



## Destination Middle Creek— *Kayaking, Birding, Herps and Wildflowers*

photo-Tyler Frantz

*by Tyler Frantz*

**A**s the blades of our kayak paddles sliced through the lake water, a bald eagle soared overhead. Green herons hopped along the rocky shoreline hunting fish. Eastern Painted Turtles sunned themselves on exposed logs, and a watersnake scuttled across the water's surface toward vegetative cover.

Back near the launch area, where eastern tiger swallowtails dined on common milkweed just paces from the boat ramp, a great blue heron stood watch while a young boy pulled a wriggling catfish to shore on his dad's fishing rod—a fine way to spend a summer day.

Nestled within the rolling agricultural hill country of Lebanon and Lancaster counties, this true gem of nature awaits exploration. The Pennsylvania Game Commission's (PGC's) Middle Creek Wildlife Management Area, located at 100 Museum Road, Stevens, is comprised of more than 6,000 acres devoted entirely to supporting numerous wildlife species as well as their native habitats including species drawn to water, wetlands and native grassland prairies.

For the naturalist who also happens to own a kayak, Middle Creek serves as an excellent day-trip destination to

paddle, picnic, fish, and observe herps, birds, pollinators and wildflowers in one location.

The main lake's 40-acre fishing area is open to non-motorized boating from May 15 through September 30 and features a well-maintained parking lot, restroom facilities and boat launch near the lake's dam breast. Signage and markers indicate the portion of the lake that is restricted access. This section is off-limits and devoted to wildlife.

A quality pair of binoculars can provide excellent opportunities to view distant waterfowl and other water-loving species from shore, but you can also get a closer look by paddling quietly and maintaining a respectful buffer between wildlife and the well-marked sanctuary boundaries.

After a good workout on the water, enjoy a picnic lunch at the Red Rock Picnic Area just off Millstone Road or cool off at the Visitors Center, where a gorgeous view of the lake is enhanced by a songbird feeding station. There are also several educational and interactive displays that enlighten visitors about our state's flora and fauna, as well as the PGC's Conservation Heritage Museum.

Pick up a wildflower or bird species checklist at the information desk and head back outside to one of the



numerous recreational hiking trails to try your hand at some species identification. Middle Creek supports more than 300 individual species of birds throughout the year and even more species of plant life. During the summertime, when wildflowers are in full bloom, a host of pollinators and birds are attracted to the area.

While participating in the “Wildlife Drive” tour, we had to momentarily mute the speakers of the radio’s audio tour, which is very informative and runs on channel 1620 AM, when we spotted an eastern meadowlark perched atop a tall stalk of milkweed. The bird’s gorgeous song only added to the stunning views of wild bergamot, blue vervain and black-eyed Susan appearing in a colorful patchwork, drawing countless butterflies and bees across the native meadow.

Middle Creek provides something for every nature lover. From anglers, boaters and hunters to naturalists, hikers and birders, consider a day trip to this one-stop shop to enjoy everything wild. ☑

### More information:

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photo-Tyler Frantz



Blue vervain grows wild among the cattails in a damp drainage, attracting a wide range of bees, birds, butterflies and other pollinators.

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In addition to Middle Creek’s kayaking opportunities, there are expansive tracts of native grasslands and wildflowers that can be viewed from both hiking trails and driving tours.



photo-Tyler Frantz

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photo-PFBC archives



The Visitors Center offers several educational displays that can enhance a day trip to Middle Creek.