

Seeking garbage, finding spring in Montclair's Bonsal Preserve

SUNDAY APRIL 14, 2013, 12:45 PM

BY GWEN OREL

STAFF WRITER

THE MONTCLAIR TIMES

I'm wearing waders, and I'm mid-calf deep in water that is too cold, fishing out what looks like a sock from a muddy stream.



PHOTO COURTESY OF RITA SINGER

Reporter Gwen Orel finds a water bottle among the rosa floribunda in the Alonzo F. Bonsal Wildlife Preserve at last Sunday's cleanup. For more photos, visit northjersey.com/Montclair.

A gnat just flew up my nose.

I'm doing a Good Thing, but it's Sunday, and I'd kind of like to be home petting the cat.

That is how I envisioned my experience would be of cleaning up the Alonzo F. Bonsal Wildlife Preserve this past Sunday.

Scratch all that.

Buttercups were blooming. Birds were singing. Sunshine filtered through still-leafless trees.

The Third River sparkled.

the MONTCLAIR TIMES

George Krusznis from the [Passaic](#) Valley Sewerage Commission manned a truck with waders, rakes and supplies. There were no waders in anything close to my size.

It was too warm to wear either the canvas or waterproof gloves the organizers of the annual cleanup from the Friends of the Bonsal Preserve helpfully offered.

It was spring, and it was about time.

Jonathan Grupper, who, along with the DeSalvo family, founded the Friends of the Bonsal Preserve, reported that 70 people collected 1,400 pounds of trash on Sunday. The trash was there, all right, but you had to look hard to find it.

You couldn't miss the preserve's peaceful beauty.

MAKING THE WORLD HAPPY

The cleanup was scheduled from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the over 20-acre wildlife preserve on the border of [Montclair](#) and [Clifton](#). Named for an influential Montclair resident, the preserve includes forests, wetlands, fields. Some trash is litter, some comes through the storm drain, Grupper said.

Last year, said Deborah DeSalvo, politicians came out in force, because it was an election year. I didn't see any while I was there; I left around 12:30 p.m. Early in the day, there were about half a dozen high school students, some doing community service for Key Club, an international service program for high school students run by the Kiwanis Club, and about 21 others.

Julia Bonsal, the granddaughter of Alonzo, came from New York City to clean. Her garbage bag had only a meager haul when she left. "It's really great that there's less trash," Bonsal said.

[Montclair](#) resident Dan Hurley walked the paths with family friend Alexa Marquez, 6, of [Belleville](#), and a little white dog named Sugar. They had come for a nature walk, "and we were lucky to find something to do," said Hurley.

Marquez said she had heard a snake ("Woof!" barked Sugar), and smelled some skunk cabbage. She said they were going to clean "because it makes the world happy."

trash and treasure hunting

Every year, DeSalvo told me, they find unusual items. This year, volunteer Dirk Vanderklein fished a plastic Santa statue out of the river. Most of Santa's paint had flaked off, leaving him with a green beard. While Santa was trash, the box he had been found in was not: it is a geocache, explained Grupper, which means he was part of a real-world treasure hunt. The box has been rehidden.

"I think he's been hidden since 2010," Grupper said. "People go to geocaching.com, and see the GPS coordinates. They then come to the box and write messages in a log inside."

I felt as though I was looking for treasure, too. I was jealous of people who found beer bottles. Is that a shiny rock, or silver foil? Silver foil, baby.

Some volunteers earned their time in the sun: [Montclair](#) resident Gerry Sullivan said he had a bag full of plastic litter he'd found by the pump-house.

When I found an empty water bottle, and climbed through thorny thickets to grasp it, I felt a sense of accomplishment. Municipal Environmental Commission member Rita Singer told me the thorns were from floribunda roses, an invasive plant. She warned me to avoid the leafless poison ivy vines, and pointed out the trout lilies by the stream. Trout lilies, she said, are an endangered species which will flower in a few weeks.

Invasive species are of serious concern in the preserve. Bonsal will join the 1st Ward Cleanup Day on Saturday, April 27, organized by 1st Ward Councilman Bill Hurlock, to focus on them.

I wasn't finding a lot of trash, but I was learning a lot.

The trash, I left on the truck. The peace, I carried home.

It was a more-than-fair trade.

Contact Gwen Orel at orel@northjersey.com