

# Pennsylvania Forest Stewards News



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## Chairman's Column

By Bob Slagter, PA Forest Stewards Steering Committee Chair, '08

### Building Fellowships

*"What we have seen and heard we proclaim now to you, so that you may have fellowship with us."*

- 1 John 1:3

For you Bible scholars out there, I am sure the Apostle John had a different meaning than I will apply to this verse. John was referring to his time with Christ and I'll be talking about our time with His creations. But the verse is an apt way, I think, to describe what we do, not necessarily in a biblical sense but in a very practical vein.

Think about how you interact with your fellow landowners. Is it not about what we have seen and heard? Don't we take those experiences and try to use them to help convince our fellow forest owners that there is a better way, maybe even a BEST way to interact with their woodlands? And the reason we interact with them is precisely what John refers to, "...so that you may have fellowship with us." We are really at our best as Stewards when we motivate people to a better way, a more sustainable way to treat our land, our trees, our responsibilities. The fellowship we espouse is all about taking what we learn and sharing it with others, creating the kind of fellowship that increases our credibility and opens the eyes of our fellow forest landowners.

This type of interaction has been going on for thousands of years, as we can see in 1 John. What we know, we need to share to establish fellowship that hopefully is rooted in best practices for timber management and sustainable growth. I believe that is why it is always worth it to interact all we can, whenever we can, with landowners. We build fellowships with this interaction and, as a bonus, we also learn from those with whom we are speaking.

"What we have seen and heard" is what experts in forest management know and teach is the best way to treat our forests. As we know, that means picking a type of treatment that best answers the needs of our forests. But it is much bigger than that—we have a responsibility to learn all we can as Stewards so that the fellowships we build grow from a grounded space. To that end, let's all resolve to participate in at least one learning experience per quarter for the rest of this year. There are countless opportunities to increase our personal

knowledge both online and through printed resources. For example, as you'll read elsewhere in this newsletter, we'll all have an excellent opportunity on July 16 to learn and connect at the PA Forest Stewards Summer Meeting. Let's take a look at whatever interests us and give it a try. We will probably find that what it gives us is at least more confidence as a resource for others and at most real credibility when we build fellowships.

We urgently need to build fellowships if we are to save a shrinking and parcelized forest landscape. Well-meaning people make the mistake of diameter-limit cuts every day, and as I watch truckload after truckload of logs go by in record numbers, I despair about how much pressure the forests can take with log prices at record highs.

So, like the Bible says, increase your knowledge base, go proclaim what you have seen and build fellowships that will benefit woodlands. And take care and stay well.

## PA Forest Stewards Summer Meeting Planned

All Stewards, mark your calendars! We are excited to announce our PA Forest Stewards Summer Meeting on Saturday, July 16, 10 AM–4 PM at the Ag Progress Days site, Special Events Building in Rock Springs, PA. Check-in opens at 9 AM, so come early and enjoy some refreshments, light snacks, and good conversation before activities get underway.

Open to all Stewards and their guests, the day will be packed with learning opportunities, program updates, good food, and a special afternoon segment in honor of Jim Finley.

A registration packet with details will be sent out in May. Note that this is a one-day event; overnight accommodations in State College may be limited due to the Central PA Festival of the Arts.

## Applications for Class of 2022 to Go Out Next Week

Application materials for nominees for the 2022 class of PA Forest Stewards will be mailed out next week. If you have sent in nominations, please plan to check with them at the end of April to make sure they received a packet.

This year's basic training will be held September 29 through October 2 at Krislund Camp in Madisonburg, PA.

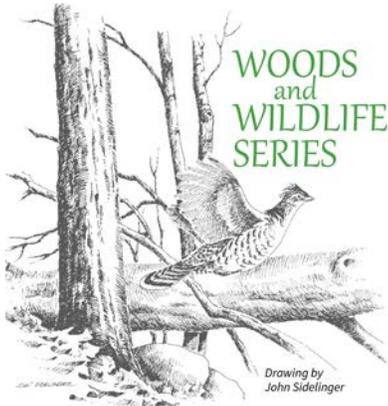


*Last year's timber harvest training session.*



# Tied to Trees: Connections with Ancestors and Animals

By Mike and Laura Jackson, PA Forest Stewards, Class of '00



*This article is part of a series exploring animals and their dependency on forests. Each article blends personal experiences with factual information and will challenge you to look closely in your woodlot for evidence that you are a habitat provider for the species.*

In 1983, Laura's parents offered to give us part of the dairy farm where Laura grew up—if we'd move back to Bedford County. We didn't have to think very long before we accepted their offer. When it was time to gift us the land, Laura asked for the part of the farm that was mostly forested on the lower flanks of Tussey Mountain. It was the land where Laura's great-great-great-great grandfather, Abraham Buzzard, settled his family in 1811. Laura especially liked that part of the farm because it was mostly forest with four small mountain fields. Other fields even higher on the mountain had naturally reforested and Abraham's house was reduced to rubble, but the family history made it a special spot.

Remnants of rock walls and big trees with embedded barbed wire were clues that livestock foraged on the mountain many years ago. We also found timbers of a spring house buried deep in an intermittent stream near the old house site and we realized that some of the fruit trees were probably planted by Abraham and his family. One old apple tree and two pear trees still produced fruit.

We built our house in 1988 in the top mountain field near the apple and pear trees, just a bit downslope from where Abraham built his house. We marveled at the heritage that was gifted to us and vowed to care for the land. Following in Abraham's footprints, we started planting trees. Our idea was to create an

arboretum of special trees. The ginkgo and dawn redwood were teaching trees, examples of living fossils to show Laura's biology students. We planted mulberry, apple, white spruce, sweet gum, and black cherry trees near the house. The sweet gum trees commemorated the huge trees we saw when we backpacked in Honduras in 1993. We also planted four Callery pear trees in the front yard. We liked the brilliant white flowers in the spring and thought the small fruits would provide food for birds in the winter. Our arboretum was expanding nicely—until we became Pennsylvania Forest Stewards in 2000. After attending workshops on invasive species for several years, we realized that we'd made some big mistakes in our zeal to create more biodiversity, so we vowed to remove any trees that were invasive and not native to Pennsylvania.

The hardest trees to remove were the two mulberry trees—not because they were big trees, but because they attracted so much wildlife. An impressive variety of birds—Scarlet Tanagers, American Robins, Red-bellied Woodpeckers, Cedar Waxwings, Baltimore Orioles, Blue Jays, Gray Catbirds, and more, fed on the fruit each summer.

The fallen mulberry fruit also attracted box turtles each summer. We found the same turtle (which we named "BECK") under the trees four different times: July 3, 1999; June 29, 2006; and June 20, 2013. And on June 30, 2015, BECK and another box turtle named TURF were feasting on mulberries and then mated!

The most exciting visitors to the mulberry trees were gray foxes. Like the box turtles, gray foxes started visiting the

trees in 1999. We could see the trees from our house and would watch gray foxes eat the fallen fruit, then climb the trees to find more fruit. Unlike a red fox, a gray fox has retractable claws, so they are agile tree climbers.

When we figured out the trees were white mulberry (*Morus alba*), an invasive tree native to China, we agreed they had to go, but we didn't want to remove the last one until we had fruiting red mulberry trees. By 2020, some of the red mulberry trees were fruiting, so we removed the last white mulberry tree that year.

Red mulberry trees (*Morus rubra*) are native to Pennsylvania and equally favored as food by birds and other wildlife, but we had a hard time finding any. We finally located some at Perennial Gardens, a native plant nursery in New Bloomfield, PA and bought four in 2018 at the PA Native Plant Festival. This event attracts a wide variety of native plant vendors who offer a wide variety of—you guessed it—native plants. We pre-order native plants and pick them up at the festival. Here's the list of vendors: [www.panativeplantsociety.org/plant-sale-vendors-and-plant-list.html](http://www.panativeplantsociety.org/plant-sale-vendors-and-plant-list.html). The PA Native Plant Festival will be held in Boalsburg, PA on Saturday, May 7, 2022. Stop by and say hello. We'll be at the Juniata Valley Audubon Society table selling shade-grown coffee from Honduras and answering questions about birds. We'd love to meet you!

In 2006, Mike removed the most invasive trees we had planted—the Callery pear, also called the Bradford pear

**Gray Foxes**, continued on page 3

*It was relatively easy for Mike to yank out the Callery pear trees that we planted four years earlier.*



Article photos by Mike and Laura Jackson

(*Pyrus calleryana*), native to Southeast Asia. We saw how young Callery pear trees displaced native plants after seeing thousands in bloom for miles along the interstate while on a spring trip to Washington, D.C.

Fifteen years later, in 2021, the Pennsylvania Department of Agriculture finally declared Callery/Bradford pear trees to be a noxious weed, so they can't be legally sold or cultivated in the state. The ban on sale and cultivation took effect on February 9, 2022, with enforcement being phased in over the next two years. We applauded the ban after we patted ourselves on the back for removing ours 15 years earlier.

You might be wondering about Abraham's pear trees. Did we remove those, too? It wasn't hard to decide. After all, those trees didn't produce very tasty fruit—the pears were always rock hard and not very sweet. We didn't think they were Asian pears, though, and did some research. Most likely, Abraham planted European pears (*Pyrus communis*)—trees native to Europe and northern Iran, cultivated by Greeks and Romans thousands of years ago. Early colonists brought European pears to America in the 1600s.

Amazingly, the oldest known pear tree in the US is still alive. Known as the Endicott Pear, it was planted between 1632 and 1649 in Massachusetts. Laura's sister, Nancy I. Sanders, a prolific author, wrote a children's book about this tree, now a national monument. Her book, *The Very*

*Oldest Pear Tree*, details the true story of how the Endicott Pear Tree grew up with our nation. Its survival is a source of inspiration to children facing adversity.

In the end, family heritage won out, so Abraham's pear trees were spared. We know these European pear trees aren't invasive like the Callery pear and even though we don't eat the fruit, they are much appreciated by gray foxes. We don't often see foxes in our backyard, but we know they are common nocturnal visitors.

Game cameras reveal that gray foxes eat the bird seed we scatter on a flat rock for ground-feeding birds, suet dropped by birds from the suet feeder, as well as fruit and vegetable scraps from our compost bin. We find their scat on our kitchen steps, our driveway, and our patio. Although we have never found a den, we have seen fox kits in our woods. On July 21, 2002, a hot, sunny afternoon, we watched five gray foxes in the small clearing just beyond Abraham's pear tree. Two adults were resting in the shade while three fox kits chased each other.

On the morning of May 13, 2009, we walked up our lane through the woods and surprised a gray fox family. One of the adults growled at us, and another one barked. Mike took a photo of one of the adults (shown above right) before they beat a hasty retreat into the woods.

Our most exciting encounter with gray foxes was thanks to Abraham's pear trees. In 2019, the trees produced a



This gray fox, its family surprised by the Jacksons approaching, is on high alert.

bumper crop of pears—more than we'd ever seen. Emboldened gray foxes, hungry for pears, made regular forays into our backyard in late September.

One rainy afternoon, Laura snuck out of the house and hid behind a sugar maple tree to photograph the foxes eating the fallen pears (shown below).



Gray fox with a tasty pear snack "to go."

We hope you plant special trees that mark important events and people in your family. One of the longer-lived trees that's great for wildlife is the white oak (*Quercus alba*). Oak trees are known to live 500 years. Their leaves provide food for 537 species of caterpillars and their acorns are important sources of food for many animals. Doug Tallamy's new book, *The Nature of Oaks*, is a fascinating read about the importance and ecology of oak trees. If you want a lasting memorial, plant a tree.

#### References:

- Sanders, Nancy I. *The Very Oldest Pear Tree*. 2020. Chicago (Ill): Albert Whitman & Co.
- Tallamy, Douglas W. *The Nature of Oaks*. 2021. Portland (OR): Timber Press.



This gray fox was caught on camera at the bird seed the Jacksons scatter on a large flat rock.

# Birds Need Nesting Sites: You Can Help

By Paul Solomon, PA Forest Steward, Class of '93, and Jeanne Riley, PA Forest Steward, Class of '13

Birds! What would life be without them? They enrich our lives with their beauty and song. They are active in controlling insect pests, pollinating plants, spreading seeds, and removing carrion from our surroundings. Birds have the largest following of all wildlife in the US, with over 45 million people reporting that they observe wild birds, per 2016 US Fish and Wildlife Service reports.

Many of the birds that populate our communities rely on tree cavities for nesting or roosting, cavities which are increasingly in short supply due to forest clearing and fragmentation carried out for agriculture, logging, and land development. Firewood cutting, fencerow removal, and the rising use of steel and plastic (versus wooden) fence posts also reduce the number of nesting cavities.

Of the 190 species of breeding birds in Pennsylvania, approximately 35 are cavity nesters. One-half of these are primary cavity nesters, such as woodpeckers, that excavate their own nests as part of their breeding behavior. Secondary cavity nesters, such as wrens, Eastern Bluebirds, American Kestrels, Tufted Titmice, chickadees, Purple Martins, and Great-crested Flycatchers rely on pre-existing holes as nest sites.

Cavities, both natural and manufactured, offer a number of benefits to birds. They provide protection from predators, extreme weather, and disease as well as space for food storage. Use of cavity nests has been shown to extend nesting time and success, with 60% to 80% of cavity nests supporting the birth of at least one young bird, versus 20% to 40% of open nests. Use of nesting cavities also enables birds to conserve energy in cold weather. Without nesting cavities, roosting birds such as robins can burn one-tenth of their body weight to stay alive in the winter. By maintaining snags and providing nesting boxes, landowners can attract and sustain the many species of birds that are vital contributors to the ecosystem on which we all depend.

**Snags.** Snags are dead or dying trees which contain cavities used as nesting sites by wildlife. Snags of both deciduous and conifer (evergreen) trees are used by wildlife. Hard snags, which are partially or recently dead trees, typically have their bark intact and feature solid or mostly undecayed wood. These kinds of snags are well-suited to cavity excavating birds such as woodpeckers. Other species prefer soft snags, which are in advanced stages of decay and generally do not have limbs. Dead or dying trees

with large diameters, existing holes or cavities, wounds or scars, and a combination of decayed and sound wood are ideally suited for nesting. Landowners wishing to attract diverse species of birds should maintain snags of a variety of types and sizes. Potential future snags should be identified and saved when undertaking logging or forest management activities. However, for safety considerations, snags located near buildings, particularly residential units, should be removed during logging operations.

**Nesting Boxes.** Nesting boxes can be built from plans or kits or can be purchased. Unfortunately, many commercially manufactured bird houses are designed to attract a buyer rather than a bird. Nesting boxes which are not properly designed do not adequately protect birds, and, therefore, should be avoided. Nesting boxes should be designed, constructed, and placed with a particular species of bird in mind. Eliminating predators' access to boxes is also important in creating nesting habitat.

Features to consider in choosing or constructing a nesting box and tools available to protect it from predators are described in the table below.

*Nesting, continued on page 5*

## Features to Consider in Nesting Box Design, Construction, Placement, and Protection

Design	Construction	Placement	Protection
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Box dimensions specific to species of interest.</li> <li>Roof extended <math>\geq 2''</math> over entrance hole.</li> <li>Exact size and shape of hole matched to species of interest.<sup>1</sup></li> <li>Deep scoring on inside front panel of box below hole to serve as exit ladder.</li> <li>Ventilation holes near top for excess heat to escape.</li> <li>Floor containing 4 or more 3/8" holes for drainage.</li> <li>Floor which is recessed to prevent water infiltration.</li> <li>Side or front panel for easy human access.</li> <li>No perches.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lumber which is untreated (e.g., plywood, cedar, or pine) at least 3/4" thick.</li> <li>Interior which is unstained/unpainted.</li> <li>Exterior which is unstained/unpainted or painted/stained in light earth tones to reflect sunlight and heat.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Place in field, wetland, woods, woods edge, or underbrush based on species of interest.</li> <li>Place at natural nesting height of species of interest.</li> <li>Avoid sites near livestock feeding areas and sites with significant human activity.</li> <li>Eliminate obstacles to birds' likely flight path to and from hole entrances.</li> <li>Avoid sites where pesticides are used.</li> <li>Avoid sites where cats can be found.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attach predator baffles (aluminum or metal tubes or plates) to poles or trees on which nesting boxes or sites are located.<sup>2</sup></li> <li>Consider adding hole extenders, 4"x4" wooden, open-ended squares that fit over entrance holes, to boxes.</li> </ul>

Reference: [Shalaway S. Nest Box Basics](#), in **A Guide to Bird Homes**. Bird Watcher's Digest Press, 2010.



Photo by Mike and Laura Jackson

**Black-Capped Chickadee.** Although these tiny birds will nest in existing cavities, they also will excavate their own nests in soft snags. Their persistence in building nesting cavities is amazing!

<sup>1</sup>For Eastern Bluebirds, popular cavity nesters, a round hole of 1-1/2" in diameter enables access while eliminating predators such as European starlings.

<sup>2</sup>See references for instructions.

Perches on nesting boxes should be avoided. Birds that use nesting boxes have strong feet and do not require them, and perches can make it easy for predatory birds to access the box.

Common preferred nesting locations include open woods and edges (chickadee), wooded swamps and streams (Prothonotary Warbler), woodland edges (Tufted Titmouse), old field and brush (Carolina Wren), open fields (Tree Swallow), and forest openings and edges (Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers).

Some cavity nesters, such as Eastern Bluebirds, prefer nesting boxes which already contain suitable nesting mate-

rial. Nesting material may enhance the attractiveness of the box, provided it is free of parasite infestation. Investigate the preferences of the species of interest when installing the box.

New nesting boxes are best installed just before breeding season. They can be kept up all year long, as they can be very useful to birds for conserving heat in the colder months.

Birds may be hesitant to accept a new nesting box, so experts advise leaving the box in place for 2 to 3 years before modifying or moving it. Some species like used nests and so may be attracted to existing nesting boxes. Boxes should be inspected

in late winter and maintained according to the needs of the species of interest.

Native bird populations play many essential roles within an ecosystem but are increasingly under threat. With thoughtful design, construction, placement, and protection of natural and manufactured nesting boxes, we can provide native bird populations with the welcoming homes they need to thrive and thereby ensure that they continue to enrich our natural world. Let's get to work!

Nesting, continued on page 6

## The Forest and Grounding: A Systematic Method to Grounding

By Sasha Soto, PhD Graduate Student, Center for Private Forests at Penn State

Anxiety. It's a pesky little thing that most all of us have experienced from time to time. It can manifest in many forms, fooling even the most experienced at times. Sometimes it's subtle: the tension building in the body, a sore jaw, achy legs, or an irritable stomach. It's quite annoying, when you're tossing and turning, unable to fall asleep but you're oh, so tired. Then there are the big-tells, like when your mind and heart are running a race against each other; you get grouchy, nervous, and might panic. Ugh, I sympathize with you!

Personally, I've experienced almost every symptom of anxiety at some point or another. Over the years, I've learned to recognize the early signs, and though I'm not always successful, I do my best to stay positive and proactive. A common question I've heard is, "How can I reduce my anxiety?" Well, I'm happy to share something that has worked well for me.

**Remember to be mindful of yourself and your emotions.** Use intentional practices to remind yourself to be kind to yourself and honor where you are in that moment, physically and emotionally. Acknowledge your emotions. When you are joyful, embrace the happiness. When you are fearful, remind yourself that you are capable. And when you are worried or stressed, take time to slow down, even if only for a moment.

An intentional strategy that many professionals swear by is the 5-4-3-2-1 method. It's simple and effective for reducing anxiety, stopping panic attacks,

and helping you to ground yourself in the moment (Schuldt 2020 and Mayo Clinic 2020). The method forces you to slow down, focus on your surroundings, and recalibrate your emotions. This exercise can be performed anywhere and anytime. Because, here we all love forests, I'll walk you through this method using the forest as our inspiration. Now, let's make five lists using your five senses.

### What are 5 things you see?

I can see wildlife tracks, a bear or a deer (1). I notice the many shapes and shades of the leaves (2). I see plants, so many plants (3). I see insects crawling (4). I see funny-shaped mushrooms, so many colors (5).

### Touch 4 things.

I feel the ground below my feet, muddy, bare, or rocky (1). I run my hands across the moss (2). I feel the scales or smoothness of the tree barks (3). I feel the nuts fallen from the trees (4).

### What are 3 things you hear?

I hear the birds singing (1). I hear the leaves rustling in the wind (2). I hear the water flowing in the creek (3).

### What 2 things do you smell?

I smell fresh pine needles (1). My favorite, I smell the earth when the soil aerates from the rain (2).

### What is 1 thing you can taste?

I can taste the berries from the bush (1). (Imagine the taste only, unless you can clearly identify the item before eating.)

I told you it was simple! I hope this helps you like it has helped me. Remember, you can use this strategy anywhere and anytime, stressed or not. Intentionally practice mindfulness to stay grounded. Breathe. And, be kind to yourself.

Take care,  
Sasha

### Sources:

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A simple graphic to remind us how to use our five senses to reduce anxiety and stress.

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*Nesting*, continued from page 5

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Shalaway S. *A Guide to Bird Homes*, 2010.



Photo by Mike and Laura Jackson  
*Pileated Woodpecker*.

## Dates for Your Calendar

**July 16. PA Forest Stewards Summer Meeting.** 10 AM–4 PM. Ag Progress Days Site, Rock Springs, PA.

**September 23-26. PA Forest Stewards Class of 2021 Training.** Krislund Camp, Madisonburg, PA.

Check the Center for Private Forests website for up-to-date listings of upcoming events:

[ecosystems.psu.edu/private-forests](https://ecosystems.psu.edu/private-forests).

## Remembering PA Forest Stewards We've Lost

We recently learned of the loss of these fellow Pennsylvania Forest Steward volunteers:

- John Griest (Class of '10)
- Dr. William "Bill" Courtney (Class of '03)

Our thoughts are with the families of these long-time Stewards.

We are so grateful for each Steward's service; if you hear of any of our volunteers who have passed away, please let us know.

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