

CLOSTER NATURE CENTER NEWS

P.O. BOX 80, CLOSTER NJ 07624 closternaturecenter.org

By the pond on Ruckman Road

May 2025

May 2025 Programs and Activities:

Spring Hike: May 10th, 4 pm - 5 pm

Nature Marc will lead a guided hike through our reserve. Join him to explore the spring bloom and witness the forest preparing for the warm summer months. There's always a chance to encounter wildlife, and you're sure to learn something new!

Starts at the Cabin

Suggested Donation: Members, \$5...Non-Members, \$10

Annual Open Board Meeting:

May 13th, 7:30 PM

Join the Closter Nature Center board and staff for our annual public meeting. Get up to date on our successes from last year and our goals for the upcoming year. This is a great opportunity for anyone interested in our organization and who perhaps wants to get involved, either as a volunteer or as a trustee!

Free

Closter Nature Center Open House!

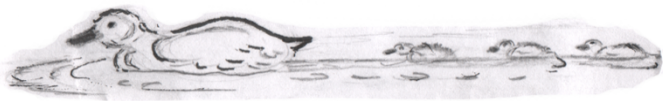
May 18th, 4 -6 PM

Nature lovers, join us for a relaxing afternoon at the Nature Center's Open House!

Discover our forest conservation work, meet dedicated volunteers, and enjoy crafts, animal encounters, and gentle hikes through reforested trails.

Then, settle in by the water for *Music by the Pond*—live music that adds a perfect, peaceful note to your day in nature.

Whether you're exploring programs, considering volunteering, or just looking to unwind with family and friends, stop by, slow down, and enjoy the harmony of nature and music.



Naturalist's Notes:

Of all the pond life here at the Nature Center, I get more questions about our water snakes than any other. This time of year, the Northern water snakes are quite conspicuous, sunning themselves on rocks surrounding the pond, swimming along in the shallows and occasionally swallowing a fish or a frog.

The Northern water snake's colors vary between yellowish-brown, brick red and dark brown with interlocking chain-like patterns. Like all snakes, they can bite if bothered, but lack the fangs and venom of Cottonmouths, a Southern snake they are often confused with. While some snakes use their bodies to squeeze their prey and others have venom to subdue their food, the water snake uses neither technique. They rely on speed, and then slowly swallow their prey alive. Although they are one of the pond's top predators, they can also be preyed on by fish like the large-mouthed bass, and birds like the heron.

Any animal that can bite deserves respect, and that is especially so with snakes. If left alone, they'll leave you alone, but if bothered they will bite. If you are lucky enough to see one, enjoy the moment—but leave it be.

See you on the trails, Marc Gussen, Naturalist

CNC's Senior Trail Crew Completes Bridge Repair Project

The longest bridge that is part of the CNC trail system is one that crosses a stretch of swamp on the way to our reforestation projects in the Orange Trail area. This has always been a difficult crossing to maintain. At least two Eagle Scout attempts had only temporary success. The current bridge, constructed by a NY/NJ Trail Conference construction crew, with CNC volunteer assistance, was installed over a decade ago. This one has lasted very well! However, in the last 2 years, several of the cross pieces began to show some rot. Tom Golodik and his Senior Trail Crew recently spent many hours removing the unsafe planks and carefully matching the replacements for size and angle. Thanks to their care and skill, this important structure is safely back in service for all CNC hikers and classes.



The Wonders of Vernal Pools

By Grace H. Kim, Student Naturalist

When you walk the trails in the Closter Nature Center, do you ever wonder about the mysterious bodies of water that appear in the spring? These aren't just some random puddles; they're called vernal pools! These small bodies of water, also called ephemeral pools because of their brief existence, are seasonal pools or wetlands that appear during the spring and play a crucial role in the life cycle of a variety of organisms.



Vernal pool along the Blue Trail

Creation and Development

The water for vernal pools greatly depends on the seasons and the hydrologic cycle. The pools first start as empty holes or depressions in the ground, which often result from geological processes such as erosion or the pulling up of the root ball of large trees blown over in storms. The soil generally has a thick underground layer of clay, as is typical in our woodlands, that prevents precipitation and snow melt from seeping quickly into the soil. As vernal pools have no other source other than rain and snow melt, they can last for a couple of days to months, depending on the amount of seasonal precipitation, before evaporation dries them out.

Where can you find them?

Vernal pools can be located in various places around the world, but are more common in areas with a Mediterranean climate--wet winters and dry summers--which are the ideal environment for the pool's formation and longevity. Here in New Jersey, it is estimated that 3,000 to 5,000 vernal pools exist for at least two consecutive months every year.

Animal Hotspots

Despite their constantly changing environment, vernal pools can serve as an essential habitat for various organisms, each representing unique adaptations to natural conditions and a source of biodiversity. Common species include:

Mole Salamanders: A dull gray or brown salamander with a small body and large limbs. They spend almost all their time below ground, hence the name "mole." However, every year, they leave the underground to reproduce in a safe place. As vernal pools do



not hold predatory fish, this environment is the perfect place for mole salamanders.

Wood Frogs: A medium-sized, brown to red-colored frog that can be found in moist woodlands. Similarly to mole salamanders, they also mate and lay eggs in vernal pools during the spring. Those near a vernal pool may hear a wood frog's distinctive clucking call.

Spring Peepers: Spring peepers spend their winters in soft mud near ponds, under logs, or in loose bark or holes in trees. Early in the spring you will begin to hear the male's signature mating call—a high-pitched whistling or peeping sound repeated about 20 times a minute. They call on warm spring nights and during the day in rainy or cloudy weather. Females lay their eggs in vernal pools, ponds, and other wetlands where fish are not present.



Fairy Shrimp: A small, freshwater crustacean that is a translucent white or orange color, has compound eyes, and eleven legs. Their main diet is algae and bacteria. Fairy shrimp eggs are embedded into the soil and stay there until next spring when the vernal pools return.

Nature's Beauty

Vernal pools are one of our woodlands' natural beauties, and a primary example of what nature can accomplish with time. When the pools appear during springtime, a variety of diverse species can emerge and create a balanced and enchanting ecosystem. That alone is a reason why it should be preserved and protected.

Grace H. Kim is a senior at Bergen County Academies.