

Upper Deerfield Township

Environmental Commission

Otters Active in Upper Cohansey

Yes, we do have otters—but it's rare to see them. When you do, you'll usually see more than one: playfully splashing together along the water's edge, sliding down the muddy bank into the water, or swimming side-by-side. With streamlined bodies, a water-repellent coat, webbed feet and long tails, they glide swiftly through the water and can dive to the bottom of the lake and stay submerged for five or more minutes, using special flaps to close off their nostrils and ears. On land they can walk, run or slide. Although they are near-sighted, they have keen senses of smell and hearing.



Upper Deerfield's undisturbed habitat along the Upper Cohansey—commonly called the Northwest Passage—provides the otters with fresh water and plenty of catfish, sunfish, bass and carp, which they locate with the help of long stiff whiskers. They may even find freshwater mussels, one of their favorite foods, and they'll sometimes eat frogs, toads, salamanders, snakes and insects. The otter's streamlined shape—about 3 feet long—helps it slip through the water, either fresh or brackish, even at a mature weight of 18-25 pounds. With a life span of 8 or 9 years, they are family-oriented and very social, communicating with a combination of growling, snarling, barking, hissing, grunting, whistling, purring, snorting and scent-marking.

Both males and females reach sexual maturity at age 2 and when they reproduce in early spring, the litter is typically 2 or 3 furry, blind and toothless kits, each weighing about 5 ounces. Although the kits may enter the water at age 8 weeks, Mom and Dad feed them for about 9 months and they usually stick with the family until they're at least a year old. Otters do not hibernate but are active year-round, primarily at night, and their thick coat keeps them warm even in cold winter waters. The otter has few predators while in the water, but on land they're vulnerable to attacks by bobcats, coyotes, dogs and red foxes. Their highest mortality is due to illegal hunting or road kill. In New Jersey, otters may be legally hunted only by licensed trappers with a special permit.



ROADSIDE CLEANUP

Saturday, April 17

8 am-noon

Meet at

Municipal Building

Gloves and Bags Provided

Cicadas May Emerge Soon

Spent 17 Years Underground



The group of periodical cicadas called Brood X is due to emerge from underground sometime in May or June, when the soil temperature reaches about 64 degrees. New Jersey last saw Brood X, also known as the Great Eastern Brood, in 2004, and we may be one of 18 Eastern states to see them again this year. During the four to six weeks they're out, they'll mate and lay eggs in the stems of woody plants. Then the nymphs will hatch from the eggs and begin another 17-year cycle, feeding on underground roots, until emerging again in 2038.

Are they harmful? Well, you may want to hold your ears. When the males are looking for a mate, they make a shrill buzzing sound, quieting down at sunset. If there are large numbers of cicadas—there may be tens of billions this year—this buzzing sound could be as loud as a revved up motorcycle. Otherwise, they are mostly beneficial. They prune mature trees, aerate the soil, and once they die, their 2.5 inch bodies serve as an important source of nitrogen for growing trees. They're eaten by just about any critter that likes bugs—so please don't use insecticides. And you can eat them, too! Crunchy, gluten-free, high in protein, low in fat and carbs, they tend to take on the flavor of whatever they're cooked in. Saute in butter and dip into a tangy sauce—*bon appetit!*



Spotted Lanternfly Update

Spotted Lanternfly (SLF) nymphs (2) emerge from the egg masses (1) in early May and pass through several stages (3) before becoming adults (4). They feed on the sap of trees and plants, leaving behind a sticky liquid, called Honeydew, that gets moldy, cuts off sunlight, and kills the plant. Getting rid of them is tricky: most insecticides and traps will also kill honeybees, butterflies, birds and other desirable wildlife along with the SLF. Vigilance helps: scrape, squirt or blow them off the plant and into a container of water mixed with rubbing alcohol or vinegar. Smushing works: use fly swatters, wiffle-ball bats, salt guns or electric bug zappers. Remove Tree of Heaven, their favorite host. And plant some milkweed: it poisons SLF while helping the monarch butterfly survive. *(to be continued)*