



400 Learn About Area's Ecology, History, Culture at Pinelands Short Course at Stockton

March 8 Event at College Co-Sponsored by N.J. Pinelands Commission

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Galloway Township, NJ- South Jersey's Pinelands National Reserve is home to unique people, plants and animals, and contains aquifers that are the source of fresh water for the region. The 25th annual Pinelands Short Course at The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey **today** featured 36 presentations by experts illuminating the Pinelands' culture, history and ecology.

The daylong event drew 400 people to hear experts on topics such as the southern pine beetle, climate change in forest ecosystems, wildlife habitat restoration, native bees and other insects of the Pinelands, the Jersey Devil, butterflies and moths of the Pinelands, owls of New Jersey, the Pine Barrens Byway, the Kirkwood-Cohansey Aquifer system and the Bass River State Forest.

Experts hailed from Stockton College, the New Jersey Pinelands Commission, Dartmouth College and Kean University, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the state Park Service, the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, the Ocean County Cultural and Heritage Commission, along with hydrologists, historians, musicians and nature photographers.

"Stockton is distinctively suited to host this event, as our campus is in the Pinelands National Reserve and our Environmental Studies program is one of the oldest and best in the nation," said President Herman Saatkamp. "The college also protects and manages 1,500 acres of forestlands under New Jersey's first comprehensive forest management plan on public land."

"I think people feel an attachment to the Pinelands because it represents how things can be without all the noise and distractions of modern life," said Nancy Wittenberg, executive director of the Pinelands Commission, which co-sponsored the event with Stockton.

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Dr. Ron Hutchison, associate professor of Biology at Stockton, outlined how elevated levels of carbon dioxide (CO₂) in the atmosphere are affecting plants in the Pinelands, during a presentation titled, "Climate Change in Forested Ecosystems."

Earth's temperatures have fluctuated between warm and cold periods for 4.5 billion years, Dr. Hutchison said. But since 1880, studies show global surface temperatures have been rising as man has burned "a tremendous amount of fossil fuels," adding more CO₂ to the atmosphere than ever before.

Plants use CO₂ to grow, and the increased levels have also made them more able to conserve water, he said. But some plants won't be able to survive in the new higher temperatures, while others will invade the Pinelands from the south, Hutchison said.

Hutchison asked the class how to get more people interested in planting native Pinelands plants such as the curly grass fern and the beaked-rush - and conserving their habitat. Ideas ranged from asking chains such as Home Depot and Lowe's to stock the plants, to asking planning boards to encourage the use of native plants in new developments.

Theresa Lettman, director of monitoring programs for the Pinelands Preservation Alliance in Southamptton, Burlington County, said the PPA holds a native plant sale yearly, and now nurseries are growing the plants to meet the demand. This year's sale is April 27 from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Southamptton facility, she said.

Hutchison said if people don't lower emissions of CO₂, by 2090, the climate for people living in New York City will "feel like living in South Carolina" does now.

But this "is not an insurmountable problem," Hutchison said. Increasing use of solar, wind and water to power the planet could cut down or eventually eliminate the burning of fossil fuels and CO₂ emissions, he said.

"The barriers are social and political, not technical or economic," Hutchison said. Unlike fossil fuels, "the sun is always there, the wind is always there," he said.

"New Jersey is blessed with the offshore wind, which works well at night, and solar during the day. We really should push that," he said.

The Pinelands Preservation Alliance's Lettman, who lives in Manchester, Ocean County, said she has been attending the event for 21 years. "It gives me the opportunity to learn new things" and to interact with others who are interested in preserving the Pinelands, she said.

Dr. Jamie Cromartie, associate professor of Entomology at Stockton, brought two dozen participants to the college's ecology lab, which has served generations of students, to present "Native Bees and Other Pinelands Insects."

"Bees are basically wasps that switched from preying on animals to using pollen and nectar as a food source for larvae," Cromartie explained.

He compared a flower's need to attract pollinators to pizza shops at the shore competing to draw customers during the summer.

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A mini lesson in bee anatomy showed that pollen is transported by getting trapped on hairs, known as scopa, covering a bee's abdomen and/or hind legs.

Native bees collected from the surrounding region were pinned in display cases for observation. Green, blue and yellow-colored bees—some fuzzy, some shiny—ranged in size from tiny dots just larger than the heads of the pins to big bumblebees. Honeybees are actually not native to North America, so there weren't any queens to be seen.

"In the Pine Barrens things turn up that aren't well known," Cromartie said as he shared pictures of rare sightings.

To collect bees for pinning, Cromartie uses white, blue and yellow Dixie-cup sized plastic containers filled with a water and soap solution. He always uses blue Dawn dish detergent with the original scent. Prior to his presentation, he set out a trap line of the plastic cuts filled with soapy water. At the end of his lecture, he took the group outside to check the traps and learn which species are currently active on Stockton's campus.

Phil Levy, of Cedar Run in Ocean County, said, "I try to get here every year to keep learning." He is a recreation aide for Ocean County Parks and Recreation and has presented at the Short Course in the past. Now he hopes to take what he learns and "share it with the parks."

Stockton's Continuing Studies program helped organize the event, at which New Jersey educators could earn professional development credits through the state Department of Education.

The day included a field trip to the Edwin B. Forsythe Wildlife Refuge, which is near the college in Galloway.

Other presentations were held in Stockton's Campus Center and the new Unified Science Center, both of which were designed to reduce energy use and impacts on the environment.

The 154,000-square-foot Campus Center, which opened in May 2011, was awarded the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Gold Certification by the U.S. Green Building Council. The center uses 40 percent less water and 30 percent less energy than standard construction. The Campus Center includes an 8,000-square-foot event room, a theater, meeting rooms, a food court and offices.

The Unified Science Center, which opened in September 2013, is a three-story, 66,000-square-foot building adjacent to the Campus Center.

The Unified Science Center includes 11 research labs, six multipurpose classrooms for natural science and math programs, computer classrooms, labs for Life Science, Chemistry, Organic Chemistry, Analytical/Physical Chemistry, Genetics, Microbiology, and faculty offices. The building has been designed for energy efficiency in accordance with LEED guidelines.

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Photos - Please credit: Susan Allen/The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey