



LEEPfrog



The Newsletter of the
Lutherlyn Environmental Education Program

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Mink at Lutherlyn by Todd Garcia-Bish

Early one morning in mid-November, a mink crossed Dick Road to get onto Lutherlyn property. The previous November, another mink was spotted at Miller (Upper) Lake. These secretive animals are rarely seen, but they are not uncommon. In fact, in some recent years Pennsylvania hunters and trappers have taken over 14,000 mink. Still, it was surprising to find out that these animals call Lutherlyn home.

Mink are about the size of a small house cat, but thinner. They have a long bushy tail that is about 8 inches long and short legs. Adult mink weigh between 1 and 2.5 pounds. Their fur is very soft and dark brown. They often have a white spot on their chin and sometimes the white fur continues down their neck.

Since they often spend time swimming, they have an oily underfur with coarser long hairs over the top.

The quality of their fur has led to a huge market for mink coats. It takes 50 to 60 mink pelts to make one

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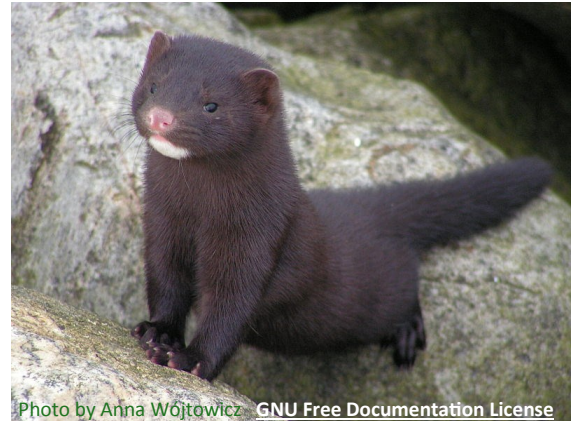


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Program Highlight: LEEP Into School and Virtual Options

LEEP is offering field trips this spring, but we know that may not be a possibility for everyone. We are doing our best to offer a variety of options to bring nature into the classroom, both physically and virtually.

Our LEEP into School program is designed to bring nature activities into elementary classrooms and school yards. We can tailor these programs to the outdoor resources that each school has. We have taught some students about insects as they catch them on their playgrounds. Some students have been fortunate enough to have a trail near their school that could be used for a sensory hike. For schools without many natural resources, we bring along animals from our Discovery Room to help students learn about adaptations or strategies for surviving winter.

The LEEP staff is also available to interact with students through virtual classroom platforms. This often occurs in conjunction with the students viewing one of the videos that we have created. The personal interaction with our staff is a great way to answer students' questions and pique their curiosity.

To learn more about these options, please contact the LEEP staff.



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coat. The desire for pelt uniformity has led to the animals being raised on farms where their food and conditions can be standardized. In 2019, American mink farms produced 2.7 million pelts totaling \$59,000,000. (Unfortunately, farm-raised mink are susceptible to the coronavirus (SARS-CoV-2) and millions were killed in Denmark this fall. Utah mink farms had outbreaks of the virus early in the fall and the US Department of Agriculture has found one wild mink that picked up the virus near one of the farms. So far, there has only been this one case of a wild mink having the virus.)

Wild mink have a varied diet and move between several different types of ecosystems. They are opportunistic and will eat the easiest prey available. In the summer, that may be fish, frogs, crayfish, snakes, or birds. In the winter, they may turn to small mammals, rabbits, and muskrats for food. Many of these prey are found along streams, lakes, and rivers, but mink also prefer wetlands and bottomland hardwood forests.

These types of ecosystems are found in abundance at Lutherlyn. Many of the prey that mink prefer are also found here. Really, it should not be surprising at all that mink live at Lutherlyn – this is mink habitat!



Notes from the Naturalists by Holly Schubert



Walkingsticks and thread-legged bugs are delightful masters of camouflage that are a treat to see in nature. The thread-legged bug is often thought to be a baby walkingstick. However, though they look very similar they are not related, beyond both being insects.

The walkingstick is the larger and thicker of the two. Thread-legged bugs are smaller and very thin and delicate. In these photos the walkingstick is about 4 inches long (not including antennae) and the thread-legged bug is about 2 inches long. These are typical sizes for each of these insects.

Another major difference between the two is that walkingsticks are herbivores who eat mostly the leaves of plants, while thread-legged bugs are members of the assassin bug family and are carnivores, eating mostly other insects. Both insects, however, make use of their long spindly body and limbs to camouflage themselves on tree branches. While both extend their front legs in a way that sometimes makes it difficult to recognize them as legs, the thread-legged bug uses the front legs to grasp, mantis-like, in a way that walkingsticks rarely do. It is not uncommon to see thread-legged bugs on school field trips, especially in the early fall.

Both of these insects were past “What is it Wednesday” features. Each Wednesday morning on Camp Lutherlyn's Facebook page LEEP posts a photo. Readers have all day to guess what the photo is, and around 6 pm LEEP provides the answer and a brief explanation. Each week's “What is it Wednesday” post is also posted on the Nature of Lutherlyn blog after it is posted on Facebook, sometimes with additional bonus information. Like and follow Camp Lutherlyn on Facebook to see “What is it Wednesday” posts when they come out, or check out our blog, The Nature of Lutherlyn at <https://lutherlynnature.blogspot.com/>.





Terra Dei Homestead: Gardening Through the Pandemic by Holly Schubert

In a normal summer the gardens at Terra Dei Homestead are bustling with groups of campers every day, learning about the garden, tasting the delight of vegetables fresh from the earth, and helping to care for the plants that supplement the dining hall's meals. Throughout the summer the Terra Dei gardens supply the dining hall with vegetables like lettuce and other greens, zucchini, cucumbers, green beans, and potatoes. Garlic, onions, peppers and herbs enhance campfire meals, and sweet peas, carrots, blueberries, and raspberries are so popular they are devoured on the spot in the garden. Later produce like tomatoes and squash are used with fall retreat groups.

Then came the coronavirus pandemic. Summer camp 2020 was cancelled, and there would be no campers in the garden or dining hall. Some parts of the garden were planted before we knew what our decision would be regarding summer camp. Once we knew we would not be able to welcome summer campers, we decided to continue to grow the garden with the same amount and variety of vegetables as in other years. The produce was donated to Katie's Kitchen, one of many ministries in Butler which hosts weekly dinners for people in need. In addition to being able to share produce with people in need, keeping the garden going throughout the summer allowed us to create regular gardening videos to share with our Lutherlyn family throughout the summer.

One set of videos was produced for Lutherlyn's virtual summer camp 2020. Each day of virtual camp included a visit to Terra Dei with a lesson about how and why we care for the earth at Terra Dei, and a close-up look at an in-progress garden project. We also posted weekly garden updates throughout the summer on Facebook. These turned out to be very popular ways for people to follow along with the garden's progress throughout the summer, learning tips that they can use in their own gardening at home.



Nothing quite replaces visiting the garden in person, getting your hands in the soil, and tasting fresher-than-fresh veggies right off the vine. But these videos made it possible for even more people to see the garden, and in more stages of development, than ever before. During the pandemic, more and more people have been discovering the satisfaction of gardening. We are grateful that we have had the opportunity to be a part of that and share the Terra Dei gardens with a wider audience in 2020. We already have our seeds ordered for this summer and are looking forward to welcoming in-person visitors back to the garden in 2021!



Contact us: Lutherlyn Environmental Education Program, Box 355, Prospect, PA 16052

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Register now for summer camp
at Lutherlyn!

www.lutherlyn.com/summer



Share this newsletter with a friend!

Earthcare Corner: The Problem with Plastic by Todd Garcia-Bish

Plastics are everywhere. They are in our lunches, our toys, our homes, our vehicles, and even our bodies. It is estimated that 6.3 billion metric tons of plastic were generated between 1950 and 2015. If trends continue, this number will nearly double by 2050. Of all of that plastic, only 9% is recycled! The rest ends up in landfills, our air, and our water.

None of the commonly used plastics are biodegradable. They break up into smaller and smaller pieces over time; they do not break down. As they get smaller, they can end up in more and more places. These microplastics end up everywhere – in your body, in animals, at the bottom of the ocean, on mountain peaks.

Plastic causes significant impacts on wildlife. Microplastics that are eaten by wildlife can cause fatal intestinal blockages. Recent studies have found plastics in the stomachs of 90% of seabirds and 100% of sea turtles. It is estimated that by 2050 there will be more plastics by weight in the ocean than fish.

Plastic production contributes to greenhouse gas emissions at every point along the supply chain. Extracting the oil and gas needed to create the plastic produces methane leaks. Refineries, where oil is converted to the raw materials to create plastics, are one of the top greenhouse gas producers. The same is true of “cracker plants” where natural gas is turned into plastic building blocks. Each one of these plants releases as much carbon in a day as is released cumulatively in a year by 434 cars.



Photo by Jasmin Sessler, CC BY 4.0

So, here's what we can do:

- Pack reusable shopping bags so you always have them.
- Pack reusable cutlery and straws.
- Take your own reusable containers for take-out.
- Don't buy products with lots of packaging
- Buy in bulk.
- Use a water bottle or cup, avoid single-use bottles.
- Buy products made from ocean plastic:

<https://www.businessinsider.com/companies-that-use-recycled-ocean-plastic-in-products>



LEEP Public Programs

Saturday Safaris

Lutherlyn Saturday Safaris are a great way to spend part of a Saturday! They are designed for groups and families and all of the programs involve outdoor adventures. Please visit our website (www.lutherlyn.com/safari) or contact the LEEP office for more information or to register.

- **May 1, 2021** - Wild Flowers and Wild Edibles
- **September 11, 2021** - Stream and Pond Critters
- **November 6, 2021** - Archaeology and the Venango Trail
- **February 5, 2022** - Animal Tracking
- **March 5, 2022** - Maple Syrup Time

