

The Peacock Planet

Saint Peter's University Sustainability Council Newsletter

December 2020



([Rockefeller, the stowaway owl](#) found in the Norway Spruce taken to Rockefeller Center, all wrapped up in a sweater. Image: © Ravensbeard Wildlife Center)

Our Newsletter has a New Name

Thank you to everyone who submitted name ideas for the Sustainability Council's new newsletter. As you can see above, the winning entry was The Peacock Planet, submitted by EdD student Thomas MacNamara. (Thanks, Thomas!)

This edition of our newsletter contains much to inform and engage, including why New Jersey just passed the strongest bag ban in the country. You'll also find many interesting events as well as a great local hiking trail and a glowing Netflix documentary recommendation.

The upcoming holidays will likely be different than any that you have experienced before, due to pandemic restrictions, but it is our hope that you will find much joy in simple acts, in unexpected places, and in new traditions. Happy Holidays from all of us on the Sustainability Council!

December Events: Save the Date

- Thursday, December 3 at Noon: "[Keeping Culture Through Cuisine: Maintenance of Food Sovereignty for Immigrant Groups Contributes to Sustainable Food Systems in Jersey City](#)" Click on this Zoom link at the appointed time. a group discussion on holiday food will follow
 - Our presenter, Dr. Diana Chen received her PhD in Environmental Dynamics and a Graduate Certificate in Sustainability from the University of Arkansas. Her research interests include ethnobotany, food studies, agricultural history, ecological anthropology, and nutritional psychiatry.
- Sunday, December 6 at 8am: [Bird walk for beginners at the Lorrimer Sanctuary](#)
- Starting December 14 through January 5: [The Christmas Bird Count](#) needs your help in counting North American birds.
- Saturdays in December from 10am to 1pm: [Jersey City Neighborhood Cleanups](#). Click on the link to volunteer for one of these upcoming events:
 - Saturday, December 5: New York Ave (hill between the Heights and Hoboken)
 - Saturday, December 12: Corner of Summit Ave and Cornelison Ave (near Bergen-Lafayette and McGinley Square)
 - Saturday, December 19: Brunswick Street (downtown JC)
 - Saturday, January 9: underpass of Route 1-9 on Newark Ave (near Journal Square)
- Saturday, December 19 from 10am to 11:30am: **Winter Waterfowl Walk at Liberty State Park**. Come to learn more about this important destination for migrating winter waterfowl. Meet at the Park office, located at 200 Morris Pesin Drive.
- **Enjoy your Christmas break!**

Monthly Challenge: **Trash Audit: Take a closer look at your trash to reduce waste**



Did you know that just by examining your trash you could make a difference? You can! Doing a trash audit helps you see what you are both purchasing and throwing away. This is a good first step in reducing waste and helping you make better environment conscious decisions in what you purchase. Your challenge for this month is to take a trash audit. Check out the websites below to get started.

- www.goingzerowaste.com/blog/how-to-perform-a-trash-audit/
- www.thezerowastecollective.com/how-to-conduct-a-trash-audit
- Alternatively, click to learn what a [Personal Trash Inventory \(PTI\)](#) actually is, and a [PTI Step-By-Step Guide to Get Started](#).

Advocate for a new Park: **The Essex-Hudson Greenway**

The [Essex-Hudson Greenway](#) is a linear park proposed along an 8.6 mile stretch of unused rail line stretching from Jersey City to Montclair. The freeholders and county executives in both Hudson and Essex have expressed support for the Greenway, but public support from the community will help move this project along. Please consider signing [the digital letter link here](#).

Our Favorite Hikes: **Hemlock Falls**

by Marybeth Duong, Class of 2021



Everyone's been on a boring walk around the park! But how about one that leads you to a waterfall? [Hemlock Falls located in Essex County](#) is one of my favorites! It's also only 26 minutes away from campus! This scenic and well-marked trail is perfect for hiking, jogging, running, and walking! There is no worry about getting lost because there is a map available near the entrance and online. While on the path, there are several "fairy houses" made of natural

materials. The trail is not difficult at all. It is fantastic for beginners and a fun activity to do with your friends and family!

What We're Reading & Watching

Here are some articles that Council Members found most intriguing lately:

- [New Atlantic Marine Sanctuary Will Be One of World's Largest](#)
- [Good News for Blue Whales](#)
- [It's Way Too Hot in the Arctic Right now](#)
- Dr. Twersky highly recommends this recording of a webinar on [First Nations: Ethical Landscapes, Sacred Plants](#), sponsored recently by the New York Botanical Gardens.
- [A virtual hike through a tropical forest in Maui, Hawaii](#) - very relaxing!
- [7 Reef Documentaries to get you through social isolation this week](#)

A Documentary recommendation:

- **My Octopus Teacher (available on Netflix)**

Dr. Kathy Wydner writes: "This film is visually stunning. It documents a relationship between a filmmaker and a common octopus living in a South African kelp forest. It sends a message about the rare beauty of this unique ecosystem and promotes an appreciation for all living things. Very highly recommended!"

One Small Step

By Stephanie Martinez, Bio Major, Class of 2022



One small step that I take for the sustainability of our planet is to recycle. We are all familiar with the three R's: Reduce, Reuse, and Recycle but there are some more R's I consider before recycling:

- Rethink: before buying anything I always think to myself, 'do I truly need this item?'
- Refuse: if the answer is 'no, I don't need it' then I don't buy it
- Reduce: if I truly do need it then I get a bigger size or in bulk to reduce plastic packaging
- Reuse: ordering take out? I try to reuse the container it comes in to store any leftovers or other foods
- Recycle: this is one of the last options to consider. I rinse out all plastic, aluminum, and glass to avoid contaminating other recyclables that are in the bin
- Rot: when an item cannot be recycled it goes to the garbage. Just because the item is plastic, it does not mean it can be recycled. The general rule I follow is if it's hard plastic I throw it in the recycling bin. When in doubt, throw it out.

Recycling programs vary depending on what community you live in. You can always check out <https://how2recycle.info/check-locally> to see what your local recycling center accepts!

Community Voices: **Saying No to Single-use Plastic & Paper Bags**

Dr. Wanlu Li, Chemistry Department

New Jersey State lawmakers recently passed the [strongest bag ban in the nation](#). The new law, which goes into effect in May of 2022, bans businesses from handing out single-use plastic bags, polystyrene food containers, plastic straws, and paper bags. If flexible, lightweight, and affordable, plastic bags are the most efficient choice for us to transport goods, then why did the government enact a ban that will drastically impact everyone?



Let us start with the production of conventional plastic bags. Petrochemicals (refined oil or cracked natural gas) dominate the raw materials for producing plastic bags. Most single use plastic bags are made from long $-CH_2-$ chains (named polyethylene). Oil or gas is superheated and pressurized to isolate pure polyethylene chains which can be combined to form resin pellets of pure plastic. Different amounts of pressure and heat applied to the resin pellets result in various thicknesses of plastic film. Two film sheets pressed together at the edge compounded by large-scale manufacturing create thousands of plastic bags in seconds.

The downside of these plastic bags is that they take a very long time to degrade and the degraded fragments are still not biodegradable. To make them biodegradable, the price would be around 7 to 10 times higher than conventional plastic bags. Even by making it decomposable, it is still not able to fully degrade even after three years, compared to a paper bag, which only takes one month to degrade completely. However, there are concerns that paper bags take more energy to make and thus produce more greenhouse gases during manufacture.

**BRING YOUR
BAG**



It is hard to imagine life without plastic grocery bags. However, before the introduction of the plastic bag in 1977, generations of people over thousands of years got along just fine using their bags to carry their purchases home. And we can, too! I have started using reusable bags (from Trader Joes). They are durable and easy to carry around. When we get used to life without plastic bags, we will be happy with our shopping bags and remember to always bring them with us. It is time to gather the power of all the people and make our society sustainable and environmentally friendly!

A thought to leave you with.....

“I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I had not lived.”- Henry David Thoreau

The Saint Peter’s University Sustainability Council, founded in 2012, is a group of students, faculty, and staff who strive to make our campus community and our world more sustainable for future generations.

Your feedback, photos, event notices, and story ideas are always welcome. Please email them to skeller1@saintpeter.edu

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