



March Newsletter



Director's Corner

Dear Friends,

As I am sure you are aware, we are in the midst of budget season in Trenton. That means that it is crucial that we continue to express our strong support for the New Jersey School of Conservation and the vital role we play in helping to implement New Jersey's ambitious and important climate change education curriculum.

At a time when our society is reckoning with climate change, and as political forces risk de-prioritizing climate change education, it is more important than ever that we keep NJSOC strong so our teachers and our children can be prepared for a future where the natural environment is protected and preserved.

NJSOC has long played an important role in education in New Jersey, and now is no different. We help train teachers in the fields of conservation education, climate change mitigation, and ways to incorporate the outdoors into lesson planning. The students who visit our campus discover a new dimension in their learning and return to their

communities as mindful stewards of the natural world.

After a year of doubling the number of school groups who visited our campus, the number of individuals who attended programs, the number of teachers who attended professional development, now is the time to continue to grow our programs and our work.

Yet the current allocation from Trenton is \$500,000 – a fraction of the resources we have applied to our expansion over the past year.

In order for NJSOC to continue on the path of growth, in order to continue to support teachers and students as they meet the state's first-in-the-nation climate education mandate, in order to expand the accessibility of our trails and our infrastructure, it is critical that Trenton fund NJSOC at its \$3.5 million requested level.

We hope you will follow the link below to express to your representatives your support for NJSOC and why we need to support conservation education in the year ahead and beyond.

Thank you for your attention and support for the NJSOC community.

In Friendship,

Serry Kirk Pflugh

Contact Your Lawmakers



Celebrating Master Educator Lois Lyons

"I get to wow students with nature," says Presidential Excellence Awardee Lois Lyons, 30 year teacher of Chemistry and Biology, and NJSOC faculty member. "And I hope they take that with them the rest of their lives."

Thanks to encouragement from her friend and colleague Michael Roche, Lois Lyons joined NJSOC several years ago and has been a valuable contributor to the teaching faculty ever

since. From Nature Journaling to Interpretive Hiking to Professional Development for Teachers, Lois inspires students and teachers alike to wonder at the nature around them.

In Nature Journaling, she helps students slow down and take in the world around them. "Stop. Notice. Wonder," she advises. "See if you can make a connection with what you're seeing." If a student observes the bark on one tree to be different from the bark on the next, she encourages her to take some time to wonder about the observation. "Spend time being perplexed by what you observe for a little while."

The results are consistent: students feel like they have had a totally new interaction with the world around them.

"Young children come to me and tug on my shirt and say, Mrs. Lyons, this is the best day of my life," after making a piece of art out of pine cones and acorns. "I hope they never lose that sense of wonder," Lois says.

Lois is a master educator in every sense of the word. As a recipient of the Presidential Excellence Award, Lois has been recognized for her innovative approach to education, especially for developing alternative ways of evaluating students through projects in addition to traditional testing. She is a master educator who knows how to motivate her students, facilitating them to discover their full potential.

This skill extends to the way she leads professional development for teachers. She trusts in the reported magic and beautiful setting at NJSOC to help do the work for her. "The campus and the forest trails do a lot for you. The teachers get into it right away," sitting down on the ground and starting to sketch to learn how to inspire their students to appreciate and learn about the environment. The feedback is overwhelmingly positive, with many writing back within days to share success stories that they found with the students at their schools.

Lois was made for NJSOC. She is an avid hiker and volunteer for the Monmouth County Park System on its hikes and paddle programs. She is also a Purple Martin and Bluebird monitor and Trail Marking leader. Her watercolor interests help to add art concepts to her classes.

"I'm happy to have found this place," she reflects. "It gives me a really good feeling and purpose for my life right now. I am grateful to be able to connect with students and help them connect to the planet."



Women's History Month Remembrance

By Kerry Kirk Pflugh, Executive Director, NJSOC

As we recall our Camp Wapalanne days and recognize March as Women's History Month it is fitting to acknowledge, honor and celebrate one of our founders and the first director of Camp Wapalanne – Dr. S. Marie Kuhnen.

Dr. Kuhnen was hired by Dr. DeAlton Partridge, the first director of the NJSOC and president of Montclair State College to serve as the Camp Director of Camp Wapalanne between 1950-1952.

In an interview she had in 1995 with Annette Sambolin, author of the New Jersey School of Conservation 1949-1999, Dr. Kuhnen said of the experience, "The original staff had a 2-3 day pre camp training period in which we developed and reviewed camp policy, met state people such as Luther Lindenmuth (who became the third director of the NJSOC), the head forestry (as well as) the head of the state forest fire department and many others who would enrich our programs. Since we were a pioneer group — the first — we met frequently in the evenings to discuss policy, problems and new procedures. We had a great, close-knit, eager group that loved every minute of what we were doing."

Dr. Kuhnen is described as someone "who put her heart and soul into teaching the children nature appreciation at the camp."

Following her summer camp involvement, Dr. Kuhnen instructed a 10-day undergraduate Montclair State Field biology course on the NJSOC campus for undergraduates during the summer. Dr. Kuhnen is also credited with establishing the L. B. Sharp Library. She eventually became the chairperson of the biology department and held that position for eight years. Dr. Kuhnen was a professor of botany and a faculty member of MSU for 41 years. A brilliant scientist and beloved mentor to hundreds of students, and friend and colleague to so many, Dr. Kuhnen was also a memorable teacher.

"The nearly magnetic appeal of Marie Kuhnen to her ardent followers was a personality that

exuded her Love of All-Things-in-Nature," said Assistant Director Jerry Schierloh, one of our Honorary Trustees. "To be sure, her botanical and ornithology skills were unparalleled, but it was her magical way of getting her learning constituents caught up in the Awe of something that would instantly capture her eye and her enthusiasm for sharing it: a spring wildflower inching its tendrils up through a tiny gap in leaf litter or, perhaps, a swallow capturing its evening, in-flight insect meal as it swooped over the water of Lake Wapalanne near dusk. She also shared her love for special places and habitats in the NJSOC environs that became intuitively linked to nearly every visit or course she taught at SOC."

"Of all the classes I've ever taken, I learned more and remember more from Dr. Kuhnen's New Jersey Flora class than from any other," echoed Trustees Vice President Shayne Russell. "And the content has remained relevant, useful, and interesting to me throughout my entire life. I only wish I'd known at the time (this was in 1977) that we had Camp Wapalanne in common-- I would have loved to have talked to her about that! "

Recently, I was walking on the NJSOC grounds and ran into one of Dr. Kuhnen's former students, Tom Miller who was also a counselor at Camp Wapalanne in 1982. I mentioned that I was writing this piece about her for the newsletter and he said, "She is truly one of the most extraordinary people I have met in my lifetime."

He went on to say that "Dr. S. Marie Kuhnen was a pioneering woman in the study of birds. Armed with a Ph.D. in ornithology and prodigious field skills, she inspired several generations of biology, ecology, botany and environmental science teachers in New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania. Her dedication to field studies is legendary. Between late September and mid-November each year, Dr. Kuhnen could be found atop the Montclair or Sunrise Mountain Hawk watches with her acolytes. She was also famous for her stamina, hiking to the Adirondack peaks and taking part on 24-hour birding competitions when she was in her 80s. She will always be remembered by her students for her kindness, patience and boundless knowledge."

Of her birding prowess, Trustee MJ Davis said, "Dr. Kuhnen inspired me in her field biology summer class at SOC in 1975. One super power of hers that I found most impressive was her ability to pick one bird song out of a chorus and then hone in on the location of the singer. The fact that she was a classmate of my mother's in college, further cemented our bond."

Trustee William Dioguardi who knew her through his parents who were both counselors at Camp Wapalanne said, "I was lucky to have known her. She was a big part of my mother and father lives at Camp Wapalanne. They were lifetime friends. We all loved her homemade bread."

"Although Marie Kuhnen's roots were embedded in the foundations of nature, outdoor and conservation education that were prevalent in the 1950s and 1960s – and, although those roots were somewhat subsumed by the rise of environmental education in succeeding years – she totally captured and captivated what has been a ceaseless and ongoing passion of the New Jersey School of Conservation: to create a tightly bonded partnership of those who are and have been associated with the School as their cherished family of nature, outdoor, conservation, and environmental believers!" Schieloh added. "Most surely, Dr. S. Marie Kuhnen was a highly favored and legendary spokesperson in advancing that renowned School of Conservation aspiration and legacy!"

He continues, "Dr. Kuhnen's most profound influence on the New Jersey School of Conservation was, unquestionably, her initiation of the Camp Wapalanne summer camping program in 1950 ... a program which would undergo numerous evolutionary leaps and bounds during the next 35 years and become one of the most Influential and respected nature and environmentally oriented summer camping programs of its kind, both nationally and internationally!"

As for myself, my memory of her will forever be her quiet presence in Big Timbers during Camp Wapalanne summer camp in the 1970s, sitting amongst her undergraduate students with a smile on her face and singing along with the Camp Wapalanne campers as I led the campers in song. I can still see her now.

In 1995, the Friend of NJSOC awarded her with the SOC Annual Award of Merit for "a lifetime of dedicated service to the Earth as a college science professor and department chair and for

her friendship and loyal support of the programs at the SOC for over four decades.” Dr. Kuhnman passed away in 2009, however her spirit lives her daily in our work to inspire young people to appreciate and science and natural resources. The Friends are grateful to Dr. Kuhnman for her enduring friendship and we honor her as one of the NJSOC’s distinguished educators during Women’s History Month.



Be Part of Our Story

By Shayne Russell, NJSOC Vice President

Many of our stories at the School of Conservation have been quietly sitting in boxes. As our new team of Archives volunteers works to uncover those stories, we’re not going to be satisfied with “whispering” them. From the smallest interesting tidbit, to the most significant events that connect us to the history of environmental education nationwide, we want to SHOUT THEM OUT! Here’s an update on how that’s going and how you can help.

Since January, through our NJSOC Archives Project, and with the guidance of Archivist Cindy Srnka, 15 volunteers have been trained and have begun the process of rehousing our historical materials, assessing their condition and describing their content.

Our progress has been aided by a generous grant from the Sussex County Arts and Heritage Council which made it possible to purchase an initial order of archival supplies necessary to begin the project. A beautiful space has been prepared to house the Archives in SOC’s new Welcome Center. Board members have loaned us a laptop and a scanner so we can begin scanning documents. The volunteer hour invested by our Archives team have been invaluable!

But we need your help. In order to continue moving the project forward, we will need to raise additional funds for archival shelving, permanent storage containers, supplies such as archival folders, envelopes, photo sleeves, a dehumidifier, subscription fees for an online platform to share files and part-time guidance from an experienced archivist. We will be seeking additional grants and funding opportunities to meet these needs.

A generous donor has offered to match up to \$3,500 in donations to the Archive Project. Your matching contributions will help see us through to the anticipated completion of the first phase of the project by the end of June 2025. Without this help, we may need to pause the project at the end of next month, just when we’re really getting started! Please donate today and BE A PART OF THE NJSOC STORY! Thank you!

[Donate Here](#)



Meet NJSOC's Ambassador Animals! All About Picta – Our Painted Turtle

By Amelia Basile, NJSOC Intern, Jefferson Environmental Academy

Our Eastern Painted Turtle, Picta, is named after her scientific name *Chrysemys picta*. Painted turtles are native to the state of New Jersey and found all over the United States, southern Canada and parts of Mexico. This species thrives in the New Jersey habitat due to the abundance of freshwater, wetlands, the temperate climate, and prey available to them.

These unique reptiles can be identified in many ways. Most distinctly, they are identified by the red and yellow markings along its head, legs and underside. The yellow markings look like brush strokes on top of their dark green color. The stripes go lengthwise across their arms and head. The pattern on the underside can vary from each individual. Most commonly, it is orangish red with a black and yellow striped splotch in the middle. Their smooth green-ish brown shell can measure 90-250mm long.

[Read More](#)



Native Animal Spotlight

By Amelia Basile, NJSOC Intern, Jefferson Environmental Academy

Have you wondered what types of animals you might see at the NJSOC? In northern New

Jersey, there are so many unique, beautiful, and important species. Here we will highlight a few that have been seen roaming the campus!

Starting with easiest to miss animals, you may find a spotted salamander. These large salamanders are a dark grey color with yellow or orange spots unevenly spread throughout their entire body. The amount of spots varies per individual, and it is very rare to find zero-spotted, spotted salamanders. The spotted salamander is a rare find at the New Jersey School of Conservation. This is because they rarely come above ground as they like to stay protected and moist! You may see one during breeding season as they make their way to vernal pools. These natural temporary bodies of water are found in forests during the spring time and are formed due to rain settling in depressed areas. Since these salamanders prefer cool, moist environments, they travel to vernal pools during rainy spring nights.

[Read More](#)

Our Campus by Starlight



Cindy Radich shot this stunning photo at the foot of the Rainbow Bridge while on our campus for a meeting.

Our Mission



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The mission of the New Jersey School of Conservation is to foster environmental knowledge and action through education programs delivered in a natural setting. We are a community of diverse, responsible stewards of the earth who promote sustainability practices, climate change mitigation and environmental justice.

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