

1-2008

## Gordie News, January 2008

West Chester University of Pennsylvania

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# GORDIE NEWS

(January 2008) 2:1

Erika Szonntag, editor

Gordon Natural Area for Environmental Studies

West Chester University of Pennsylvania

(A Certified Wildlife Habitat by the National Wildlife Federation)



## Special Announcements & Dates-

**January 29, 2008 – Sustainability Across the Campus Green Festival**

**February 20, 2008 – Speaker Richard Louv on “Nature Deficit Disorder”**

**Next Workday: Saturday, May 3, 2008 – Great Garlic Mustard Pull #2**

**Help save postage: If you have an E-mail we can add you to the Friends of the Gordon Natural Area mailing list. You will be notified of the latest Gordie News (<http://darwin.wcupa.edu/gordon/>) and other activities**

**Contact Erika Szonntag with feedback or ideas for articles at [es631042@wcupa.edu](mailto:es631042@wcupa.edu)**

## :: What's New? ::

### A Tribute to Robert Benson Gordon

Robert Benson Gordon, born on 23 July 1901, was the Professor Emeritus of Science at West Chester University in 1964 and after whom West Chester University's Gordon Natural Area is named.

He was a most accomplished man of science, and his career as a college professor began right here at WCU. He earned his Bachelor of Science in Applied Optics in 1922, Master of Science in Botany in 1928, and PhD. in Botany in 1931 from Ohio State University. Between 1922 and 1924 he practiced optometry, but soon found that his true passions lied in more biological pursuits. For most of his career, he taught general biology, plant ecology, and conservation at various colleges and universities. His accomplishments include:

- Beginning his career as a college professor at WCU in 1938, becoming Head of the Department of Science in 1944, and becoming Professor Emeritus of Science in 1964
- During the summers, taught at Franz Theodore Stone Laboratory of OSU from 1946-47 and 1950; Audubon Nature Center in Greenwich, CT from 1948-49, and the New Jersey School of Conservation, Stokes State Forest (1951-52)
- Member of teaching staff at the Arboretum of the Barnes Foundation in Merion, PA
- Professor and Head of Biology Dept. at Cabrini College, Radnor, PA from 1963-64
- Instructor of Horticulture Science at Longwood Foundation, Kennett Square, PA from 1968-69 and 1971.

- Research Associate with Ohio Biological Survey at OSU during the summers of 1964-67 and 1973-74

Though his interests were many, he specialized in the “mapping and understanding of natural vegetation of the northeastern United States” (Ohio J. Sci.) in relation to planning for land use, and entitled his dissertation “The Primary Forest Types of the East Central States” (1931).

His hallmark contribution was an “eight colored, comprehensive map” (Ohio J. Sci.) entitled “Natural Vegetation of Ohio at the Time of the Earliest Land Surveys”, published by the Ohio Biological Survey in 1966. The map was “the first of its kind in scope and methodology prepared for any state in the U.S.” (Ohio J. Sci.) and was very well received. He also contributed a bulletin entitled “The Natural Vegetation of Ohio in Pioneer Days” to the Ohio Biological Survey in 1969. It is known that “these two contributions on Ohio’s original vegetation was his greatest research love.” (Ohio J. Sci.)

Thus, West Chester University dedicated the 67 acre woodland on south campus in 1973 to Dr. Gordon in honor and recognition of all his vast efforts and accomplishments in biological conservation and beyond.

*Information courtesy of: The Ohio Journal of Science. v81, n4 (July, 1981), 187-192.*

Dr. Gordon passed on 11 February 1981. Below are some thoughts and sentiments from his daughter Virginia and son Robert.

*Reflections of my father, Dr. Robert B. Gordon*

By Virginia Gordon Hatch

31 December 2007

My first thoughts of Dad were of his kindness and dedication to family, teaching, the church and community. A quote from a former student’s letter to him in May 1963 reads: “Most of all, however, we were and are deeply appreciative of your dedication to our welfare and our growth as teaching biologists.”

I remember as a family going on the Christmas bird census with the West Chester Bird Club and then a pot luck supper and meeting sometimes at our home. I remember going to the lab at Christmas vacation to water plants or check on things.

The summer of 1940 or 41 we drove to the Grand Canyon, some of the national parks, Yellowstone, Bryce Canyon, Salt Lake City, and saw the Pueblo and Hopi Indian homes, stopping in Columbus to see family before and after. Summers he often had positions elsewhere and the family would go together. Several summers were at an Ohio State Biological Station at Put-in-Bay Island in Lake Erie in the 1940s. In 1949 or 1950 we were at an Audubon site in Greenwich, Connecticut where teachers took one or two week courses on the ecology of woods, lakes, farms, and the tidewaters. Because there were evening activities such as films of the dust bowl, strip mining and resultant flooding or singing and camp stories, I saw him to be humorous in story telling.

He was well rounded in his interests. We attended college plays, music programs, saw museums and art. He had a workbench in the basement and did household repairs and constructed a train platform for my brother. We had a victory garden off north High Street during the war and in the back yard. Soldiers away from home sometimes shared holiday dinners. I remember him canvas sassing for the Community Chest.

*Remarks added by son Robert L. Gordon, 15 January 2008*

I think Virginia touched on a lot of the family remembrances, so I will just add those things that come to mind about his love of his profession.

When I was on field trips with him, and even around my yard, he would tell you both the common name and the Latin name, and the family name of the species. For him, this was the proper way to know a plant.

I think he was most happy the day he discovered a plant that was not classified, or known, and I think he had that one submitted to the scientific journals and then named after him.

One of the cleverest things I think he was responsible for was a guide to finding out what kind of tree you were looking at. You worked your way down, from general observations, like rough or smooth bark, alternating branches or not, and so forth, until you got to the leaves. By then, the tree was identified, or you had one of two choices, and he helped you pick the right one. Another project done after he retired was a very detailed colored map of Ohio showing the entire native flora before it was changed by farming and development, done by using information and notes from the original scouts, surveyors' and courthouse records.

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## **Visitors to the Gordon Natural Area**



On Friday December 28, Cindy Pistritto (Physics) and her three children took a hike down to the Gordon to do some cleaning up. They spent about a half hour near the entrance to the GNA picking up trash, volunteering their time in accordance with her son Matthew's service project for his Confirmation in March at St. Agnes Church. Matthew (11) is in the red coat along with siblings Katie and Daniel (8 years old and twins). Many thanks to the Pistritto family for their time and efforts!



## :: Scientific Abstract of the Month ::

(barberry is common in the GNA and is a serious problem on the floodplain south of Tigue Rd and west of new St)

### WINDOWS OF OPPORTUNITY: HISTORICAL AND ECOLOGICAL CONTROLS ON *BERBERIS THUNBERGII* INVASIONS

Brian G. DeGasperis<sup>1</sup> and Glenn Motzkin

Harvard Forest, Harvard University, Petersham, Massachusetts

Attempts to determine characteristics that render habitats invulnerable to nonnative species have been met with limited success. This may be because most studies focus on modern habitat



conditions and do not consider invasibility in the context of a historically dynamic landscape in which both the abundance of a species and the invasibility of a site may change. We surveyed 159 currently forested sites for the occurrence and abundance of *Berberis thunbergii* (Japanese barberry), an invasive, nonnative shrub in forests of the northeastern United States, relative to modern environmental conditions, contemporary logging activity, and two periods of historical land use. *B. thunbergii* occurred more frequently and was more abundant in post-agricultural forests than in continuously wooded sites. This relationship was stronger for agricultural sites that were abandoned and reforested after *B. thunbergii* was introduced to the region than for sites that reforested prior to *B.*

*thunbergii* introduction. In contrast, recent forest harvesting did not influence the occurrence or abundance of **B. thunbergii**. Modern soil fertility explained a significant portion of the variation in *B. thunbergii* occurrence, whereas site history considerably improved predictions of population density and helped evaluate potential invasion mechanisms. While land-use history co-varies with soil fertility and distance to putative seed sources, the strong relationship between modern abundance patterns and historical agriculture suggests that *B. thunbergii* colonized recently abandoned agricultural lands in the early 20th century and then persisted and spread locally during subsequent reforestation. Our results indicate that interpretations of both native community composition and modern plant invasions must consider the importance of historical landscape changes and the timing of species introduction along with current environmental conditions.

**Keywords:** *Berberis thunbergii*; disturbance; forest harvesting; habitat invasibility; invasive plant species; land-use history; logging; propagule availability; Quabbin Reservoir Reservation Ecology. 2008, 88 (12).

Article: pp. 3115–3125

Photo-Rachel Stern holding barberry plant “pulled” up in the GNA floodplain

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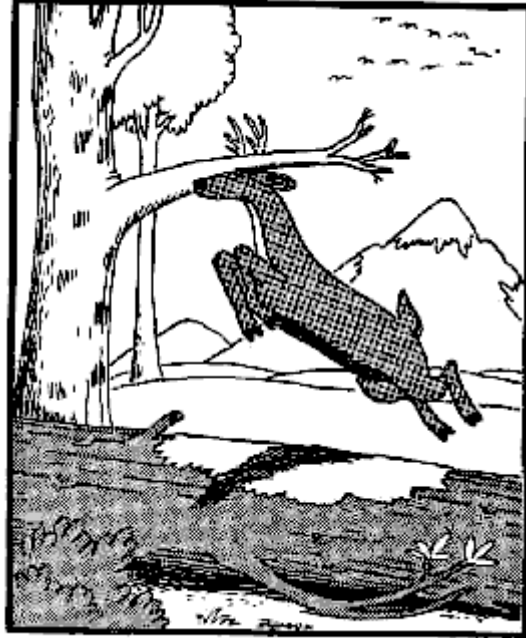


## “Let’s Discuss Deer”

The word “deer” is synonymous with Chester County, and there is no doubt that you as a resident have had your own various experiences with them. Concerning the GNA, the large deer populations have damaged or eliminated all but American beech and white ash tree populations, as well as many native plants from the forest’s understory (reducing our biodiversity). Two invasive tree species, the tree-of-heaven and Norway maple, do not appeal to deer and have spread significantly throughout the GNA. The deer population must be managed to a lower population level.

We would like to look at options for reducing the deer populations in the GNA, beginning with meetings this summer. The goal is to have a plan of action in place by July 2009. Please contact Gerry Hertel with any suggestions or ideas. We will be contacting each neighbor directly

From “The Far Side” by Gary Larsen



Nature scenes we rarely see

## SUSTAINABILITY ACROSS THE CAMPUS GREEN FESTIVAL

Tuesday, January 29, 2008

Sykes Student Union, 1pm-6:30pm

The Green Festival is a *fun* and *free* student-organized event and its mission is to provide the West Chester community easy access to information about local environmental issues, including:

On-Campus Environmental Groups  
Local Sustainability Efforts  
Local “Green” Businesses

The Green Festival will feature musical guests Gillian Grassie and Cheers Elephant. The event is intended to increase community involvement in and awareness of local environmental concerns



## ***“350 is the number every person needs to know”***

What significance does the number 350 hold, exactly? 350 is the maximum parts per million – or ppm – of carbon dioxide that the atmosphere can hold in order for earth to sustain itself. We are currently at 383 ppm.

In a recently published article in the Washington Post<sup>2</sup>, author Bill McKibben presents some data from NASA scientist James Hansen. Hansen spoke at the American Geophysical Union conference about a month and a half ago in San Francisco, and offered some strikingly stark information about greenhouse gases and warming.

Hansen says that simply put, the earth can only handle 350 ppm carbon dioxide in the upper atmosphere. He had “reams of paleo-climatic data” (McKibben) to prove his point, and was at the forefront trying to halt global warming before it began some 20 years ago.

Let’s put this number into perspective: since the pre-Industrial Revolution, the concentration of CO<sub>2</sub> in the atmosphere was roughly 275 ppm. The number began to rise thereafter, and within the last few years scientists predicted that 450 ppm was the absolute cap. With arctic ice melting faster than any records have shown, and the Greenland ice sheet threatening to slip into the ocean, however, it has been determined that “we’ve aimed too high...” (Hansen) and that 350 seems to be the absolute maximum. This also means that we have to begin weaning ourselves of oil dependence immediately, so that excess CO<sub>2</sub> can clear itself out of the atmosphere as quickly as possible.

Hansen called for an immediate ban on new coal-fired power plants that don't capture carbon, the phase-out of old coal-fired generators, and a tax on carbon high enough to make sure that we leave tar sands and oil shale in the ground. (McKibben)

It isn't too late, but changes must be made now. 350 ppm is the magic number.

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### ***:: Check Out These Websites ::***

#### **Your State and Global Warming**

[www.nwf.org/globalwarming](http://www.nwf.org/globalwarming)

See how Pennsylvania – and any other state – is being affected by global warming. User friendly fact sheets on the National Wildlife Federation’s homepage include pictures and succinct data on species, how global warming is and will affect these species and ecosystems, what is being done right now, etc. Log on to the URL above, and then in the right hand column click on “Global Warming in Your State Fact Sheets.”



<sup>2</sup> McKibben, Bill. "Remember This: 350 Parts Per Million." Washington Post 28 Dec. 2007, sec. A: 21.

## World Ecology Report

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

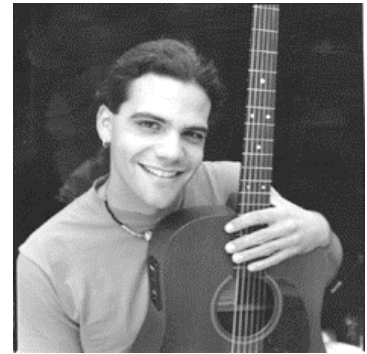


The World Ecology Report, brought to you by World Information Transfer, is a “quarterly digest” that informs readers “of critical issues in health and environment.” The non-profit organization, WIT, aims to educate people about the many facets of human-environment interaction, how it affects our health, and how we can apply information to improve our world today. The site includes reports dating back every quarter of a year to 1989.

## Eco Tunes

[www.loe.org/shows](http://www.loe.org/shows)

Living on Earth is a weekly environmental radio program “distributed by Public Radio International.” While about 300 public radio stations broadcast Living on Earth’s eclectic programs of “ecological content” each week, its interviews, podcasts, music, and more can all be downloaded on its website. For feature shows, go to the link above and choose an archive year; you can the browse songs recorded during that year from various months. Artist Joe Reilly was most recently featured, on 4 January 2008, with an interview about his “eco-tunes” – songs which he records with children about the earth and sustainability. Check out his and other artists’ music from this and past months.



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## Billion Tree Campaign

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) has launched a campaign to plant trees all over the world. The Gordon Natural Area has pledged 100 trees thus far. World target-pledged-planted/the Gordon Natural Area

Target



2,700,000,000/100

Pledged

2,134,349,170/100

Planted

1,648,623,183/96



Visit <http://www.unep.org/billiontreecampaign/>

**GNA Supporters:**

2004: Presidential Initiative (WCU); Environmental Council (WCU); USDA Forest Service; Henderson High School Environmental Club; Friends of the Gordon Area

2005: Wegman's; Yellow Springs Farm Native Plant Nursery; Environmental Council; Henderson High School Environmental Club; Friends of the Gordon Area

2006: Yellow Springs Farm Native Plant Nursery; Valero Energy Corporation; National Wildlife Federation; Henderson High School Environmental Club; Friends of the Gordon Area; WCU

2007: Pennsylvania Department of Natural Resources; WCU Alumni Association; Darlington Biological Society; MENTA Café; Yellow Springs Farm Native Plant Nursery; WCU  
2008:

Contact: [ghertel@wcupa.edu](mailto:ghertel@wcupa.edu); 610-436-2722; 484-883-3371

**NO TRAIL BIKES ARE ALLOWED IN THE GNA** – They have increased the length of trails by 300% and are impacting the biodiversity in the GNA.

**DOGS NEED TO BE LEASHED** – Students doing laboratory assignments have been attacked by unleashed dogs.

**WCU Public Safety:** 610-436-3311

