

Spring at Murrysville Community Park Wetlands

Only a bunch of cattails and a couple of ducks? The Murrysville Community Park (MCP) Wetlands holds a fascinating variety of beauty and pond life far beyond what one might imagine. Here's a glimpse of what happened there last Spring.

Beginning in March, the male spring peepers, little one and half inch frogs, sang loudly in choruses taking turns in duos and trios, each trying to have their call stand out, so they may be heard by the female spring peepers.

The male red-winged blackbirds, with their red shoulder patches, spent their days flying and singing "Conk-er-ee" to the brown streaked females which look like large sparrows. A male mallard frequented the pond closest to the MCP entrance. Eleven cute mallard ducklings followed their mother everywhere in the pond near the horse field.



Female red-winged blackbird
(Photo courtesy of Susan Miller)

Near the end of April, a loud rustling in the cattails was made by an unknown creature moving quickly through the cattails and far side of the pond closest to the parking lot. Only the jagged-edged shell and dinosaur-like hind legs of a snapping turtle could be seen before it submerged under the water.

In May, a green heron flushed high into a tree and was also observed another day in the woods near the stream close to the horse pasture. Tadpoles and red-spotted newts speckled the pond water.

Beautiful pickerel frogs glistened like gold in the sunlight. Large American bullfrogs stayed hidden among the cattails at the edge of the pond. At times a green frog could be found sitting quietly near the trail. The spring peepers continued their high-pitched whistle, and made an occasional trill sound when one male warned another that he was too close.

A large snapping turtle, sitting in the grass outside the walking trail at the furthest pond, tucked in his head the best he could for protection until the coast was clear - then made a quick run to the pond and poked his head out of the water to see who had been watching.

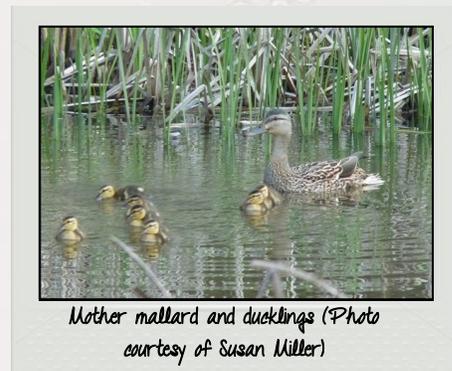
After a long journey from Brazil where they spent the winter, the first two purple martins arrived at the MCP wetlands. The purple martin pair sang sweetly to each other with bubbly notes and little clicking sounds.

A noisy killdeer bird laid 3 eggs in the parking lot and a thoughtful person blocked them from cars with a branch and yellow Caution tape. One fluffy-feathered baby killdeer

survived hungry foxes and raccoons.

Beautiful Baltimore oriole parents busily fed their young in a sock-like nest, which the mother bird may have woven using plant material and hair from the horses in the adjacent field.

For many hours every day, the red-winged blackbirds flew back and forth between the cattails and nearby trees, making warning calls to others to stay away from their nests and babies.



Mother mallard and ducklings (Photo courtesy of Susan Miller)

At the end of May, a smaller and fearful snapping turtle sat next to the walking trail, perhaps on a mission to travel to a suitable area in order to lay eggs. As the snapping turtle sat there, a bat flew over the pond several times to feed on insects. The bat may have



Jeff Hunt shows a baby Purple Martin during Wetlands Tour (photo courtesy of Susan Miller)

been resting under the splintered bark of the great old shagbark hickory tree near the end of the parking lot. Another large tree, and special to the area, is a honey locust with its large barbs, grandly standing across the bridge on the path from the last pond.

Although it might seem to be quiet at times at the MCP Wetlands, in the Spring the Wetlands are teeming with life. Many birds, mammals, amphibians, and other wildlife make their home there and are busy with feeding, surviving predators, and raising families. The MCP Wetlands is a special and interesting place.

Visit <http://www.Pixcontroller.com/wetlands> to view a live MCP Wetlands webcam and Chat about wetlands observations. All are welcome to a free **Wetlands Tour** led by naturalist Susan Miller starting at **9 AM on July 9**, sponsored by the Murrysville Trail Alliance and Friends of Murrysville Parks. As part of the tour, Jeff Hunt of the Purple Martin Preservation Alliance will give a talk about purple martins.

- Susan Miller

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You are invited . . .

to a free MCP Wetlands Tour led by naturalist Susan Miller on Saturday, July 9, starting at 9 AM at the Wetlands Pavilion.