news

new life for an urban treasure.

Taylor Arboretum was established in 1931 by Joshua C. Taylor, a Chester lawyer and conservationist, on land that had once been part of an industrial mill complex. Along with vibrant collections of azaleas, magnolias, and lilacs, the property boasts 10 trees in the PA Big Trees database, including a giant dogwood, a needle juniper, and a sawtooth oak.

In 2016, Widener University purchased the 30-acre natural area, which is located about a mile north of the University's Chester, PA, campus. The Arboretum has been languishing for some time—invasive vines are climbing the trees, and the banks of Ridley Creek, which runs through the arboretum, are eroding into the waterway.

Widener has dreams of transforming the site into an educational resource for students and important green space for the surrounding community. To realize those aspirations, Widener is partnering with Natural Lands to develop a master plan that will act as a blueprint for step-by-step improvements to the property. In addition, they will develop a stewardship plan for ongoing, sustainable management of the arboretum.

"The arboretum is an academic asset for Widener, as it provides a living learning laboratory for our students," said Professor Stephen R. Madigosky, chair of Widener's department of environmental science and sustainability. At the same time, it is a public treasure we want to ensure will be available for people in Chester and the surrounding communities to enjoy for decades."

The collaboration is being underwritten by the William Penn Foundation. Said Andrew Johnson, director of the Watershed Protection Program at the William Penn Foundation, "Through this partnership project the Arboretum will become an asset that will benefit the University and the community, and an important example of the multiple benefits of restoration and stewardship of urban and suburban lands in the Delaware River watershed." ■

10

trees in the PA Big Trees database

Ridley Creek

David Steckel

window into a winged world.

Eight years ago, shortly after Mike Coll moved in to the preserve manager's cottage at Hildacy Preserve, he installed a Screech Owl box in a small copse of trees behind the house. The nest box—which he's now outfitted with a camera—has been a window into the world of the owls and other species that have used it.

Last year, Mike noticed a flutter of activity near the box. "I checked the camera feed and was surprised to see a Great-crested Flycatcher building a nest."

For the next few days, Mike watched as the female bird arranged pine needles into a small cup-shaped nest while the male called constantly, claiming his territory from the surrounding treetops. She laid a total of five eggs, which she incubated for two weeks.

All five eggs hatched in the same day and within minutes the adult birds began stuffing insects into the mouths of their young. For the next two weeks, both adults worked tirelessly to provide the constant stream of food required by their growing offspring. As the chicks got larger, so too did the size of the insects the adults brought them. After 15 days of eating, all five young were nearly identical copies of their parents. One by one they left the nest, flying to nearby trees where the mature birds would continue to feed them until they could learn to hunt on their own.

"I observed many of the young calling and foraging around my house in the month that followed, but by August they had mostly dispersed," said Mike. "In the fall they faced the challenge of migrating to Central America with the rest of their species. Those that survived will hopefully return each year to begin the process anew." ■

Last year, **34** Natural Lands volunteers monitored **350** nest boxes on **15** preserves, counting **1,200** fledglings. In late summer we'll tally this year's numbers and hope to see more great results from our nest box program!

See page 18 for more info.

Mike Coll