

# Demarest Nature News

Demarest Nature Center Association  
Box 41, Demarest, N.J., 07627

[www.demarestnaturecenter.org](http://www.demarestnaturecenter.org)  
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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

This newsletter is a first for us: Both of the feature stories were written by high school students! Amrita Kumar, a member of our board of trustees, wrote about deer, and Romi Melamed interviewed one of our founding trustees. On top of that, two scouts recently took on ambitious projects in the nature center. We are deeply gratified that a new generation is taking up the cause of learning about, enjoying, and protecting nature.

We hope you have been enjoying both the natural beauty of the forest and our programs. The forest and flowers are in full bloom, providing a sanctuary for woodpeckers, owls, deer, ducks, butterflies, and other forms of wildlife. The stream is also full of life, including fish, otters, frogs, and snails. You can see and hear wildlife with every stroll through the forest. Our amazing volunteers help to pick up litter to ensure the trails remain clean and beautiful. The trails are also well-marked and are always free.

We had a busy first half of the year. Despite extremely cold weather, we had a popular Maple Syrup Day to show how trees are tapped and syrup is made. We continue to host our popular Community Trail Walks the first Saturday of every month at 10 a.m. We also had a guided Birdwatching Tour with the Bergen Audubon Society, led by Don Torino. We had a Canoe Day, and we appreciate that Veolia continues to lend the canoes to us. We again partnered with Marc Gussen (naturalist at Closter Nature Center) to do field trips and nature talks for 12 groups of elementary school students. Recently we had a heron naming contest, our annual Photo Contest and Community Cleanup Day.

Thomas Gonedes (Troop 25 in Tenaflly) just completed an Eagle Scout project in the Emerson Meadow to create an area for meditation (see separate article). In partnership with SOAR Education and the Bergen Audubon Society, Oliver Couillard (Troop 20 & Troop 166) is currently doing an Eagle project to install pollinator patches, build insect hotels and birdhouses, and install a citizen photography stand (see separate article).

Looking forward, we are piloting a new program in partnership with the Demarest Library, Friends of the Library, SOAR Education, and the Demarest Environmental Commission to offer three nature classes to Demarest youth. Also, mark your calendars for the Demarest Nature Center Oktoberfest on Oct. 3 from noon to 5 p.m. at the Demarest Duck Pond. Please write to [info@demarestnaturecenter.org](mailto:info@demarestnaturecenter.org) to offer a program or volunteer.

All of us are volunteers. We use funds to maintain the trails and support programming that benefits the community. Membership dues and generous donations help to support these efforts. We hope you will consider supporting these important initiatives, as we try to build our local community through volunteering and wholesome activities that everyone enjoys. We aim to provide a refuge for nature and the community. We hope to see you soon in the Nature Center!

*— Stephen Tillack*

*President, Demarest Nature Center*



## MEET OUR NEW MASCOT

The Demarest Nature Center is thrilled to announce that our beloved heron mascot—brought to life by founding trustee Dave Emerson's wonderful wooden sculpture—finally has an official name.

Our naming contest received 26 creative submissions. The winning name was proposed by one of our board members, but board members are ineligible for the winner's prize, so we held a drawing for the prize among all entrants. Gerald Escala was randomly selected. He receives a bird-themed prize package, which includes a bird poster, a book about birding, and a nature center hat.

We are proud to announce that our mascot will henceforth and forever be known as: **Tenny Tenakill**

***Your membership dollars allow us to continue to give back to the community and preserve and protect DNC's 55 acres of meadows, forests and wetlands.***

# DEMAREST NATURE CENTER SPOTLIGHT

## OH, DEER!

By Amrita Kumar

The Demarest Nature Center is home to a diverse array of wildlife—birds, pollinators, native plants—but the animal you're most likely to spot is the deer. DNC trustees estimate between 30 and 50 deer living within the DNC's 55 acres, which translates to between 135 and 225 deer per square kilometer. Though the deer are undeniably cute, this overabundance carries real consequences.

To understand why, it helps to picture how a forest is structured. Above you is the canopy, the tops of the tall trees. Below that is the understory: the layer of shrubs, wildflowers, and saplings that grow in the shade closer to the ground. This layer is where much of a forest's biodiversity lives. But it's also where deer do most of their foraging. According to research compiled across multiple forest studies, understories can only regenerate at deer densities below 10 per square kilometer. At roughly 135 to 225, seedlings are consumed before they can take root, and flowering plants disappear from the forest floor.

This is more than an aesthetic problem. The deer population in Demarest has set off a chain of consequences that ripples far beyond the DNC.

### The Pollinator Problem

The understory plants that deer eat are foundational to the DNC's ecosystem. Wildflowers and low-growing shrubs provide critical food for bees, butterflies, and other pollinators, especially in early spring when few other resources are available. Studies have found that in heavily grazed forests, bumblebee visitation rates drop measurably as flowering herbs disappear. At high deer densities, the entire plant-pollinator network simplifies. Without pollinators, even the trees that manage to seed struggle to reproduce.

**Tuck your pants into your socks and wear light-colored clothing so ticks are easier to spot.**

### The Front Yard Effect

And the damage doesn't stop at the nature center's edge. Walk through Demarest and you'll see the same story playing out in front yards and porches across town. Homeowners have learned to plant deer-resistant varieties—lavender, catmint, ornamental grasses—which so far

tend to hold up. But beloved garden staples like hydrangeas, hostas, arborvitae, and daylilies have never been safe: deer prefer them above almost everything else. Stacy Ling, a New Jersey master gardener who has spent over 25 years gardening in a high-deer-pressure area, writes on her blog [stacyling.com](http://stacyling.com) that in this region, hydrangeas simply are not deer resistant and all need protection. Deer will leave them flowerless, eating the buds before they're even visible to the human eye.

As deer populations rise and their food supply shrinks, landscapers across northern New Jersey report that even the reliably resistant plants are no longer a sure thing. Experts warn that when deer are hungry enough, they'll eat just about anything. Some Demarest residents have simply given up on live flowers altogether and put artificial blooms in pots on their front porches, just to have a little color.

### Lyme Disease

White-tailed deer are the primary reproductive host for the black-legged tick, the species responsible for transmitting Lyme disease. But deer are only part of the story; white-footed mice are the secret to how Lyme actually spreads. When larval and nymphal ticks feed on mice, the mice infect the ticks with the pathogen. This transmission is what drives Lyme through a community.

New Jersey ranked fourth in the nation for



Source: Diego Garces, grand prize winner, John C. Goodwin Photo Contest, 2025.

Lyme disease cases in 2023, and Bergen County has recorded confirmed cases every year on record. Deer moving between nature preserves and residential yards carry ticks with them, and yards are where most human tick bites occur. Studies have found correlations between high deer density and higher

tick populations, and some interventions have reduced tick abundance in more isolated settings.

### Protecting Yourself

Whether you're hiking the DNC trails or just doing yard work, you can take simple steps to reduce your risk. Tuck your pants into your socks and wear light-colored clothing so ticks are easier to spot. Apply an EPA-registered tick repellent before heading out. After any time outdoors, check your entire body carefully for ticks,

including behind your knees, around your waist, and in your hair. These precautions apply in your backyard just as much as in the nature center.

### Road Safety

Bergen County consistently ranks among the top New Jersey counties for deer-vehicle collisions, with hundreds of crashes recorded each year. The deer at the DNC don't stay put: studies show that a single suburban deer's territory can cover dozens of residential yards. They range through surrounding neighborhoods, crossing roads at dawn and dusk, and the larger the herd, the more risk for local drivers.

### What Comes Next

Ecologists describe what's happening as an overshoot: a population grows beyond what its environment can sustainably support, and the environment degrades as a result. Left unmanaged, the herd would eventually decline on its own, but only to a permanently degraded equilibrium, with vegetation too depleted to fully recover.

Communities across northern New Jersey are responding in different ways. Some municipalities have authorized controlled bow hunts to reduce herd size. Researchers have also explored immunocontraception, a form of deer birth control delivered by dart, which reduces reproduction without culling. Our neighbor, the Closter Nature Center, has undertaken one of the most ambitious local restoration efforts in the region. In 2023, they constructed a one-acre deer-proof enclosure, and in 2024 planted over 200 native wetland species inside it. They added a second deer enclosure in 2025, and have begun to plant hundreds of saplings outside of those enclosures, protected by wire cages. Altogether, more than 1,400 plants were established between 2024 and 2025, with funding from Veolia and the Borough of Closter. Their work offers a hopeful model for what sustained, community-backed restoration can look like.

The encouraging news is that ecosystems can bounce back. With effective deer population management, studies suggest meaningful vegetation recovery is possible within a decade.

To see how, we built an interactive model that lets you adjust local deer density and watch the effects ripple outward. Scan the QR code to view it on our website.



## ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖ ANGELA RODIN REMEMBERS ❖ ❖ ❖ ❖

*Angela Rodin, age 91, a founding trustee of the Demarest Nature Center who is now a member of the Environmental Commission, was interviewed recently by Romi Melamed, a rising junior at Northern Valley Regional High School at Demarest, who is a member of the nature center. The interview took place on a bench by the Tenakill Brook.*

I'm Angela Crociata Rodin, and I was a biology teacher, retired now. I worked in Paterson at the high school, and then I worked in Haworth Middle School for 25 years, as the science coordinator. I have two daughters and two granddaughters.

### Founding of nature center

In 1971, there was a little notice somewhere that some people were going to get together and see if we could form a nature center. As I said, [part of] this area was a dump. The people who had the first meeting actually lived on Donnybrook [Drive]. So they were very interested in keeping it because they didn't want a dump in their backyard. But they were also very town-minded, and Dr. [Philip] Duffy, his wife, and their son [Henry Duffy] thought, "Let's see if we can get some people together."

So at the first meeting, which was in 1971, about 14 of us went to their house and sat down and, you know, figured, "Could we somehow do this?" The problem was that at that particular time, everybody was into tennis; tennis was like pickleball today. So, there was a group of people in town who wanted to take the area and make [part of] it into a private tennis club. We'd rather have a nature center everybody could enjoy, instead of a private tennis club. I mean, to think that a private tennis club would serve the people better than a nature center. It just didn't make sense. But there were a lot of people that were friends with those who wanted the tennis club. And they wouldn't even talk to us, "No I can't risk my friendship."

**"Because if it's going to last,  
you guys have to hold it up.  
I won't be here."**

So, the struggle began. We had many, many meetings with the town and everything. Finally, the council said, "Would people be interested in a nature center?" So we, a whole bunch of us, lapped all around town and got over 1,000 signatures to support a nature center. We brought it to the council, and some of the council members were, unfortunately, friends with the people who wanted the tennis club. So they said "No, we have to go to a vote," a physical vote. Which, of course, made us a little upset, because you don't know how a vote is going to turn out, and we had been promised that this was going to be no big deal.

Well, anyway, we went to vote, and the interesting thing was that if you wanted the nature center, you had to vote "no." So it was like, Do you want tennis? My husband was going ballistic. You know, it was overwhelming, but at least we won. We got a lease on 55 acres. We were happy, it's 55 acres here and the town was not going to give us any money; it's not town-supported, it's strictly membership-supported. We figured,

if the people really wanted this open space for themselves, then they would support it. Of course, everybody was very happy with the beginning, but the beginning years were a little hard. You had to convince people to come, and making some of the trails was not easy. But in doing so, we found a lot of interesting flowers that we didn't know were growing here. Oh, it was great, it was very interesting.

I was the secretary. I remember having all kinds of scribbly notes. And it was a very trying time. Eventually 14 of us pulled away a little bit, so that other people could come in, because we felt, if we were the only ones that felt we needed nature, if nobody else in town cared, then why bother? I mean, if you're going to have a place like this, it has to be wanted.

So slowly, as we pulled away, new people came. Luckily, it did sustain, it has sustained itself. So the first lease ended, and then they got a second lease. The second lease was only for 10 years, and that has me worried because it's going to be coming up soon. This should be forever; it's so fragile. As you can see, with the houses going up all around, we've got all these mega-mansions, and this property is priceless. We're getting so crowded in this area that I think we need it, because if you don't have open space for trees, you're not going to get the oxygen you need.



Angela Rodin at the bulletin board. Source: Romi Melamed

### Encouraging young people to get involved

This is where you should really, every day, just take a walk. At least once a week, take a walk. Just to go in here, you hear different noises. You hear the birds, and you hear the little chipmunks, and it's just peaceful. It's very busy now, I guess, and I feel bad for you guys [young people], because you don't have peace. Try to feel involved. Join the nature center and be aware of what it does. I guess the first step is becoming a member, and then you get all these updates. Because if it's going to last, you guys have to hold it up. I won't be here.

-- Romi Melamed

# DEMAREST NATURE CENTER SPOTLIGHT

## EVENT RECAP

We kicked off the New Year on Jan. 1 with a Winter Scavenger Hunt, where over 50 participants braved freezing temperatures for some outdoor fun. In February, we hosted our fourth annual Maple Syrup Day featuring a live demonstration by Ray Slaman on how to make syrup from maple sap. Visitors enjoyed taste-testing real maple syrup against corn syrup, all while treating themselves to hot chocolate, coffee, and donuts. In May, families joined us for our annual Canoe Day and Birdhouse Building event (which had a record attendance this year). Monthly Community Trail Walks also continued from January through June with educational hikes led by Jeff Shaari and Ray Slaman (set to resume in September). In April, the Bergen County Audubon Society hosted a birdwatching hike led by Don Torino, and in June Ray Slaman led a memorable evening Solstice Hike to wrap up the season. Our community events are taking a brief summer break, but we will be back with a full lineup in the fall. Keep an eye on our website and social media pages for upcoming dates and announcements!

## JOHN C. GOODWIN NATURE PHOTO CONTEST WINNERS

**GRAND PRIZE:** Joel Rudin      *Raccoon in Tree*

### ADULTS:

|                   |                  |                          |
|-------------------|------------------|--------------------------|
| 🥇 1 <sup>st</sup> | Rachel Bolella   | <i>Northern Flicker</i>  |
| 🥈 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Tai-De Li        | <i>Tenakill Creek</i>    |
| 🥉 3 <sup>rd</sup> | Loretta Guardino | <i>Alligator in Tree</i> |

### YOUTH:

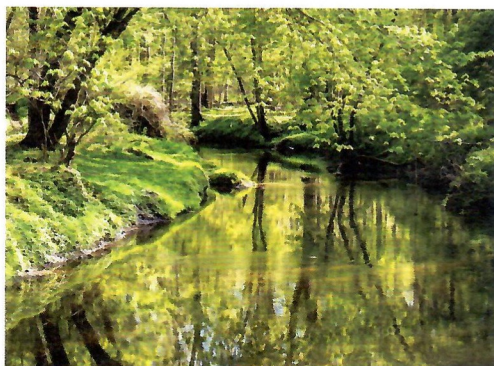
|                   |                  |                                |
|-------------------|------------------|--------------------------------|
| 🥇 1 <sup>st</sup> | Nicholas Shaari  | <i>Barred Owl</i>              |
| 🥈 2 <sup>nd</sup> | Tyler Kim        | <i>What's Left of the Deer</i> |
| 🥉 3 <sup>rd</sup> | Alexander Shaari | <i>Groundhog</i>               |



*Raccoon in Tree* – Source: Joel Rudin



*Northern Flicker* – Source: Rachel Bolella



*Tenakill Creek* – Source: Tai-De Li



*Alligator in Tree* – Source: Loretta Guardino



*Barred Owl* – Source: Nicholas Shaari



*What's Left of the Deer* – Source: Tyler Kim



*Groundhog* – Source: Alexander Shaari

## OUR "HOT POCKETS" OF BIODIVERSITY

There is a new biodiversity project in the Emerson Meadow. This incredible habitat restoration initiative was based on the vision of SOAR Education, Inc. and made possible thanks to a generous conservation grant from the Bergen Audubon Society. We want to extend our heartfelt appreciation to Lillian Lugo (Founder & CEO of SOAR Education), who successfully applied for the grant and dedicated countless hours alongside her Vice President, Mark Hirsch, to beautifully design, plant, and upkeep the crucial initial monitoring and watering of our new native gardens.

The continued collaboration between the Demarest Nature Center (DNC) and SOAR has made this project a reality. The pollinator initiative includes several environmental components, including insect hotels, bird nesting boxes, and a Chronolog post. Impressive fundraising completed by Scout Oliver Couillard as part of his Eagle Scout project enabled the financial support of the Chronolog station for which SOAR sponsored the other half. Our deepest thanks also go out to the wonderful coordination between Lillian, Mark, and Oliver, the Scout project leader for Troops 166 and 20. This coordination involved scheduling the participation and engagement of Scout members across two troops! The young men spent their time planting, making bird nesting boxes, designing insect hotels, and installing the protective fences that ensure the deer will not nosh on the greenery meant for pollinators.

Thanks to DNC board member and co-founder Dave Emerson for delivering the fencing and mulch, and for helping guide the installation of the fencing. Thanks also to DNC board member Andrew Zimmerman for donating



Source: Monica Couillard

the trellis that serves as the scaffold for the native trumpet vine that will attract hummingbirds. Oliver and SOAR Education have offered the community at large the hands-on opportunity to engage in citizen science with the simple snap of a cell phone picture via the Chronolog station. Citizen science is of high value for the DNC and for future conservation and restoration projects. We ask all trail-goers to step on up to the Chronolog and join the paparazzi for nature! Thank you so much to SOAR Education, the Bergen Audubon Society, Oliver, and all of the incredible volunteers for planting the seeds for a greener, more resilient pollinator sanctuary!

## SCOUTING

Looking for adventure, leadership, and opportunities to give back to the Demarest community? Come join Scout Troop 20 of the Northern New Jersey Council!

Chartered by the Demarest Nature Center, Troop 20 offers a blend of outdoor adventure and meaningful service. In just four years, we've canoed through scenic waterways, conquered zip lines and rope courses, and built a proud tradition of giving back through our annual food and blood drives. We also volunteer at Canoe Day and Oktoberfest.

Whether your scout craves adventure in the great outdoors or wants to make a real difference in their community, there's a place for them here. Learn more at: <https://bit.ly/JoinDNCTroop20>.



## SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

In June, the Demarest Nature Center presented scholarship awards and checks to two Northern Valley Demarest seniors, Mia Barbieri and Leah Park, during their graduation ceremony. We congratulate Mia and Leah on their achievements and look forward to seeing the positive impact they will make on our planet.

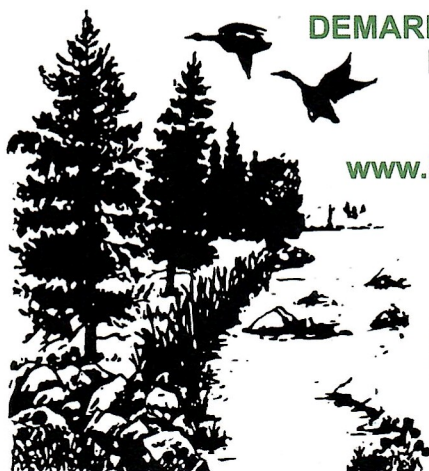


## New Meditative Area



There is a new meditative area in the Emerson Meadow, created by Thomas Gonedes as his Eagle Scout project for Scouting America Troop 25 in Tenafly. Thomas raised the

funds for this peaceful retreat, which features a fresh layer of wood chips, charming birdhouses, and a welcoming bench positioned to face the meadow. Built with the help of volunteers, this project is a wonderful gift to Demarest. We extend our appreciation to Thomas for organizing and executing this project, and we invite everyone to come visit and enjoy this tranquil new space!



DEMAREST NATURE CENTER ASSN.

Borough of Demarest

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[www.DemarestNatureCenter.org](http://www.DemarestNatureCenter.org)



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## SOAR SUMMER PROGRAM SERIES

Are you ready to explore the great outdoors, meet tiny creatures, and travel back in time? The Demarest Free Public Library is hosting an exciting SOAR Program series of classes for kids in grades 1–3 (ages 6–9) this July. All programs meet in the children's program room.

Here is what is in store for our young explorers:



- **World of Littles**

- ▶ Date and time: Wednesday, July 15, 4 to 5 p.m.
- ▶ What they'll do: Go on a fun nature walk to the Demarest Duck Pond to explore the mighty miniature wildlife that supports our environment, and then decorate a personal puzzle and mini-bugs!

- **Bonkers for Bugs**

- ▶ Date & Time: Wednesday, July 22, 4 to 5 p.m.
- ▶ What we'll do: Grab a magnifying glass and take a walk outside to discover all kinds of amazing insects, create cool geoboard bug designs, and decorate a mini-bug storage box!

- **Fossil Frenzy (Can Ya Dig It?)**

- ▶ Date & Time: Wednesday, July 29, 4 to 5 p.m.
- ▶ What we'll do: Take a thrilling journey to the past to learn how fossils are made, hunt for hidden fossils in your very own sandpit, and excavate a dinosaur toy to keep!

### How to Sign Up:

**Spaces are limited and filling up fast, so head over to the Demarest Library Website to register your child today!**

These programs are generously sponsored and funded by the Demarest Nature Center, the Demarest Environmental Commission, the Friends of the Demarest Library, and the Demarest Free Public Library.

## --- CHECK US OUT ON SOCIAL MEDIA! ---



[facebook.com/people/Demarest-Nature-Center/100091316019265/](https://facebook.com/people/Demarest-Nature-Center/100091316019265/)



[instagram.com/demarestnaturectr/](https://instagram.com/demarestnaturectr/)

[www.demarestnaturecenter.org](http://www.demarestnaturecenter.org)

email: [info@demarestnaturecenter.org](mailto:info@demarestnaturecenter.org)

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**The Demarest Nature Center is proud to be the charter organization for Boy Scout Troop 20.**

**For more information, please contact them at [dnc.troop.20.demarest@gmail.com](mailto:dnc.troop.20.demarest@gmail.com).**

## BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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**We are a 501(c)3! There is no greater feeling** than supporting a worthy organization. The Demarest Nature is a non-profit 501(c)3 organization. This means that your donations are tax deductible. Your donations support all of our educational programs, scholarships, events and the continued preservation of our green space. Consider a gift to the Demarest Nature Center as an investment in the future of our community. Of course, it goes without saying, or with saying in this case, that we are not offering tax advice by the above statement. Contact any of our trustees if you would like more information.