

The Pinchot Eagle



Friends of Pinchot State Park

January/February/March 2010

Campground Hosts At Your Service

By Annette Hinerdeer



PHOTO BY TED PRINDLE

Campground Hosts, Hal and Annette Hinerdeer

My hubby, Hal, and I have been camping for many years and often found ourselves heading in the direction of Gifford Pinchot State Park. It has become like a second home to us.

Thirteen years ago we decided to become volunteer campground hosts, and for the past eight years, I have been the host coordinator. I now share the host coordinating duties with my friend and fellow host, Ted Prindle.

On weekends, the hosts offer support at the campground office by greeting campers and helping them pick a site. We answer questions and do what we can to help improve everyone's visit.

Campground hosts conduct a daily check of the bathhouses. We replace toilet tissue, change light bulbs and sweep the floors, as needed.

Campground hosts also have the opportunity to volunteer in capacities beyond their assigned duties. During our stay, Hal and I especially enjoy monitoring and maintaining the bluebird boxes.

The hosts are a good group of people, helping each other and sharing duties. We are "working,"

but we are surrounded by the beauty of nature, with an awesome lake, lush woodlands, and abundant wildlife. If we have questions, or an issue arises, the park staff are there to lend us support. All that and free camping, too! If you'd like to join the team, contact the park office at (717) 432-5011.

"Operation Bluebird"

By Beth Kepley, Park Naturalist

Henry David Thoreau once said, after observing a male bluebird, it seemed as though he "carries the sky on his back." Happiness can be described by some as a pair of bluebirds settled in a new nesting box you put up last winter. Those who do not understand Eastern Bluebirds might not agree, but those who monitor the nesting boxes here at Gifford Pinchot State Park might definitely think otherwise.

The bluebird trail here at the park began back in 1962 when one volunteer, Ray Bubb, erected 15 nesting boxes and monitored them during the 1963 nesting season. During that first nesting season, Ray made many observations about what he dubbed "Operation Bluebird" here at Pinchot Park:



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- Bluebirds arrive during the month of March.
- House hunting by bluebirds was observed to begin by the end of March.
- Nest building begins early to mid April.
- First nesting fledglings leave the box by early May.

(Continued on page 2)

DID YOU KNOW...

Quaker Race Day Use was named after the Quakers who once lived in the area and raced their horse-drawn buggies on the present day Route 177, between the Warrington Meeting House and the Lewisberry Meeting House?



What Do Santa's Reindeer Eat?

By Pat Sabold
FOPSP Board Member

In North America, Reindeer are also known as Caribou. They live in the arctic and sub-arctic regions. During cold winter months, when most vegetation dies off, very little remains for the reindeer to feed upon. Carpets of Reindeer Lichen, which survive under the snow, become an important source of nourishment for them.

on rocks, branches, sides of trees, gravestones, etc. They are very sensitive to air pollution, especially to sulfur and nitrogen. If the air becomes too polluted, the lichens will wither and die. Their growth rate is very slow and many do not recover well from disturbances.

Lichens are important to their environment. They break down



Reindeer Lichen

Lichens are dual organisms made of part fungus and part algae. Their association is mutualistic, meaning both organisms benefit from the relationship. The algae, through photosynthesis, create sugars which feed the fungus. The fungus protects the algae from the weather and provides the reproductive structure.

Lichens grow in difficult places, such as

rocks into soil and help stabilize the existing soil. They provide homes for spiders, mites, lice, and other insects. All are important in the nutrient cycle where they grow.

Reindeer Lichen grows in patches at Gifford Pinchot State Park. If you listen carefully on Christmas Eve, you might hear Santa's team of reindeer touching down at the park for a quick bite of lichen.

"Operation Bluebird" (Continued from page 1)

- Second nesting was observed to begin middle of June and end in July.
- A few pairs will spend the winter months in the park using the boxes for roosts on cold, winter nights.

All of these observations still hold true for bluebird nesting habits here at the park. Bluebirds are summer residents in Pennsylvania, with some



birds overwintering in the southeastern part of the state (York County included). Bluebirds are usually found in fields, open woodlands, parks or other open areas, including suburban locations with open spaces and scattered trees. Ray

put his first 15 boxes in the Quaker Race Day Use area, and continued to add more as the years passed.

In 1997 the bluebird nesting trail here at the park began to be monitored by Kathy Clark and a few other volunteers. At that time they had 58 boxes throughout the park. They added more as they saw fit, and today we are up to 79 boxes. Kathy founded the Bluebird Society of Pennsylvania in 1998, an affiliate of the North American Bluebird Society. Kathy and Ray have since moved on to other opportunities outside of Pinchot Park, but what they did for our bluebird population continues on.

The nesting boxes here at Pinchot Park continue to attract bluebirds year after year. In addition to Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, Tufted Titmice, Chickadees, House Wrens, and even the occasional Little Brown Bat and mouse use the boxes!



In recent years (2007-2009), 629 nestlings were fledged from Pinchot's bluebird boxes, with over HALF of them being Eastern Bluebirds. If you are interested in getting involved with the bluebird trail at Pinchot Park (donating nesting boxes, monitoring boxes, coordinating the volunteers and data for the bluebird trail, etc.), please contact Beth Kepley, the park naturalist, at ekepley@state.pa.us or call (717) 432-5011.

Wake Up Sleepy Head!

By Pat Sabold

FOPSP Board Member

Now that winter is upon us, where have all the critters gone? From birds, to bugs, to animals, all have learned to adapt to the cold, bitter winter.

Birds migrate. Some move to lower elevations,

others migrate southward, and then there are those who migrate much farther to warmer continents.

Crickets and grasshoppers die, but first they drill holes in the ground and deposit eggs that will hatch in the spring. Ants go underground. Some butterflies, like the Monarch, migrate south; while other butterflies enter a cocoon for the winter, or hide under leaf litter to keep warm.

Ladybugs hide in large groups under logs or in the crevices of tree bark. You may even find them huddling by a warm window.

Snails and slugs find moist places for the winter. They close their shells with a cement-like material, and cover themselves with slime to keep from drying out.

Animals hibernate and/or take long naps. In September and October, groundhogs go underground and seal off their burrows with packed soil. Their burrows have several chambers; one for food storage, another for sleeping, and yet another for going to the bathroom. The groundhog remains underground during winter, but he will occasionally wake up to eat and use the bathroom.

Chipmunks burrow in the ground, seal off their entrance and sleep in a room with dried

leaves and grasses. If the weather gets warm enough, they will come out for brief periods.



Skunks and squirrels sleep in hollow trees, logs, or unused groundhog burrows. Several of them may huddle together in one nest. They

are light sleepers and awaken on warm days.

Fish become sluggish and/or migrate to deeper waters that won't freeze. Frogs, toads, and salamanders bury themselves deep into the mud. They breathe, through their skin, the air that is trapped in the mud.

Even though you can't see all the critters during the winter, it's nice to know that they're there, tucked in, and awaiting the arrival of spring.



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Friends of Pinchot State Park is a chapter of the Pennsylvania Parks and Forests Foundation (PPFF). The PPFF is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. Contributions are tax deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

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Publication deadlines are the 15th of each quarter (March, June, September, December). The Advisory Board reserve publication decisions.

FRIENDS OF PINCHOT STATE PARK



Annual Membership Application

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Mail form with payment to: Friends of Pinchot State Park, 2200
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Memberships are for one year, June 1 through May 31.