to her on page 3.

As we look forward to a bountiful new year, we look back with pride and gratitude for all we have accomplished this year—together.

Wishing you and yours joy and good health during this season of celebration and all year long. Let’s continue to be great friends.

Ruffian Tittmann, Executive Director
**Wissahickon Bike Bridges are Open!**

After delays from the pandemic, a hurricane, supply chain shortages, and other obstacles, the Wissahickon bike bridges at Ten Box reopened at last to the delight of all those involved in the extensive $1.2 million project, as well as those gathered at the ribbon-cutting ceremony on September 16. Philadelphia Parks & Recreation Deputy Commissioner Patrick Morgan thanked FOW for keeping the public informed about the project, which completely restored and reinforced the four-decades-old trail bridges, including replacing the often-slippery wood planking with a safer, more durable metal surface.

“We are grateful to Parks & Rec for identifying the issues and getting the work done,” said FOW Executive Director Ruffian Tittmann, who also thanked the public for being patient.

“These bridges have come back better than ever, so we can enjoy them for another 40 years. Congratulations!”

Deputy Commissioner Morgan noted that this project demonstrates Philadelphia’s investment in providing access to the Wissahickon trails and nature. The bridges connect the Lincoln Drive and Forbidden Drive sections of the Wissahickon Valley Trail. An important link between Forbidden Drive and the Schuylkill River Trail, from Wissahickon Valley Park to the Art Museum, the bridges are a popular and sustainable option for commuting to Center City.

![Photo of ribbon-cutting ceremony]

Philadelphia Parks & Recreation Deputy Commissioner Patrick Morgan, assisted by some special helpers and FOW Executive Director Ruffian Tittmann (far right), cuts the ribbon at a ceremony celebrating the reopening of the Wissahickon bike trail bridges after significant restoration.

Photo by Bradley Maule

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**SAVE THE DATE**

**2023 PUBLIC PROJECTS MEETING**

**JANUARY 17 • 6 P.M.**

Friends of the Wissahickon will host its annual Public Projects Meeting to share progress on its major projects over the past year and discuss projects for the upcoming year. Visit fow.org for more details and to register for this virtual event.

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**ALL TRAILS CHALLENGE 2022**

*Every Step Makes an Impact*

A special group of enthusiastic individuals gathered at the Chestnut Hill Brewing Company on September 15 because they were up for the Challenge—the All Trails Challenge, that is. The occasion was a launch party for people who had signed up for Friends of the Wissahickon’s 2022 ATC, which kicked off on August 22 for FOW members, September 6 for the public.

The ATC may be drawing to a close, but there’s still time to support the Challengers or donate directly to this activity that means so much to the park. Visit here fow.org/event/2022atc1/ to learn more.

**Sponsored by**

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Audrey Simpson has seen a lot of changes since she became the part-time business manager for both Friends of the Wissahickon and the Chestnut Hill Historical Society (now Chestnut Hill Conservancy) 22 years ago. When FOW outgrew the space that the two organizations shared on Germantown Avenue and moved to its current location on Evergreen Avenue in 2016, Audrey began working exclusively for FOW, and we’re so grateful she did. At the end of this year, the FOW family will lose an indispensable colleague and dear friend when Audrey retires from the organization.

“For a lot of people, including myself, she was the first face people saw or heard on the phone at FOW,” said Ruffian Tittmann, FOW executive director. “Audrey has seen it all and has always been a steady and reassuring presence for the many different people and situations she encountered over the past two decades.”

Over the years, Audrey has interacted with a wide range of people, from public contractors, vendors, and financial institutions to the FOW staff and board, as well as members of the public needing assistance with situations both mundane and critical. As FOW grew, so did Audrey’s responsibilities. In addition to managing FOW’s business operations, she continually expanded her skill set, from IT to HR; she even earned an SHRM (Society of Human Resource Management)-CP certification. But she took it all in stride. “I worked my way through it and figured it out,” said Audrey.

“Although she’ll miss the variety and challenges of the work, it is the people who have become like family whom she’ll miss most.”

Of the many memories Audrey has amassed during her time at FOW, there have been a few standouts: the first William Penn Grant for operations in 2003, enabling the hiring of FOW’s first executive director—a seminal moment in the organization’s expansion; the year FOW moved to its current location; the extraordinary 95th anniversary celebration; and the appearance of the Wissahickon bear. She fondly recalls the staff hikes, visiting various parts of the park where projects were taking place, particularly the picnic in Blue Bell Park during the pandemic because it brought the close-knit team even closer together. Although she’ll miss the variety and challenges of the work, it is the people who have become like family whom she’ll miss most. Nevertheless, she believes it’s time for a change.

Audrey has no idea what’s next after FOW, other than tackling “a whole lot of closets that have to be cleaned,” for starters. She hopes to spend more time with her husband and their two children, Stephen Jr. and Chris, and five grandchildren, as well as in her happy place, Cape Cod.

Quotes

“FOW without Audrey—it’s hard for me to picture. You could always rely on her. Now who is going to come to the office in the middle of the night when the alarm goes off? I know there are things she just knew and took care of as a matter of course. She was the consummate professional and there was never any doubt how much she enjoyed her job. Audrey, we will miss your great work, but we will miss you more!”

—Ruffian Tittmann, Executive Director

“It is hard to imagine working at FOW without Audrey! She has always been such a stable and joyful presence here. She has never hesitated to share her considerable experience and thoughtful insights with me, while also managing to sneak in a laugh or two. I am so grateful for all I have learned from her and will miss her and our late afternoon chats dearly. But I will take one for our chocolate-loving team and eat her share of the cupcakes and cookies moving forward, ha ha! Love you, Audrey!”

—Sarah Marley, Development Director

“Audrey is such a staple of Friends of the Wissahickon that it’s going to feel so strange to not see her regularly. Her reliable and dependable nature always keeps the rest of us in line. That (along with the fact that her son has the same birthday as me) is why I so affectionately call her ‘Mom.’ I’m gonna miss you, Mom!”

—Shawn Green, Director of Field Stewardship

“Audrey has always been the rock of the office. Constant and calming, even through the pandemic, she was a reassuring presence. Audrey was always in the office, available for any question, and she always knew the answer. She took care of the office—the physical space as well as all of us. It’s going to be a big adjustment without her.”

—Maeve Pollack, Development and Database Manager
“Audrey has seen it all and has always been a steady and reassuring presence for the many different people and situations she encountered over the past two decades.”

“Congratulations to you, Audrey, on your retirement! You’ve been the clasp to the chain that is FOW; thank you for all your work and magic wand waving. I’ve loved being your office neighbor this last year, enjoying your desk soundtrack and company. I hope you have a fantastic retirement, filled with both peace and adventure, family time, and absolutely no QuickBooks. Cheers!”

—Pauline Berkowitz, Capital Projects Coordinator

“The few office days I had each week, I would always look forward to the afternoons when Audrey came in. She has such an infectious, lighthearted, and humorous personality. Since starting with FOW in the beginning of 2022, Audrey has been someone I could always depend on. She will be deeply missed, and I wish Audrey a fulfilling and relaxing retirement!”

—Amelia Marren, Volunteer Program Coordinator

“I have been around FOW so long that, when I became president, I actually did not benefit from Audrey’s instruction, probably to my detriment. But during our many years at FOW, I’ve thoroughly enjoyed her company and her wry sense of humor (usually spiced up with a few gentle personal barbs). We must find a way to keep her involved in the FOW family.”

—David Pope, former FOW President

“Audrey has been the heart and soul of FOW for over 20 years and has been an enthusiastic and knowledgeable part of the FOW leadership team from day one. I value the 14 years we worked together and know that she has left the Wissahickon stronger than it was when she arrived.”

—Maura McCarthy, Fairmount Park Conservancy Executive Director, and former FOW Executive Director
It’s been a busy year of stewardship within Wissahickon Valley Park! We’re so grateful and proud of the accomplishments that we were able to achieve, thanks to the hundreds of volunteers who came out to join us. From a huge clean-up on Lincoln Drive to the planting of over 1,000 native plants, volunteers make the park cleaner and more sustainable.

The winter season is always when the FOW field staff regroups, strategizes, and plans projects for the upcoming year. As always, we’ve got a lot of work to do, and can use your support. There are many opportunities to help in the Wissahickon:

- The easiest is to come out for some of our Volunteer Service Days. These events are open to all and don’t require any experience. We provide the tools, gloves, and instruction - you just have to show up! Check out our upcoming Volunteer Service Days here: fow.org/volunteering/workinthepark
- For those of you who prefer to work solo, or are unable to join our scheduled service days, consider becoming a Wissahero by doing a self-guided clean-up. Check out the details here: fow.org/volunteering/clean-up/
- If you are part of a business or organization interested in coming joining us for a private service project, read more here: fow.org/volunteering/corporate-groups/

### TAKE VOLUNTEERING AT FOW TO THE NEXT LEVEL

During the winter, Friends of the Wissahickon recruits and trains several smaller corps of volunteers to work on a more involved level. We are currently recruiting for our 2023 training classes, which take place from February through March. Do you love the park and want to make a positive difference? Do you want to meet new, like-minded friends? If so, consider applying for one of these programs!

- **Trail Ambassadors** are park docents who teach park visitors about the park’s history, flora, fauna, and geology and assist with anything from directions to first aid. With only a few park rangers on duty in the Wissahickon, Trail Ambassadors serve a much-needed role in the park by providing regular outreach and assistance to park users, leading hikes, and staffing information tables in the Wissahickon & the surrounding community. It’s an important job because it is through this corps that we are better able to serve the public and the park. Learn more about this program and apply at fow.org/volunteering/trail-ambassadors/.
- **Crew Leaders** are a special corps of stewards who are trained in leading volunteer groups in the Wissahickon, building & improving trails, restoring habitat, and sharing their knowledge and expertise with others. They work directly with FOW staff to plan and lead volunteer service days throughout the park. With the constant natural and human stresses on the park, Crew Leaders play an integral role in keeping the Wissahickon beautiful and sustainable for generations to come. Learn more about this program and apply at fow.org/volunteering/crew-leaders/.
GUIDED WALKS & TALKS

There’s no better way to explore Wissahickon Valley Park than with FOW volunteers! Our Guided Walks & Talks are fun, educational, and cover a wide range of topics. Come out and discover your newest favorite sections of the park!

Registration is required for all hikes so that participants can be informed of weather or other emergency cancellations. Guided Walks & Talks may be on rocky, rugged trails that may be wet and slippery. Wear sturdy shoes or boots with socks. Walks are canceled in heavy rain. Service animals are always welcome.

REGISTER NOW AND FIND MORE GUIDED WALKS & TALKS ON FOW’S EVENTS CALENDAR AT FOW.ORG/EVENTS.

Trail Ambassador Field Report

Ambassadors:
Debbie Hoellein, Jim McClory, Susan Hauck

Date: Friday, 8/19/22  Time: 9 am – 11:45 am
Locations: Northern Section (Northwestern Ave. to Rex Ave.)

Description: This hike was titled “The Wissahickon in August,” one of a monthly series in which we explore the changes in the flora and fauna during the different seasons and highlight the general experience of hiking in the park during each month. We also discuss points of interest.

When we started, the weather was sunny and in the 70s, but it was warm and in the 80s by the time we finished. The heat is part of the experience of hiking in the Wissahickon in August. Luckily, most of the hike was in the shade. Besides the 3 leaders, there were 13 adult attendees. All were from Philadelphia or the suburbs, except for a couple visiting from Miami.

We started at Cedars House and took the lower trail from the driveway through the Andorra Natural Area to Bells Mill Road. We crossed the road and took Monster Hill to the Yellow Trail. We then went north to the first connector trail to Forbidden Drive. We crossed the Covered Bridge and then took the Orange Trail back to Bells Mill Road. We had planned to do part of the Lavender Trail but realized that would get us back after the stated end time of the hike. We walked across the bridge and took Forbidden Drive back to the start.

One person chose to take Forbidden Drive back to the start from the Covered Bridge because he was hot. We met him at the end of the hike.

Jim talked about the Covered Bridge, the mills, and the WPA. Sue talked about stormwater runoff mitigation, FOW, and Wissahickon Valley Park. Debbie talked about plants and a little about geology. Dave Stehman explained the structure and purpose of the Monster Hill project. We had a member of Historic Rittenhouse Town speak, and he discussed what is there.

As we walked, we noticed how our native and non-native plants were looking at this time of year. We did not see much in terms of wildlife.

As always, it was fun sharing the experience of walking through our beautiful park with others.
Sustainable Shopping at Weavers Way

by Nima Koliwad, Weavers Way Co-op

The triple bottom line, or the “Triple P” approach—People, Planet, and Profit—is a core cooperative principle that guides the day-to-day practices at the co-op. We focus on “people” first—people whom we work with (staff and employees) and people whom we do business with (vendors and local business owners), and ensure we employ fair trade and ethical practices in our daily operations. “Planet” is next; we work hard to ensure our carbon footprint is as small as possible and offer sustainable choices to our customers. Although “profit” is very important (we are a business after all!), it tends to be the last factor in the triple bottom line scale. We want to create and share alternatives for and with our shoppers and allow them to make sustainable choices.

At Weavers Way, we are very proud of our bulk departments. Our stores offer a tremendous variety of bulk products. We have conventional and organic offerings to make shopping easy and accessible to all budgets. To promote shopping in bulk to save on costs and packaging, Weavers Way offers a 10 percent discount the first weekend of every month to members who bring their own containers to shop. Many members are pros at bulk shopping and will offer nifty tips and tricks to beginners. Making a list is a top tip shared by veteran bulk shoppers. It might feel a little intimidating the first time you shop in the bulk department, but you will soon get the hang of it! Make a list before coming to shop and bring enough containers to buy all the bulk items on your list. Instructions are provided on how to label and weigh the containers and products. If you can reuse the containers, then you have all the information written down from the last time you shopped. Quick note: PLU# (price look-up codes) differ from store to store, so please check and make sure you have the right number before heading to the checkout counter.

The Container Return Program (CRP) is another important program that was launched last year at the co-op. Select items are packaged in glass or reusable jars and are available to shoppers as an alternative to conventional deli containers. Shoppers pay a small deposit when they buy a product in a reusable container, which gets refunded when they bring back the container to the store. The idea is to promote a culture in which the shopper has a choice and can shop at the co-op to ensure fewer plastic containers end up in a landfill.

Currently, Weavers Way offers seasonal soups, peanut butter, house-marinated olives, Thompson raisins, walnut pieces, and salad greens in reusable, returnable containers. A shopper can simply wash out the container to remove any bits of residue and bring it back to the co-op. These containers get picked up, sanitized, and returned to the prep kitchen, where they are filled with yummy foods and readied for shoppers. This process was initiated at the co-op by our Plastic Reduction Task Force Committee. This member-led committee is always looking for ways to make shopping at the co-op easy and sustainable. Alisa Shargorodsky, a committee member and founder and CEO of Echo Systems, which works to eliminate single-use waste, outlined the backend of this program and makes it possible for the co-op to implement the Container Return Program. As of September, the co-op sold 7,280 returnable containers, of which 5,163 were returned and reused at the co-op. We are working on adding more products to this program; salads and -grain bowls are next on the list. We are very excited to be able to offer our shoppers a plastic-free alternative at Weavers Way.

Nima Koliwad is Weavers Way Co-op’s community outreach and communications coordinator. Weavers Way members earn working member credit when volunteering for FOW.
Wissahickon Environmental Center

LATE FALL-WINTER CALENDAR

All programs are FREE, all-weather, require registration, and begin at the Tree House (300 W. Northwestern Ave.) unless otherwise noted.

Coffee with the Birds
Wednesdays | 9 a.m.
We will brew a pot of hot or iced coffee to enjoy, as well see what birds are around the grounds. If time permits, we will venture into the woods or meadow.

Naturalist on Demand
Fridays | 1-4 p.m.
Feel free to drop in and ask the Tree House staff to show you around the woods.

Andorra Ecological Restoration Sessions
Mondays | November 21, December 5, and 19 | 2-4 p.m.
This is a mix of training and work sessions so you can help us fight off invasive plants and install and maintain native specimens on the Tree House grounds and Andorra Natural Area. Tools and materials provided.

Adults & Older Teens. FREE.

Naturalist Potluck: Masting and Predator Saturation
Wednesday | November 30 | 6-8 p.m.
Bring food to share, as well as your knowledge and opinions, as we discuss different natural history topics each week. Adults. FREE.

Family Game and Campfire Night
Friday | December 9 | 6-7:30 p.m.
The Tree House will have tables set up inside with some games and a campfire blazing outside. Families are encouraged to bring games and activities, as well as fixings for s’mores and other food to cook on the fire.
Preregistration is requested. All ages. FREE.

Weekend Activity Box
Weekends during park hours
Even if the building is closed, stop by the back porch and pick up materials for season-appropriate activities like scavenger hunts, crafts, and coloring pages. FREE (donations appreciated).

SPECIAL PROGRAMS

Fuzzy Buddies
Saturday | December 3 | 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
This is a celebration of the Wissahickon’s mammals! We begin at 10 a.m. with a story reading for tots. Outside, we will have some craft and activity stations. At 11 a.m., we will have a mammal artifact show-and-tell presentation, and then we will go on a walk to look for mammals and their tracks in order to make casts. Preregistration is required. Children of all ages with caregivers. FREE

Mammal Walk
Saturday | December 3 | 8 a.m.
This will be a slow and silent walk through the woods to spot deer, squirrels, foxes, and other mammals. This program is appropriate for people of any age that can be quiet! Preregistration is requested.

Yerba Maté with the Hermit Thrushes: Botany and Birding
Wednesday | December 21 | 9 a.m.
We are changing up Coffee with the Birds this week with a seasonal flair. We will provide yerba maté (tea) to fuel us on our hike through Andorra’s holly groves looking for wintering Hermit Thrushes as we discuss the identification and biogeography of hollies. Pre-registration is requested. All ages that can appreciate plant taxonomy are welcome. FREE

Photo by Bradley Maule
There are several ways to make meaningful gifts to advance FOW’s mission.

**STOCK**
Consider giving a gift of stock. Our DTC # is 0062 and our Vanguard Brokerage Acct # is 23501307.

**JOIN FOW’S SUSTAINER PROGRAM**
Support ongoing stewardship through our monthly membership program (and receive a special thank-you gift). Visit fow.org/sustainerprogram

**UNITED WAY DONATIONS**
Friends of the Wissahickon can receive donations through the United Way. If your employer offers United Way giving, and you would like to designate Friends of the Wissahickon as your beneficiary, please use our option code #9882.

**AMAZON SMILE**
If you shop on Amazon.com, use AmazonSmile (smile.amazon.com) and select Friends of the Wissahickon as the nonprofit organization you would like to support. The AmazonSmile Foundation will donate 0.5 percent of the purchase price from your eligible AmazonSmile purchases to FOW.

**SECURE THE WISSAHICKON’S FUTURE: MAKE IT PART OF YOUR LEGACY**
As a membership-based nonprofit, Friends of the Wissahickon depends on gifts and grants from individuals and organizations to continue important work throughout Wissahickon Valley Park. One of the most transformational ways individuals can make a lasting contribution to FOW is through The 1924 Society.

The 1924 Society is a group of committed individuals who have included FOW in their wills or have named FOW in their estate planning. Created by the late Albert Neff (1929–2005), a Philadelphia resident with a passion and love for the wildness of the Wissahickon, The 1924 Society honors and recognizes the commitment of our friends to ensure that Wissahickon Valley Park is here for generations to come.

Contributions from members of The 1924 Society make a lasting impact. Over the past decade, these friends have invested over $500,000 to help fulfill FOW’s ongoing stewardship mission in Wissahickon Valley Park. Support from these thoughtful individuals helps provide the robust educational programming and stewardship efforts needed to protect the water quality of the Wissahickon Creek and preserve the native habitat throughout the 1,800-acre park.

Members of The 1924 Society, who include FOW in their estate plans or wills, receive a lifetime membership, invitations to special events, and advanced information about FOW programs and projects. Learn more about The 1924 Society at fow.org/1924society or contact Sarah Marley at marley@fow.org.
THREE WAYS YOUR INVESTMENTS COULD HELP THE WORLD (AND THE WISSAHICKON)

A message from Prentiss Smith & Company, a generous supporter of Friends of the Wissahickon

In today’s market, your investments may be the last thing you want to think about as you enter the warm light of the Wissahickon. With financial markets battered by war and inflation, it’s understandable to want to put your latest retirement savings statement or your brokerage account balance out of your mind as you step into the woods.

But what if your walk in the Wissahickon is, in fact, the right moment to think about your investments? After all, treasuring the natural world is about more than just passing through it. It’s also about stewardship, and planning for the future. These responsibilities extend not just to us as individuals, or to our elected representatives, but also to corporations—who arguably have as much to do with the fate of our world as governments do. Fortunately, recent legislation can help point companies in the right direction. Although we may vote in elections every year, as investors who choose to be owners of those corporations, we vote with our money every day.

So how can we seize this moment and make those votes count? If we are fortunate enough to have retirement savings, brokerage accounts, or trusts, how can those investments reflect the same values we bring to our engagement with politics, with our communities, and with the Wissahickon?

Here are three suggestions:

1. **Make sure your investments exclude industries and companies that don’t align with your values.** For instance, oil and gas companies fuel climate change, which drives erosion and habitat degradation in the Wissahickon; agrochemicals degrade our waterways; private prison companies keep our communities isolated and divided. Choose an investment manager or funds that will allow you to avoid such investments entirely, as a matter of policy.

2. **Be educated about how your shares are voted.** Every share of stock you own gets a vote at a company’s annual meeting. Many investment managers and funds will vote on your behalf. Are they voting for stronger environmental disclosures? Are they voting against entrenched, non-diverse board directors at the companies in which you own a stake?

3. **Find out if your investment manager or fund manager engages with the companies in which you hold shares.** For instance, are they pushing for stronger zero deforestation policies at food companies whose supply chains impact forests across the world? By aggregating your shares with those of other clients, money managers can have an outsized impact on corporate policy making when they choose to.

With each of these steps confirmed, on your next walk in the Wissahickon you will have the satisfaction of knowing your investments are aligned with the world you want to see around you.
To Tony Croasdale, it’s what’s outside that counts. As the environmental education program specialist at the Wissahickon Environmental Center (WEC), his overarching goal is to help Philadelphians learn about the rich natural history of Philadelphia’s park system, especially the amazing diversity of life in Wissahickon Valley Park that many people are unaware of.

Tony is not new to the WEC; he served as environmental education planner from 2015 to 2017, and then transferred to Cobbs Creek Community Environmental Center to serve as environmental program specialist. Recently, he returned to the WEC, holding the same title.

Generations of children and families have visited the WEC’s Tree House, but Tony wants people to know that there is so much more.

**What sets the WEC apart from other recreation programs?**

We’re here to interpret the park, not just what’s in the building. Unlike other rec centers, our amenities are the trails, the forest, and the wildlife—focusing on the world that’s within walking distance of the Tree House, but also throughout the Wissahickon and even other parks in our system.

Our two full-time environmental educators offer programs and activities about forestry, wildlife education, and ecological restoration, adapted for audiences of all ages and interests. We keep our events calendar open for groups that want to schedule a service project or special activity. At the WEC, we work to balance hands-on activities at the Tree House with a full host of guided outdoor recreation experiences in the park that often include a nature-themed craft or game, like storytelling with hand puppets or leading a nature walk geared to older adults. Then there’s seasonal activities like maple sugaring, winter walks, and building bee houses for our backyard pollinators.

**Why is nature education so important to you?**

I hope to get people excited about the diversity of organisms ready to explore right in their own backyard, and inspire them to question the larger world of life around them. There should be a greater focus on wildlife education and plants, from preschool to grad school. I love Philadelphia — I’m a native and I live near Wissahickon Valley Park. I see the Wissahickon as a resource for the entire city to engage Philadelphians in hands-on natural history interpretation, to ultimately help maintain and improve the park’s ecological health.

**What is your favorite thing about the WEC?**

What consistently gets me excited is when we host visits from rec centers: when the bus pulls up with kids who have never been to the woods, and they’re awestruck. Sometimes they’re scared, but then I show them something like a salamander, and I love to see the thrill of discovery on their faces.

I also love the diversity—not just of the nature, but of the work. One minute we’ll be conducting a training for FOW about bluebird box monitoring, and the next thing a neighbor has called about a snapping turtle burrowing in their yard. We never know what we’ll be asked to do!
How long have you been a birding expert?
I started when I was 9 or 10. My father took me to the Pennypack Environmental Center, where I learned about belted kingfishers and that they live in the park. I asked my father if we could go look for one, and a few days later we went on our first mission to find a specific bird—and found it. That was the first time I went birding. I have been an avid birder for more than 30 years. I’ve led bird tours or performed field ornithology research all over the world, from the Mid-Atlantic to Alaska and Arctic Canada to Brazil, Peru, and Ecuador. Even when I was the lyricist and lead singer of R.A.M.B.O., a hardcore punk band, I birded extensively while on tour. I am proud to be a two-time winner of the Carbon Footprint Cup at the World Series of Birding, and to have finished second three times. But I love sharing my knowledge and the joy of birding with the people of Philadelphia.

What are your other interests?
Spending time with my wife and daughter, especially in nature. I co-host the Urban Wildlife Podcast (urbanwildlifecast.com). I collect field guides for plants and wildlife from all over the word, as well as wristwatches and James Bond memorabilia. My band, R.A.M.B.O., just released a new album on Relapse Records.

What is your educational background?
I have an MS in biology from St. Joseph’s University, where I focused on Aristide invertebrates on native vs. alien shrubs. I have a BS in horticulture from Temple University. I am also an adjunct professor of plant ecology at Temple University.
What lives in Wissahickon Valley Park? Help us find out!

**HABITAT MONITORING: WINTER**

FOW’s community-based science program continues this winter. Take a look at the map and photos below to help guide your summer habitat monitoring. Consult FOW’s habitat monitoring page on our website for more details and instructions, and consider printing the photo page and bringing it to the park as you hike, so you can check off what you find along the way.

**SPECIES SCAVENGER HUNT**

*Did you notice that the Latin name under Black squirrel directed you to the Eastern gray squirrel? That’s because Black squirrels are a melanistic form of the same species! Read more about it at https://tinyurl.com/BlackSquirrelPhiladelphia*
How did you decide to start volunteering with FOW?

I used to travel a lot on weekends—camping trips, snowboarding trips—adventures that eventually overtook my wallet. I found myself broke and hanging around on the weekends because I didn’t have anything left because of trying to keep up with people who liked the same activities. My housemate, who I met on a whitewater rafting trip, told me she had volunteered with FOW and saw their post asking for Crew Leaders and Trail Ambassadors. She knew my love for the trails and the park and said I should sign up. I went to the initial meeting and saw a lot of dudes who were avid mountain bikers and who were often building trails. Their experience was intimidating and overwhelming, but I knew I wanted a new experience learning new skills. It made me anxious to be in a room where I didn’t know anything about anything, but I talked myself out of running away. After learning what I was expected to do to learn these new skills, I was terrified of committing to something that required me to give up traveling on the weekends—especially in the winter for ski season. But I did it. I committed.

What do you love most about Wissahickon Valley Park?

When I first came to Philly, I used to wander into the park late in the evenings on Friday nights after a stressful week at school. I would walk or run away my stressful scenarios from being an urban schoolteacher. I remember buying my first headlamp and running late at night in the spring and seeing hundreds of frog/toad eyes reflecting on the trails (specifically Gorgas Lane, before they redid it). That was a unique night to be hiking alone in the park. I was scared I’d step on a frog.

What are your favorite moments from volunteering with FOW?

My crew from 2019 and the Crew Leaders from before and after are the nicest, kindest people I’ve ever met in my life. I felt like I finally met competent individuals who cared as much about life on earth as much as I do. I also love working with people who bring kids with a lot of energy to volunteer days. Teaching kids how to love the outdoors is a treat.

What are your favorite places in the Wissahickon?

Anywhere that has blooming umbrella magnolias strategically placed below eye level, the Yellow Trail, Lovers Leap while eating granola bars with my honey, standing on the bridges over the water, or standing under hundred-year-old tulip and chestnut oak trees, the frog pond, and Houston Meadow to watch the moon rises and eclipses. Shall I keep going?
David Bower, FOW’s volunteer extraordinaire, presented “Postcards from the Wissahickon” at the hybrid fall Valley Talk held in September at the Valley Green Inn and online. He delighted and impressed attendees with his anecdotes and deep knowledge from his 30 years as an avid collector of 3,000 postcards depicting images from the Wissahickon Valley.

Most of David’s collection dates from about 1898 to 1915, a period that became known as the Golden Age of Postcards. The U.S. Postal Service estimates that at the peak of their popularity, a billion one cent postcards were mailed and collected. They were cheap to buy and mail, so people were sending them all over the world. Not only were postcards the best way to share pictures, but they were also the fastest way to send messages, thanks to mail service twice, sometimes three times, daily! David likened the ease and speed of sending messages via postcard to our Tweeting today. Postcard collecting was deeply embedded into the communication and culture of the day until World War I interrupted global trade and mail, and the postcard age declined.

David was first introduced to postcards that featured images of the Wissahickon at an antiques dealership in Frederick, Maryland, in 1992, the year he joined FOW’s volunteer corps. The cards were inexpensive, so he bought a few. Three decades later, our 2019 Volunteer of the Year’s extensive collection fills 18 albums!

David has amassed 475 different images of the Wissahickon including the Wissahickon Creek, Valley Green Inn, lots of bridges and, of course, the beautiful woods. Some are views of things that are no longer there. There are exchanges with silly greetings and jokes. Nearly all photographs, the cards often depict the same image, but are produced in different colors and styles by different printers (who at the time were unrestricted by copyright laws), other images are artist enhanced. There are postcards postmarked from all over the world, including Europe, and in different languages. David said that over the years he’s seen Wissahickon spelled about 20 different ways.

David has spent as little as a couple of dollars and as much as $75 and thousands of hours curating his amazing collection, but he has loved every minute of it. “I meet interesting people with interesting stories about the Wissahickon,” he said. “The postcards tell the many stories of the Wissahickon, its history and culture, and remind me that although everything is changing, some things never do.”
Since 2013, FOW has partnered with Philadelphia Parks and Recreation to keep the upper trails clear of fallen trees through the Volunteer Sawyers, a small subset of FOW’s volunteer Crew Leaders with specialized skills and training. More frequent and heavier storms, combined with increased foot traffic and invasive pests, are weakening trees and making them fall. As a tree falls, it sometimes will take part of its root system with it, causing the loss of valuable forest soils. With so many large, aging canopy trees in the Wissahickon, when they fall it’s always a big job to remove them.

Seventy trees and limbs have come down since January, blocking trails and overwhelming crew capacity. By spring, FOW Field Coordinator Varian Bosch decided it was time to call in reinforcements, which came through a new partnership with PowerCorpsPHL.

PowerCorpsPHL provides a paid service-based workforce development experience for disconnected young adults and returning citizens ages 18 to 30; the program is powered by a collaboration between AmeriCorps, the City of Philadelphia and EducationWorks. The organization works exclusively within the Philadelphia city limits. Their service involves natural lands restoration, urban beautification, green stormwater infrastructure and other areas of environmental stewardship. Upon successful completion of the Foundations portion of the program, members are eligible to apply to join a PowerCorpsPHL fellowship in areas such as Urban Forestry, Solar, Masonry, Park Ranger and Green Stormwater Infrastructure.

The most recent crew of three PowerCorpsPHL Urban Forestry Academy Fellows started their fellowship cohort on August 1, 2022. Equipped with chain saws, the Fellows have provided much-needed extra hands to break up and clear nearly three quarters of the fallen logs off the trails. The work with PowerCorpsPHL will continue through the end of November and resume in March 2023.

Until this year, none of the Fellows working with FOW had ever spent time in the Wissahickon, according to Michael Cappon, the organization’s Assistant Director of Industry Training.

“This experience has given the Fellows a chance to perform real work using the chain saws they’ve practiced with along with valuable exposure to the concept of trail erosion and the meaning of trail work,” said Michael.

But to Varian, their presence has meant even more.

“It’s been fun teaching a new generation of stewards who are really interested in learning this field,” said Varian, who has not only helped the Fellows hone their skill with chain saws and other tools but added trail maintenance and conservation, even plant identification, to this outdoor classroom. “I never saw myself as a teacher, but they’re so receptive that it’s been great helping them learn from their mistakes and offering them the tips and tricks I’ve picked up over the years.”
KIDS' VALLEY | Games, Puzzles, Crafts, and more.

WORD SEARCH
They can be found hiding in the cluster of letters to the left. They are either horizontal, vertical, diagonal ... and some are even backwards!

Birds of the Wissahickon

- American Robin
- Mourning Dove
- Bald Eagle
- Northern Flicker
- Bluebird Nuthatch
- Blue Jay
- Red Cardinal
- Canada Goose
- Red-Tailed Hawk
- Chickadee
- Screech Owl
- Coopers Hawk
- Sparrow
- Eastern Towhee
- Tree Swallow
- Goldfinch
- Turkey Vulture
- Grackle
- Warbler
- Wood Duck
- Mallard
- Wren
- Mockingbird

PINE CONE BIRD FEEDER
Courtesy of Wissahickon Environmental Center

You will need:
- Pine Cones
- String or Wire
- Peanut Butter or Shortening
- Birdseed (small seeds are best)
- Table Covering
- Bowl
- Spoon or Knife

Directions:
1. Tie a string or wire around the top of a pine cone, adding a loop.
2. Spread shortening or peanut butter thoroughly on pine cone and between the cone scales.
3. Put pine cone in a bowl of birdseed, and roll until the seeds completely cover the cone.
4. Hang the pine cone outside where the birds can feast on it.

Notes:
- Birds will eat the seed mixture, but not the pine cones, so they can be reused.
- Peanut butter is nutritionally best, but shortening or lard are great substitutes.
- Caution: squirrels have been known to steal the entire pine cone!

FOX'S SCAVENGER HUNT
Go for a hike this winter in Wissahickon Valley Park and help Fox find everything on his list.

- Icicle
- Flying Bird
- Cardinal
- Feather
- Oak Leaf
- Bird Nest
- Pine Cone
- Twig
- Pine Needle
- Animal Tracks
- A Berry
- Cloud