



## RUSHTON NATURE KEEPERS

*Inspiring tomorrow's conservationists*

**Rushton Nature Keepers (RNK)** provides youth (ages 8-11) with unique opportunities to develop a meaningful relationship with nature, which will fuel a lifelong desire to protect the environment. RNK is focused on shaping and empowering these future conservationists while nurturing a spirit of discovery and wonder. We offer regular programs covering four conservation themes including birds and wildlife, regenerative farming, watersheds, and healthy habitat.

### Our Objectives for Your Child:

- Create a conservation ethic by showing the importance of preserving open space.
- Connect personally to nature and foster a lifelong respect of the natural world.
- Nurture a spirit of discovery and wonder.
- Develop observation skills and understanding of science beyond the classroom.
- Recognize the connection of wildlife, farming, and watersheds.
- Understand how people can help create and preserve healthy habitat.
- Appreciate the origins of the food we eat and how nature and agriculture can flourish together.
- Demonstrate the positive role humans can play in the natural world.
- Foster an awareness of how everyday personal choices can help the planet.

**RNK Membership** is \$300 for the first child and \$275 for each additional sibling. Membership includes a t-shirt, reusable water bottle, nature journal and tote per child. Programs are drop-off only unless otherwise noted. Waivers will be offered on a case-by-case basis (no questions asked), as we do not wish to exclude anyone based on financial need. Otherwise, membership is required to attend most events\*.

**A Rushton Junior Naturalist Certificate** will be awarded to Rushton Nature Keepers who attended events within each of the 4 themes for a total of at least 8 by year-end. They will be invited to attend the Rushton Junior Naturalist Celebration in November during which prizes will be awarded. Each program will allow time for reflection in a nature journal in which children will receive attendance stamps to document their progress. Each event is designated with icons covering one or more of the four themes.

*\*Please note that other relevant WCT family programs or volunteer events may pop up during the year that can count towards the Rushton Junior Naturalist certificate. Members will be notified as opportunities arise.*

**Photography policy:** Attendance at Willistown Conservation Trust programs and events constitutes consent to be photographed for use in print and electronic media. Images will not be identified using full names without written approval from the individual. Please notify Trust staff if you would prefer that your or your child's photo not be used.

## A CLOSER LOOK

### The Rushton Nature Keepers Conservation Strategy

We believe these four themes are the key focus areas that have the biggest impact on land conservation and earth stewardship. The more programs your child attends, the more comprehensive their understanding of conservation will be.

**1. Birds and Wildlife** are the global heartbeats. Birds connect people across continents with their awe-inspiring migrations and provide the charismatic face that compels people to protect habitat. Our Rushton Woods Preserve is a hub of bird conservation, boasting the region's premier bird banding station that attracts leaders in ornithology and inspires visitors to care about their avian neighbors.

**3. Watersheds** must be safeguarded through land conservation and sound environmental practices. Our partnership with the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University provides us with the tools we need to monitor the three watersheds we protect: the Ridley, Crum, and Darby Creeks. We study all aspects of stream health including underwater insects that serve as indicators of water quality.

**2. Regenerative Farming** is the way of the future and an answer to sustaining the world's growing population. By taking care of soils first and minimizing the overall impact on the land, regenerative methods have proven to be more productive than conventional methods. Rushton Farm is a leading model of environmentally responsible farming methods that create and enhance habitat for native wildlife and pollinators while growing healthy food for the community.

**4. Healthy Habitat** begins in your own backyard. The Trust has implemented several small-scale habitat restoration projects over the years, which serve as demos for landowners interested in supporting healthy habitat. For example: native wildflower meadows have been established to support native insects; stream sides have been planted with native trees for erosion control; and native shrub habitats have been planted to support migratory birds.



## OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEENS



### Looking to stay involved beyond RNK?

Opportunities exist on a case-by-case basis for children 12 and up to get involved. These include service at the farm, working at the bird banding station, helping with watershed study activities, participating in bird counts and stream cleanups, internships or other projects agreed upon with Willistown Conservation Trust staff. Contact Blake Goll (bhg@wctrust.org) for more info.

*Photo: Eva Dillon-Rutledge began as a Jr. Birding Club member years ago and then volunteered at the bird banding station. She has also volunteered for our Bird Box Program, participated in NJ Audubon's World Series of Birding, and recently attended PA's Wildlife Leadership Academy.*



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# 2026 RUSHTON NATURE KEEPERS EVENTS

## DISCOVER WILD RUSHTON

Monday, June 15 | 9:00 am-12:00 pm

Rushton Conservation Center

Welcome to Rushton Nature Keepers and summer! For our kick-off event, we'll get to know each other while exploring the woods and fields of Rushton Woods Preserve. We will learn about some of the actions we take here to study and help birds and wildlife while growing food sustainably for people. We'll also learn the basics of keeping a nature journal! In addition, we'll explore the bustle of insect life that exists in the wild meadows and on the blooming milkweed that borders the farm fields.

## DIVERSITY OF BIRDS

Tuesday, June 16 | 9:00 am-12:00 pm

Rushton Woods Preserve & Farm

Discover how preserved land like Rushton helps provide habitat for a variety of bird species throughout the seasons. Nature Keepers will get a private sneak peek at our summer breeding bird banding station nestled in the heart of the forest where they'll see wild songbirds up close and meet field scientists. We'll monitor our bluebird boxes and learn what type of insect-rich habitat baby birds like best after leaving their nest. We'll even have a special visit from live birds of prey from Indian Run Environmental Education Center!

## LEAF PACKS AND STREAM LIFE

Wednesday, June 17 | 9:00 am-12:00 pm

Ashbridge Preserve

Explore Ridley Creek at our wetland preserve with our watershed specialists while learning about the basics of stream ecology. We will investigate macroinvertebrates that call the stream bed home and discover what these aquatic insects reveal about stream health. Using "leaf packs", we will study food webs, invasive species, and how terrestrial and aquatic habitats are linked. Wear shoes that can go in the water!

## FARMING WITH NATURE AND HONEYBEES

Thursday, June 18 | 9:00 am-12:00 pm

Rushton Conservation Center

Let's help out on the farm! But this isn't just any farm; it is regenerative, meaning it complements the surrounding ecosystem by providing healthy, chemical-free habitat for many living things while conserving water and healthy soil (which helps fight climate change). We'll discover a diversity of insects and birds while working in the field and learn about how this farm functions harmoniously within the surrounding landscape. We'll also get to meet Rushton Farm Field Manager Noah and his honeybees who will provide us with yummy honey to taste! (We'll learn that it's actually the native bumblebees that do more heavy lifting in pollinating the crops.)

## INTO THE FOREST

Friday, June 19 | 9:00 am-12:00 pm

Rushton Woods Preserve and Farm

Ignite your sense of wonder and awe as we ground ourselves in the beauty of the forest. We'll practice mindful connection to nature through tree hugging and forest bathing (no bathing suits required!). We will explore the woods for fungi in a mushroom scavenger hunt with The Philadelphia Mycology Club! We'll also monitor our farm bird boxes and witness the banding of any Purple Martin chicks from our martin hotel.

## FAMILY\*: FIREFLY AND MOTH PARTY WITH ACADEMY OF NATURAL SCIENCES

June TBD | 7:30-9:30 pm

Rushton Conservation Center

Enjoy a summer evening at Rushton observing and learning about one of our best-loved insects, the firefly! We will discover what sets them apart from other beetles, the intricacies of firefly light shows, and how to help vulnerable nocturnal insects in your backyard.

We'll also explore the fascinating nocturnal insect world with entomologists from the Academy of Natural Sciences who will be surveying Rushton's population of moths, beetles, flies, crickets, and more with mercury vapor lights set against white sheets.

## WILDFLOWERS AND WATERCOLOR WORKSHOP

Wednesday, July 29 | 4:00-6:00 pm

Willistown Conservation Trust Headquarters

Explore the Trust's spectacular wildflower meadow and paint with watercolors in the fresh air! We'll identify different native flower species, discover pollination, and learn about the importance of native plants for pollinators and other insects. Leave with an understanding of what you can do in your own yard to support these important declining insects and the food webs they support.

## SUMMER HARVEST

Wednesday, August 12 | 9:00-11:30 am

Rushton Woods Preserve and Farm

Spend a morning at Rushton helping the farmers harvest the bounty of the season, like garlic and tomatoes! Then we'll meander into the woodlands for some creative fun making forest art, gnome homes, and toad abodes. The flower cutting garden will also be in full bloom, so we'll create personal bouquets to take home.

## FALL SONGBIRD BANDING

Saturday, September 5 | 8:00-10:00 am

Rushton Woods Preserve and Farm

Observe the science of bird banding, meet field biologists, and see beautiful migrant birds up close. Nature Keepers will get to "practice their banding skills" at a demo net and learn about the mysteries of migration. Sanctuaries such as Rushton are integral to the survival of migratory birds as they journey hundreds of miles from breeding to overwintering grounds.

## MONSTER NIGHT AND AUTUMN HAYRIDES

Tuesday, October 20 | 4:30-6:30 pm

Rushton Conservation Center

Observe spooky little stream creatures projected from a microscope onto a screen to MONSTER size! Learn all about which fish are native and which are invasive (the real monsters!) and how invasive species compete with natives for limited resources. Get creative designing your own stream bug, and take an autumn hayride through the farm fields at sunset!

## NORTHERN SAW-WHET OWL BANDING

Friday, November 6 | 6:00-8:00 pm

Rushton Conservation Center

Observe Northern Saw-whet Owl banding and experience an autumn evening on the farm! These tiny owls (no bigger than a soda can) travel through Pennsylvania in the fall in search of ideal overwintering habitat. Learn all about their ecology and conservation from our field scientists, and (hopefully) see an owl up-close.

## RUSHTON JUNIOR NATURALIST CELEBRATION




Friday, November 13 | 4:30-6:30 pm

Rushton Conservation Center

All Nature Keepers are invited to this special celebration. Those who have attended enough events within each of the four themes as designated by the icons on the schedule (for a total of 8) will be awarded the Rushton Junior Naturalist certificate. Following a final challenge activity, there will be a fun awards ceremony with prizes and pizza!

*\*FAMILY events are OPEN EVENTS and not exclusive to Rushton Nature Keepers, so feel free to bring your family or a friend. Free for Rushton Nature Keepers, but there may be a registration cost for non RNK members.*

### PROGRAM KEY

-  Birds and Wildlife
-  Regenerative Farming
-  Watersheds
-  Healthy Habitat

### ADDRESSES

- Willistown Conservation Trust Headquarters (WCT)**  
925 Providence Road  
Newtown Square
- Rushton Conservation Center (RCC)**  
915 Delchester Road  
Newtown Square
- Rushton Woods Preserve and Farm**  
911 Delchester Road, Newtown Square
- Ashbridge Preserve**  
1691 E. Strasburg Road  
West Chester
- Kirkwood Preserve**  
855 Grubbs Mill Road  
Newtown Square

### NEWSLETTERS

Visit the Rushton Nature Keepers webpage for updates!



Sign up for our general *Meadowlark Newsletter* or *A Bird's Eye View of Rushton Newsletter* that updates you on spring and fall bird migration!

