



Bucktoe Creek Preserve: a local haven

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Bucktoe Creek Preserve Meadow in November | Photo by Kelley Nunn

Although the days are getting shorter, temperatures are dropping, and winter is quickly approaching, there is a natural area nestled right in our community whose meadows, woodlands, and wetlands are full of life year-round. [The Bucktoe Creek Preserve \(BCP\)](#) encompasses almost 300 acres in both New Garden and Kennett Townships, and is the result of 30 years of conservation by a visionary local landowner. BCP serves as an educational center, a site of ongoing ecological restoration and research, a prime location for birders, a refuge for threatened wildlife, and an example of what can be accomplished through conservation and thoughtful stewardship of the land.

Educational Programming and Research

BCP is privately-owned, and access is restricted to scheduled programs held by organizations such as [The Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County and Delaware Nature Society](#), in order to protect the sensitive natural resources on the property. However, it has always been a priority to ensure that BCP serves the community as an educational resource, so a full schedule of over 100 programs is held at the site year-round, with new programs added regularly. The wide range of programs appeals to people of all ages and all levels of knowledge, from children who are learning to use binoculars for the first time to people seeking advanced knowledge in topics such as botany and wildlife study.



The Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County's Spring Break in Nature Program

Programs held at BCP include:

- Children's I-Spy Birding
- Wildlife in Winter
- Drop in on Nature Playgroup
- Full Moon Owl Prowls
- Wild Foraging Series
- Sky Tour
- Free Time Adventures in Nature
- Overnight in Nature

These programs are open to all, and special tailored group programs can be arranged through The Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County. Visit www.tlcforscc.org to find and register for upcoming programs at BCP.



Wildlife in Winter

Flora & Fauna

When visiting the BCP for the first time, its meadows and woodlands may seem still and quiet, especially for anyone who is used to the daily hustle and bustle of traffic and technology. However, after a few minutes on the trail, you'll start to notice a different kind of loudness, as its plant, insect, and animal communities are constantly alive and working, forging their own paths through the preserve's multitude of ecosystems.

BCP is part of an [Audubon-designated Important Bird Area](#), as well as a 30 year [Cornell Lab of Ornithology](#) study. The site provides exciting opportunities for birders of all levels of expertise. 216 species of birds have been recorded on the property, making Bucktoe one of the most productive birding hotspots in the area. Highlights include Mississippi Kite, Golden Eagle, Yellow-headed Blackbird, Anhinga, and others. No matter the time of year, there are always birds to be seen at Bucktoe.



After the Bell students at the annual Hawk Watch

BCP hosts a number of bird-related programs, bird banding, and "Watches" throughout the year led by Larry Lewis of Early Bird Nature Tours. Keep an eye out for the next Watch Program, and join us for year-round Sunday Bird Walks each week. Private birding programs can be arranged through the Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County.

Within its widely varied habitat, BCP contains woodlands that have been designated as the highest conservation value in local assessments, and contain many century-old specimen trees. Our region is currently experiencing an unprecedented



Wild Geranium

rate of population growth and development, which has led to the threat of deforestation even in our most vital and sensitive woodlands, underlining the importance of such conservation projects.

BCP also contains unusually rich meadow-wetland complexes, with meadows designated as Class I, the highest conservation value. In 2013, 283 botanical species were recorded in the meadows, with only 27% alien species (lower than the usual 35%). The meadows contain a high diversity of shrubs, including a number of hawthorn species, American plum, strawberry bush (a PA species of concern), maleberry, and red chokeberry. It also contains a dense patch of tussock sedge, possible habitat for the box turtle, a threatened species.

History

BCP and the surrounding area contains many historic sites and structures representative of our area's unique history. Historic preservation has always gone hand in hand with ecological conservation and restoration on the site, in order to maintain the integrity of the land and its heritage.

The Preserve is located within the **West Branch Red Clay Creek Historic District**.

This emerging local historic district is noted for its significance in local transportation and agriculture, and played a role in the **Underground Railroad** and the **Civil War**.

The area contains two sites listed on the **National Register of Historic Places**, the Joseph Gregg House, built circa 1737, and the **Chandler Mill Bridge**, built in 1910.

Additional historic resources located on the Preserve include ruins, historic homes, and the remains of a stone quarry, mill, dam, and mill race. It also contains the Bucktoe Cemetery, in which at least eight known



Living History Hike

African-American Civil War soldiers are buried, and the ruins of the African-American village that surrounded the original cemetery and church. Today, the Bucktoe Cemetery and surrounding village ruins serve as a living history classroom, and The Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County hosts an ongoing series of programming at the site for local students, as well as for the public.

BCP is a rare haven, and although it is located right in our Township, it feels miles away. In addition to educational programs available to all at the site, the BCP itself is a constant teacher to the community, with its landowner's legacy of conservation and restoration. It serves as a prime example of successful environmental stewardship, and the ways in which we can intervene to protect and restore the health of our water resources, wildlife habitat, and open space. The continued preservation, restoration, and operation of BCP will help to protect environmental health and quality of life throughout the region in perpetuity, benefitting our entire community for generations to come.

To learn more, visit <http://bucktoecreekpreserve.org/>. Contact The Land Conservancy for Southern Chester County for programs, memberships, and information about BCP, at www.tlcforscc.org, education@tlcforscc.org, or 610-347-0347 x104.