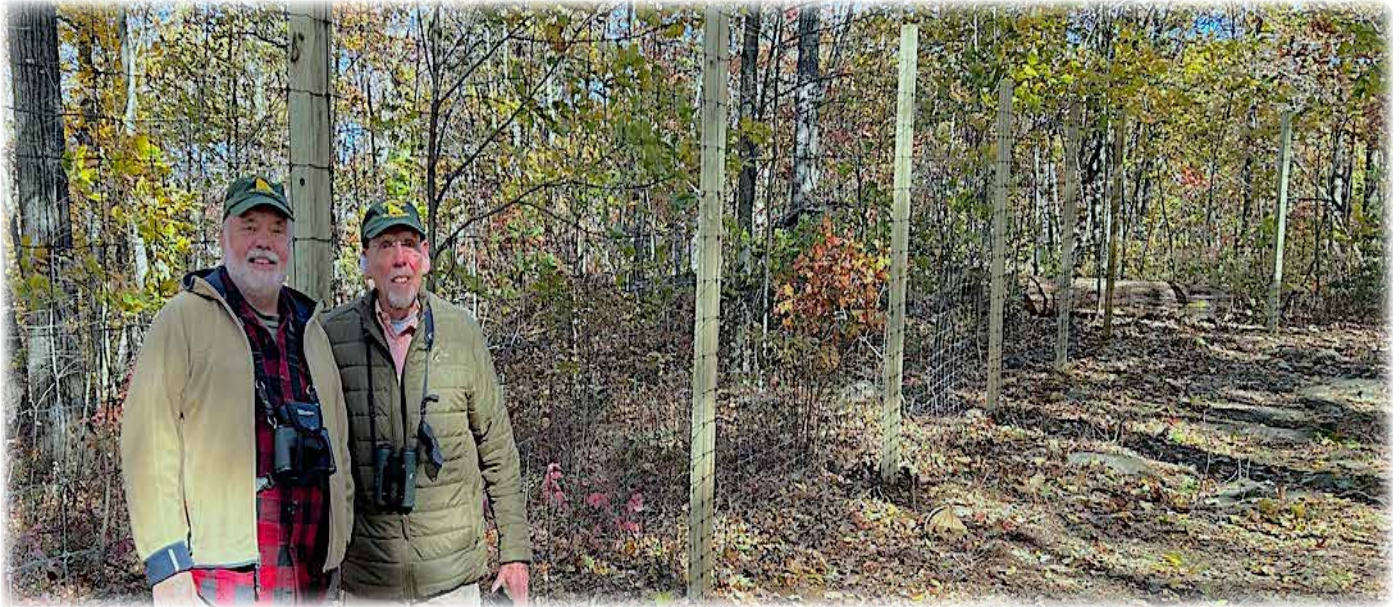


# *Palisades* NATURE NOTES



**Naturalist Evan J. Zupfer and Walter Brust standing in front of our newly installed deer enclosure fence on F trail. Read more about Walter's generous gift after Notes from the Naturalist.** Photo: Lynn Feryus

## *Notes from the Naturalist*

Winter is upon us. The leaves have fallen from the trees. Most of the birds have gone south. The days have become shorter and colder, but do not despair, winter brings its own set of new opportunities and wildlife observations to enjoy.

The month of August was quite dry. Because of these dry conditions, many animals slow down and try to reduce their activity. This made for fewer sightings throughout the month, but we still had a good share.

An Ovenbird was sighted down by the Pond on August 3 by Don McNeil. This small bird spends most of its time walking along the forest floor foraging for small insects and worms.

They are known to breed in Greenbrook. He was probably fattening up for migration. On August 14 a Monarch Butterfly was observed laying eggs on the Milkweed plants in the Native Plant Area. The next day, August 15, on the Guy Nearing Trail, I watched two juvenile Pileated Woodpeckers traverse an oak tree as they called for their parents. Their trumpet sounds are very similar to adults, just higher in pitch. On the same day down on the pond, an Eastern Kingbird was catching flies near Osprey Point. A few days later, on August 18, an Osprey was perching on a limb above Greenbrook Pond. A Bald Eagle was spotted from Patriot's Leap on August 24 by Max Selick. A second Bald Eagle was seen from S trail on August 30.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

## *Notes from the Naturalist* CONTINUING

On the morning of September 6, while walking up the ramp to the office, I was surprised to find a large spider web constructed between the railing and the support post for the office porch. It was very large, complex, and beautifully made. The surprising thing was that it must have been completely made during the night. It was not there when I had left the previous day, but here it was in all its splendor early in the morning. I found the builder directly in the center of the web with what looked like a small fly wrapped-up tightly with web silk. It was a beautiful spider. A soft medium brown with red on its legs. Because the spider was back lit from the morning sun, the color in the legs was more noticeable. They seemed to glow with an almost raspberry hew. I observed the spider for several minutes. It just sat there motionless. After taking a few photos with my phone I went inside the office to identify it. After perusing through a few guides, I had my answer, an Orb-weaver Spider, aka a Farm or Barn Spider (*Neoscona crucifera*). It was very common many years ago, but with all the changes in this area, it has dwindled in population. Alas, it was gone the next morning, and I never saw it again. Apparently, they are able to build these large complicated orb webs in one night, hopefully catch their prey, and then move on.

On September 17, Ken noticed a very large white ball on the south end of the parking lot. Upon closer examination it was discovered to be a large mushroom called a Giant Puffball (*Calvatia gigantea*). It was a bit larger than a softball and milky white in color. Interestingly it had withered away by the next morning. That same day a Red-breasted Nuthatch was seen at the feeders. This would be one of many sightings during September and October.

Down by the bog, a late Common Yellowthroat was spotted dancing among the bushes on September 19. Nearby, on the west side of the bog, a Northern House Wren began scolding me as I walked by his feeding spot. September 24 brought four Wild Turkeys to the feeders, along with an Ovenbird strolling underneath the hollies in the parking lot. On September 27, a second Red-breasted Nuthatch was heard calling in the pine grove south of the Education Center. The following morning Ken found a large Black Rat Snake sunning itself behind the office.

While inspecting trails on October third, I spotted a Red Fox strolling along the path a few yards ahead of me. He stopped a couple of times to look back at me before scampering away. The next day, October fourth, I spotted a Mourning Cloak Butterfly at Arboretum point. These Butterflies hibernate during the winter and are known to come out and fly around on warm autumn days. They are also one of the earliest Butterflies of spring, coming out of hibernation on warm days in March. A Belted Kingfisher was heard calling over the pond on October 5, probably stopping by for a quick snack before continuing its migration. On October 8, the naturalists and I were clearing debris from the very dry stream beds when we heard the soft twittering of a group of four Winter Wrens as they made their way down Green Brook. This is unusual because most of the time they are seen all alone as an individual or one single bird. Rarely are they seen in small groups. Another very late Ovenbird was found strutting along the entrance road on October 25. I was able to get very close to him as we walked the asphalt together. That's it for the Autumn sightings. Keep your eyes and ears open during the winter and enjoy your time outside in Greenbrook.

# Greenbrook Sanctuary Exclosures

I thought I was a time traveler in a science fiction story at a Saturday morning's nature walk this past July in Greenbrook Sanctuary as Sandy Bonardi took a half dozen of us through the three fenced-in deer exclosure areas. Each fenced-in space brought new wonder as I encountered plants previously familiar but absent for years.

An exuberant presence of native plants surrounded our little group — the shrub layer plants we took for granted, like the maple-leaved viburnum and spicebush, many wildflowers, ferns and even pink lady's slipper orchids. The rich diversity I took for granted was miraculously back. Forty years' worth of my history with Greenbrook swept over me beginning with our wonderful leaders, John Serrao, Jim Mershon, Nancy Slowik & Sandy Bonardi; my community service ex-

perience as Administrative Council member and Treasurer; the faces of my fellow nature lovers who regularly joined guided Saturday morning walks and maintenance projects. I was overcome with emotion brought by these rich memories centered on Greenbrook's excellence as a natural wonder.

You see, when deer are excluded by these exclosure fences within our nature sanctuary, native plants within those spaces will recover. The concept of the earth as a "seed bank" is real. Seeds can lay dormant for years and when conditions become favorable for them once again, they will sprout and fulfill our need to be surrounded by healthy forests.

The deer exclosure fences did their job and I experienced profound pleasure with their results. If we can't eliminate deer from the sanctuary, I believe the fences need be maintained and possibly expanded. Unfortunately, the oldest exclosure fence is 15 years old and deteriorating. It needs to be replaced. As a gift to Greenbrook Sanctuary and its current and future members I have volunteered to underwrite its replacement cost.

— WALTER BRUST

## SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS • WINTER 2025-26

### Donate to Greenbrook without paying taxes

If you would like to make a donation to Greenbrook Sanctuary and are a retiree who is required to make a Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) annually from your tax-deferred retirement accounts, here is an incentive to consider. You may qualify to make a Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) through a direct transferable donation to Greenbrook Sanctuary, a qualified 501c3 charity. Consult your tax preparer, financial advisor or retirement fund administrator for assistance. Any contribution is welcome and offers a potential tax savings.

### Assistance Needed for Bridge Repairs

On October 9, A large tree fell onto the bridge that traverses Green Brook and damaged it beyond repair. Palisades Nature Association is reaching out to its members for help rebuilding this bridge and also repairing and refurbishing the Bog Bridge. If you have any experience with building and repairing foot bridges and you would like to help, please call the Naturalist/Director at 201-784-0484.

### Photos Wanted

We are seeking photos taken at the Sanctuary or on field trips for use in our website gallery, newsletter, and online posts.

Please email submissions with name as it is registered with membership to [photos@greenbrooksanctuary.org](mailto:photos@greenbrooksanctuary.org)



# PRESIDENT'S REPORT

I am happy to report that 2025 has seen tangible progress in Greenbrook's ecological stewardship, programming and organizational leadership. Each was a result of members volunteering their time and donating their treasure.

The Administrative Council took significant steps "to restore the character of [Greenbrook's] natural terrain insofar as it is possible" which, as stated in our bylaws, is an essential purpose for which the Sanctuary was founded. Earlier this year the Little Brook enclosure was constructed to allow native flora to grow and flourish once more without deer overbrowsing. A tour of the new enclosure then provided the impetus for long-time member Walter Brust to fund the replacement and expansion of the Sanctuary's first, but now deteriorated, enclosure along F Trail. Thanks to our contractor Bergen Fence, both enclosures were completed in the same calendar year. This is a truly notable accomplishment made possible in both instances by the generosity of Greenbrook community members.

The programming highlight of the year was the reintroduction of the popular Tai Chi classes led in the past by Greenbrook member Nancy Hoffman. Membership Chair Mike Gallo spearheaded the relaunch initiative and was amply rewarded by Nancy graciously agreeing to resume her role as class instructor. The following 13 classes over the Summer and Fall were well-attended with an average of 13 participants per session.

Finally, the Administrative Council was the beneficiary of a welcome and well-needed infusion of six new members. Four were elected at the October 12 annual meeting, in addition to incumbents Fang-Chin Chiang and Meira Pomerantz. They are:

**Ron Kolbinger** – a retired business finance and operations manager from Kearny who enjoys photographing at Greenbrook

**Don McNeil** – a high school environmental sciences teacher from Bergenfield who is an avid birder with experience in birdbanding and field ecology research studying loons

**Margo Moss** – a special needs educator, hike leader and Palisades environmental activist from Englewood Cliffs who has held photography workshops at Greenbrook and elsewhere

**Maria Zdroik** – a special-teacher from Edgewater helping families with special needs children and a nature photographer

At the November Council meeting two more members were appointed, one being none other than Tai Chi teacher Nancy Hoffman and the other former council member Peter Schmidt.

I am hopeful that this year's progress is a harbinger of an actively engaged membership that Greenbrook needs to navigate the challenges in the years ahead.

- Chris Connolly

PNA Council President

# Winter 2025-26 Almanac of Programs

Programs subject to change. For information call 201-784-0484 or email pnanaturalist@gmail.com

**Saturday, December 6 ----- 1:00PM – 2:30**

## Early Winter Hike

*A casual walk through the sanctuary to look and listen for sounds of winter wildlife. We may hear a Great Horned Owl calling.*

**Saturday, December 13 ----- 10:00AM – 12:30PM**

## Volunteer Day

*We will be removing debris from the entrance road and the parking lot. Please wear sturdy shoes, warm clothes, and work gloves.*

**Saturday, December 20 ----- 8:00AM – 3:00PM**

## Christmas Bird Count

*78<sup>th</sup> Annual Hackensack-Ridgewood Christmas Bird Count sponsored by the Bergen County Audubon Society.*

**Sunday, December 21 ----- 7:00PM – 8:00**

## Winter Night Hike and Star Gazing

*Hike through the Sanctuary at night to view and identify winter constellations. Bring flashlights and binoculars.*

**Saturday, December 27 ----- 1:00PM – 2:00PM**

## Winter Nature Walk Around the Pond

*We will look for signs of winter wildlife, around the pond and along the trails of Greenbrook. Bring binoculars*

**Saturday January 3 ----- 4:30PM – 6:00**

## Full Moon a Risin' Hike

*Come watch a full moon rise over the Hudson River. Then hike along the cliff edge under its celestial glow.*

**Sunday, January 4 ----- 1:00PM – 2:00**

## Hike to Patriot's Leap

*A short but breathtaking hike to the southernmost vista of Greenbrook.*

**Saturday, January 10 ----- 10:00AM – 1:30PM**

## Field Trip to Liberty State Park

*Meet in the south parking lot by the Visitors Center at the end of Morris Pesin Drive. We will look for winter waterfowl and other wintering birds in this large open park. Dress for cold and windy weather.*

**Saturday, January 17 ----- 1:00PM – 2:30**

## Hike to Picture Point and Greenbrook Falls

*The first hike of the new year. A brisk walk to the most panoramic vista of Greenbrook and its iconic waterfall.*

**Sunday, January 18 ----- 7:00PM – 8:00**

## Rain/Clouds date for Winter Night Hike and Star Gazing.

*See description for December 21 program.*

**Saturday, January 24 ----- 1:00PM – 2:30**

## Trees in Winter

*Learn to Identify trees using bark, buds and twigs.*

**Saturday, January 31 – 10:00AM – Noon**

## Winter Bird Photography

*Take advantage of the Angelo D'Angelo Bird blind to photograph some winter birds. Cameras with long (300-500mm) lenses are highly recommended.*

**Saturday, February 7 – 1:00PM – 2:30**

## Winter Hike to High Point

*A hike around Greenbrook pond, culminating in the highest point in Greenbrook.*

**Saturday, February 14 ----- 1:00PM – 2:30**

## Hike to Bald Eagle Point

*The Hike to the most northern Vista of Greenbrook Sanctuary.*

**Saturday, February 21 ----- 1:00PM – 2:30**

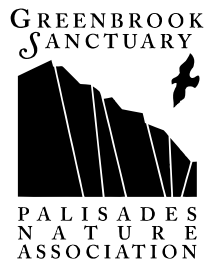
## Late Winter Hike

*Enjoy a hike through Greenbrook to look for signs of animal activity in the snow. This hike will commence with or without snow on the ground. Binoculars are highly recommended.*

**Saturday, February 28 ----- 1:00PM – 2:30**

## Geology of the Palisades Walk

*Discover the rocks, minerals and geological forces that shaped the Palisades.*




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**WELCOME, NEW & RETURNING MEMBERS:** 2025 CYCLE 4— Sophia Master, Rafael Bernstein, Michiru Niimi, John An, Dan Sapozhnikov, Kathleen Wright, Veronika Gomeniyouk, Jan Finesilver/Marla Appelbaum, Phoenix Alvarez, Ryan D’Errico, Stacy Levy, Euna Yoo, Ronald Strobel, Elizabeth Phillips, Dr. Trudy & Joe Pacifico, Cameron Pickham, Jasse Tomer, Chris Runte, Frank Armocida, Zvika Shachar, George Kelley, Kenneth Ciesla/Jennifer May, Madaline Fernandez, Danielle Villanueva, Doreen Carr, Nancy Gorman, Myat Li, Eugene Dunaev, Addys Gonzalez, Raul Martinez, Mary Emerson, Erin Ly, Christine Chang/Soon Min Ko, Timothy Matteson, Marie Alarcon, Raya Schuldenrein, Bryan Kellett, Melissa/Eric Replogle, Martha Jameson, Cohen Family, William Ellsworth, Ronald Howard, William Paquin, Andrea Squillante, Sung Son, Mark Mazel, Jon Horowitz, Grigori Levit, Anastasia Burgos, Jules Rogovich/Jordan Wenz, Seoyoung Yoon, Ruby Smith/Max Winik, Irwin Brenner, Members may RSVP to events on our website. <https://www.greenbrooksanctuary.org/events>  
Email [2greenbrook@gmail.com](mailto:2greenbrook@gmail.com) or call Membership Director Mike Gallo with online questions: 201.701.1424.

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*Palisades* NATURE NOTES   **Editor / Director / Naturalist:** Evan J. Zupfer   **Asst. Naturalists:** Sandy Bonardi, Kenneth Habermann

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**ADMINISTRATIVE COUNCIL**   **President** Chris Connolly   **First Vice President** Mike Gallo   **Second Vice President** Fang-Chin Chiang

**Treasurer** Alec Malyon   **Secretary** Nancy Hoffman   **Executive Secretary** Maryanne Carbone

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Join Us.

CLICK ON THE LINK BELOW FOR MEMBERSHIP INFORMATION

<https://www.greenbrooksanctuary.org/newmembership>