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Local Bird Watchers Bring 100 Years of History into the Future

Tinicum, Pennsylvania (November 30, 2010) – The Fledging Birders Institute and the Friends of the Heinz Refuge announced their joint effort for the upcoming “Winter Bird Count for Kids” (WBC4Kids) event to be held on January 8, 2011 at the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge in Tinicum, Pennsylvania. The free bird watching event for children, ages 8 to 16, will run from 8:30 am to 1pm.

Inspired by the century old tradition of the Christmas Bird Count, this WBC4Kids will be the first such youth-oriented event in the Delaware Valley. Young participants will explore Heinz NWR in search of various birds that reside here during the winter months. “People know that many birds fly south for the winter however very few people realize that our area is that southern destination for many species from further north,” says Dave Magpiong, president of the Fledging Birders Institute.

A natural oasis within an urban area, the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge at Tinicum is an ideal setting for the public to discover the beauty of nature close to home. Debbie Beer, Friends of Heinz Refuge board member, points out that the refuge “provides critical food and shelter resources for a great variety of birds.” She further explains that “over 1200 acres of wetland, woodlands, fields, creek and open water impoundment hosts such exciting species as Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Brown Creeper, Rusty Blackbirds, Ruby-crowned and Golden-crowned Kinglets, myriad waterfowl, hawks, Great Horned Owls, and even the first nesting pair of Bald Eagles in the history of the refuge!”

The WBC4Kids event on January 8th will start at the Heinz NWR’s Cusano Environmental Education Center (CEEC) with a brief orientation of the common local birds before the small groups embark on their discovery trips through the refuge with experienced bird trip leaders. Beer notes, “well-marked trails and boardwalks make it easy to explore and view different areas of the refuge.” The program will return to the CEEC for a celebratory luncheon at which the young participants will share their groups’ sightings with their new birding friends. The event will close with a bird of prey presentation featuring live hawks and owls from the Schuylkill Center for Environmental Education!

The Christmas Bird Census was started by Frank Chapman in 1900. In the 110 years since, the Christmas Bird Count (CBC) has become a core tradition of the birding community and contributed a wealth of scientific data regarding to bird populations and distribution during the winter season. The first CBC for Kids was pioneered by Tom Rusert and Darren Petrie of Sonoma Valley, California in 2007.

Magpiong points out that “bird watching holds profound benefits for kids – including cognitive development, social activity, and stress relief.” Parents can visit www.fledgingbirders.org/events.html to register their child for the WBC4Kids event. Early registration is suggested as the number of available spots will be limited. “We are thrilled to host a Winter Bird Count for Kids here at Heinz,” concludes Beer who leads regular bird walks at the refuge.

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Heinz NWR: Natural oasis in the shadow of Philadelphia



Watching Tree Swallows, Great Egrets, and Great Blue Herons at Heinz NWR



Young lady observes shorebirds and turtles from the trails of Heinz NWR