



PAGE 3 & 4:
PARK VOLUNTEERS



PAGES 5-8:
NATURE PROGRAMS



PAGE 9:
NATURE CHALLENGE
FOR CHILDREN

WINTER | 2014

Nature News



THE JEROME "BUDDIE" FORD NATURE CENTER'S
SEASONAL NEWSLETTER



"Making the Connection"

As the digital-age progresses, a growing number of children are finding themselves inadvertently distanced from the natural world. More screen time means less time for children to gain a firsthand appreciation of natural environments, along with the many benefits they offer. Findings from studies in the research literature suggest that an absence of intimacy with nature can negatively affect a child's physical and emotional well-being. This premise seems obvious considering that throughout most of human history our ancestors, by default, experienced childhood as Naturalists. In order to survive, they needed to learn how to live off the land as hunter-gatherers, fishers, or early agrarians. In doing so, they came away with a rich understanding of the many

natural environments that surrounded them.

In his book, *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv theorizes that an increasing number of digital-age children are being afflicted with "nature deficit disorder" and links the progressive absence of nature in children's lives with a concomitant rise in childhood obesity and attention deficit disorder, as well as depression. Understanding this current dilemma, and how to remedy it, has become a "hot topic" in the fields of environmental education and interpretation.

The Ford Nature Center's staff strives to instill children with a greater appreciation and awareness of nature in order to enrich children's lives and foster a lifelong commitment to



Searching the ancient gravels of Holmes Run

environmental stewardship. This mission is carried out by way of interpretive programming and volunteer opportunities. One particularly successful program is "Afterschool Nature Buddies." In this program, a dozen children, ranging in age from five to ten years old, spend several hours after school in a nature-oriented setting where they are afforded frequent forays into Dora Kelley Nature Park. Each day, the Naturalist

("Making the Connection" cont'd)

staff encourages the children, who are fondly referred to as the "Buddies," to bond with nature, as well as with each other. Each day brings new experiences, fostering positive memories of the natural world and a deeper relationship with it.

On their daily woodland hikes, for example, the "Buddies" enjoy exploring ancient gravel deposits along Holmes Run where they enthusiastically search for rocks and fossils. They naturally enjoy little things, such as skipping stones. Seasonal changes bring about new opportunities. As autumn progresses, collecting colorful leaves becomes a favored activity. By autumn's end, catching a glimpse of white-tailed deer through branches laid bare by frost is another. Over the last three years, the "Buddies" have become increasingly adept at identifying local wildlife and native plants. More importantly, their respect for the natural environment has grown. A few of their thoughts about the program are recorded below:

Mary, age 10: *"This program has shown me things, I use less power now and it has gotten me to go outside more and it showed me that I have a lot to look at when I am outside, such as herbs, animals, and the changes of the seasons."*

Charlie S., age 7: *"I learned about jasper and about coral reefs. I also love learning about box turtles."*

Kieran, age 10: *"Nature is a very important thing in the environment. Without nature there is no life, without trees there would be no air. I love learning about animals and how to care for them."*

Elena, age 5: *"I learned that I care about nature. I also learned about bugs and water dragons."*

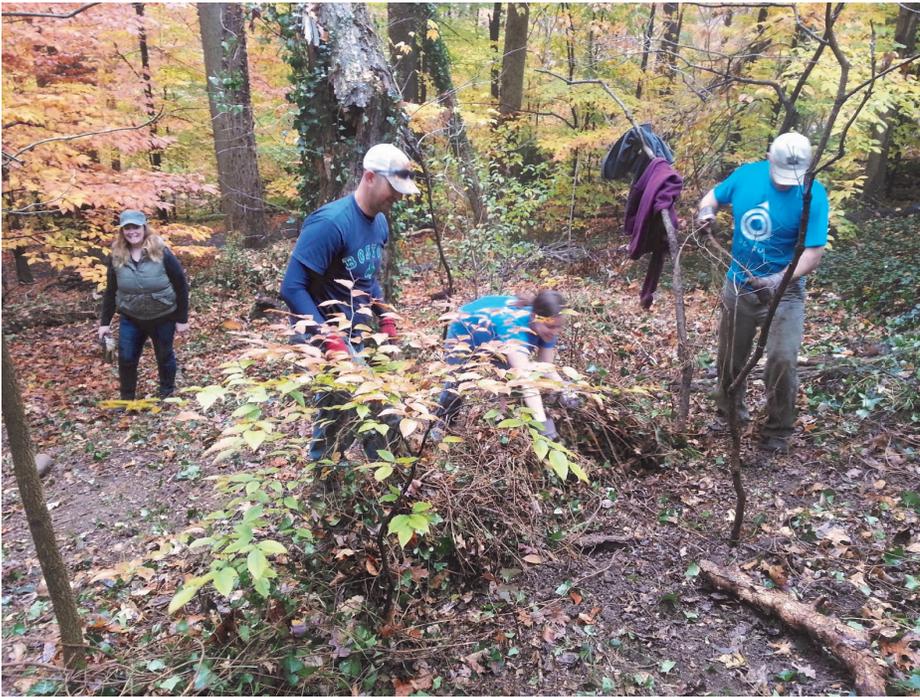
All children show an innate curiosity and yearning for the natural world if given the chance. Not surprisingly, experiential contact with nature at a young age, alone or in limited-size groups, is an important means for building positive relationships with nature, as verified by the lives of prominent Naturalists, such as Charles Darwin,

Roger Tory Peterson, Carl Linnaeus, and Freeman Tilden. Some authors have even suggested that childhood may hold a crucial window of opportunity for humans to make such connections with natural world. In any case, nature possesses intrinsic value for all humans, young and old. So, make time for that walk through Dora Kelley Nature Park this week and renew your connection with mother earth. Or, simply stop by the Nature Center to chat with the Naturalist staff.... You'll be glad you did!



Afterschool "Buddies" at rest in Dora Kelley Park... and at play in the Nature Center (above and below)





Thank You & Farewell!

This fall, the annual Dora Kelley Fall Cleanup went off without a hitch! A very special “thank you” goes out to the Friends of Dora Kelley Nature Park for organizing and recruiting this event. In addition to the fall cleanup, several other groups, including D.C. Metro Church, TC Williams High School, Lake Braddock High School, and the Boy Scouts of America, volunteered for monthly park cleanups, trail maintenance, and invasive plant removal this year. Keep your eyes peeled for upcoming volunteer opportunities next season!

On a personal note, I would like to thank all volunteers and staff for making my time with The City of Alexandria an absolute joy. In December, I will be accepting an Ecologist position with Fairfax County and will no longer work as the Naturalist/Volunteer Coordinator. However, I will continue to dedicate my weekends to improving Alexandria’s parks as well teaching classes at Jerome “Buddie” Ford Nature Center. - John

For more information about future park cleanups or other volunteer opportunities, please contact:

Mark S. Kelly, Director/Naturalist
Jerome “Buddie” Ford Nature Center
mark.kelly@alexandriava.gov



T.C. Students making a Positive Difference in Chinquapin Park

Several 9th and 10th grade biology students from T.C. Williams High School answered the Nature Center's call to help renovate Chinquapin Park's ailing nature trail in 2013, giving up their Saturday mornings to move several hundred pounds of fresh woodchips and spread them over eroding sections of the trail. The students were led by the Nature Center Director and Jovita Gill, English Language Learner (ELL) teacher for T.C. William's International Academy Network. Park visitors who encountered the project in progress complemented the students' hard work. This volunteer partnership is scheduled to continue into the spring of 2014 (*see below*).



Eagle Scout Projects

Two Eagle Projects were carried out in Dora Kelley Nature Park in the fall of 2013. Scout Dean Martin's project involved replacing several deteriorated wooden handrails along the park's upland nature trail. His troop also smoothed out two lengthy trail sections and resurfaced them with a fresh coat of woodchips, improving the nature trail's safety and appearance. Scout Ira Quint's project involved reinforcing a badly eroding section of the marsh spillway with cobbles and concrete, woodchipping another trail section, and building four birdhouses for park wildlife. Both Eagle Projects were developed under supervision of the Nature Center Director who helped the Scouts tailor their projects to meet the needs of the park (*see below*).



Scout Quint (center) working on Eagle Project



Scout Martin's completed handrails

Nature Programs

Little Adventures (ages 3-5 years)

Children and their parents are invited to explore the world of nature through a series of programs developed just for them. We'll play games, do crafts, hike through the forest, and much more! Siblings welcome. One \$15 fee covers the cost of all four sessions.

Fridays 10:30-11:30am

January 17th, February 21st, March 21st

Activity #: 121236-01



Naturalist Jane leading "Little Adventures"

Children's Conservation Theatre (ages 6-10)

Children can learn ways they can become "Eco-Warriors" and help protect the natural environment in this program series. Each program features a nature film on a hot topic in environmental conservation followed by an "Eco-Warrior" workshop. Pizza included! \$18 fee covers cost of all three sessions.

Saturdays 2-4pm

January 18th, February 15th, March 15th

Activity #: 121235-01

Beginner's Fly Tying (ages 13 to adult)

Master the art of tricking fish with hands-on instruction from a local fly tier. In this course, you will create some of the most popular fly patterns for warm water, cold water, and saltwater fishing. \$18 fee; All materials included, and all flies are yours to keep!

Saturdays 10-11:30am

February 8th, February 15th, February 22nd

Activity #: 121237-01



Nature Programs

January – February

Stories in Nature: The Mitten

Ages 3-6. This month's nature story class features Jan Brett's *The Mitten*. Participants can act out this lively winter tale with masks and then search through Dora Kelley Nature Park to discover animal homes. Program features a mitten craft. \$4

Saturday, January 4 2-3:30pm

Activity #: 121223-01

Wintering Woodpeckers

Ages 4-8. Knock! Knock! Who's there? Alexandria's woodpeckers stay active all winter long! Children are invited to enjoy a Naturalist-led presentation on woodpeckers, followed by a craft workshop and winter walk through the forest in search of these amazing birds. \$4

Saturday, January 11 10-11:30am

Activity #: 121224-01

Food Webs

Ages 6-10. Food webs are a "who-eats-who" of the natural world. In this program we'll learn how the plants, carnivores, herbivores, and omnivores of Dora Kelley Nature Park make meals of one another. \$4

Saturday, January 18 10-11:30am

Activity #: 121225-01

The Magic of Coral Reefs

Ages 4-8. Ready for some fun in the sun? Join us in beating those winter blues by exploring the fascinating world of coral reefs; the underwater gardens of tropical oceans. A fishy craft session will be featured. \$4

Saturday, January 25 10:30am-12pm

Activity #: 121226-01

Water, Water, Everywhere

Ages 6-10. Investigate water in its different forms; solid, liquid and gas. Discover how it's shaped Earth's surface and sustains all forms of life. Through fun activities, children will learn how they can protect this precious natural resource. \$4

Saturday, February 1 2-3:30pm

Activity #: 121227-01

Tracks and Traces

Ages 4-8. Whose tracks are those? Join our Naturalist in learning how to identify animal tracks and signs in Dora Kelley Nature Park. Program includes a short presentation, hike (weather permitting), and craft. \$4

Saturday, February 8 2-2:30pm

Activity #: 121229-01

Nature Programs

March

What to Expect from Exotic Pets

Ages 5-10. Before you purchase that boa snake, colorful parrot, or green water-dragon, learn about what it really takes to care for an exotic pet and whether it is the right choice to make. Program features a behind-the-scenes look at the care, cost, and cleaning of exotic animals currently living at the Nature Center. \$4

Saturday, March 8 10-11:30am

Activity #: 121231-01

Animal Homes Hike

Ages 5-10. Children and their parents can search for different types of animal homes on a Naturalist-led hike through Dora Kelley Nature Park and then construct wooden wren houses for the backyard. \$4

Saturday, March 15 10-11:30am

Activity #: 121232-01

Wonderful Wildflowers

Ages 4-8. Wildflowers are popping out all over this time of year! Explore Dora Kelley Nature Park in search of these beautiful, albeit fleeting, signs of spring. Children will be guided by a Naturalist on this spring wildflower hike and enjoy a wildflower craft. \$4

Saturday, March 22 2-3:30pm

Activity #: 121233-01

Please note that there are three ways to register for a nature program:

- **Online** www.alexandriava.gov/recreation
- **Mail-in** completed registration form to the Lee Center at 1108 Jefferson Street, Alexandria, VA 22314.
- **Drop-off** completed registration form at the Nature Center with a check (cash not accepted).

Adult Classes

Winter Tree ID and Heath Hike

Explore the stream valley of Holmes Run and learn how to identify native trees in winter. Program guide Virginia Plant Ecologist Rod Simmons will provide the natural history of our local forests. FREE

Saturday, February 22 2-5pm

Activity #: 121230-01

Invasive Plant Identification and Volunteer Training

Are you planning on volunteering at an Alexandria park or interested in controlling those noxious weeds around your home? Stop by our Invasive Plant Identification and Volunteer Training Session to learn how to prevent the spread of invasive plants in our City. Refreshments provided. FREE

Thursday, January 21 7-9pm

Activity #: 121222-01

Family Fun at the Fall Festival

The Department's annual Family Fall Festival was held at Tucker Elementary School on Saturday, October 19. Naturalist Jane Yeingst, assisted by Rec. Leader Majd Jarrar, hosted a table for the Nature Center, which contained informational fliers, a variety of interesting natural specimens, and some live ambassadors from the world of nature (i.e., a newly-hatched snapping turtle, corn snake and a woolly bear caterpillar). More than 200 children and their parents came to see the Nature Center's table and learn about seasonal changes along with programs offered by the Nature Center (*see below*).



Outreach Programs at Alexandria Recreation Centers

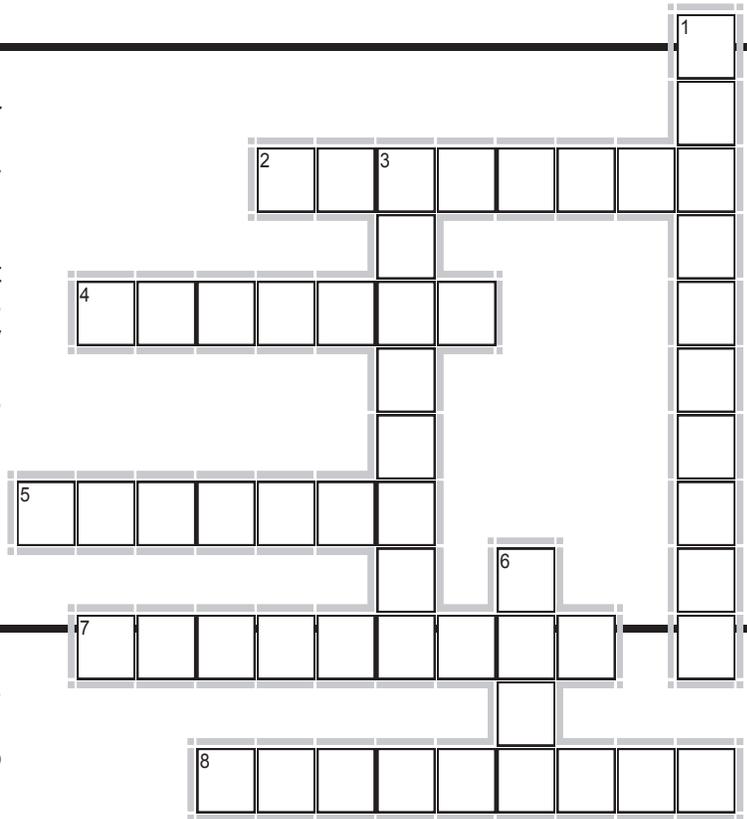
The Center Director conducted six out-of-school time nature programs at the Charles Barrett, Mount Vernon, William Ramsay, and Charles Houston recreation centers in the fall of 2013. These programs focused on "scary animals" for Halloween, but were tailored to provide a balanced myth-versus-fact interpretation of wildlife commonly viewed as frightening. The programs included a 20 minute presentation on spiders, scorpions, snakes, owls, insects, and bats, featuring live animals and a humorous "box of doom" activity followed by an art workshop where children made their own colorful bats to take home. More than 200 children, ranging in age from 5 to 10 years old, attended (*see below*).



Nature Challenge Crossword Puzzle

Across

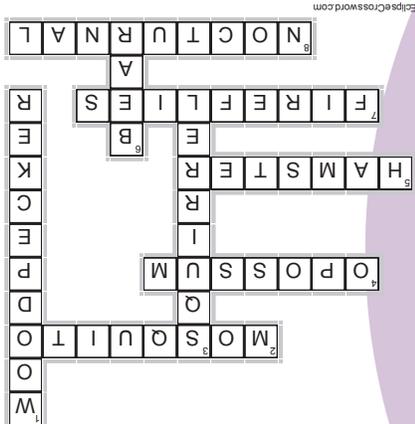
2. I am an insect that consumes blood from other animals... and humans too!
4. I am a marsupial; just like kangaroos, I carry my young in a pouch! When threatened or harmed, I mimic the appearance and smell of a dead animal.
5. My name is buttercup; I am a friendly rodent that lives at the Nature Center. I love to stuff my cheeks with nuts and seeds, and when I am done, I bury them in my bedding! What animal am I?
7. We are a type of insect; you may have noticed us flying around at night when we are bright!
8. This word describes many animals, just like me, that sleep during the day.



Down

1. You have probably heard me tapping on tree trunks; I usually find insects under the bark to eat!
3. I sleep in a nest made of leaves and twigs high-up in a tree, and I love to snack on acorns!
6. I am a large mammal that hibernates in hollow trees and underground dens during the winter!

EclipseCrossword.com



©2001 Jackson Zbinden

Nature Center Services

Outreach Programs

Jerome "Buddie" Ford Nature Center offers a variety of outreach programs for schools, community groups, senior centers, and other organizations. Programs include topics on the natural and cultural history of Alexandria, and feature live animals from the Nature Center. For more information about this or any other service listed in this section, call the Naturalist staff at 703-745-5525.

Scout Programs

Bring your troop to earn a badge! The fee is \$30 per program for up to 15 children (\$2 per each additional child).

Birthday Parties

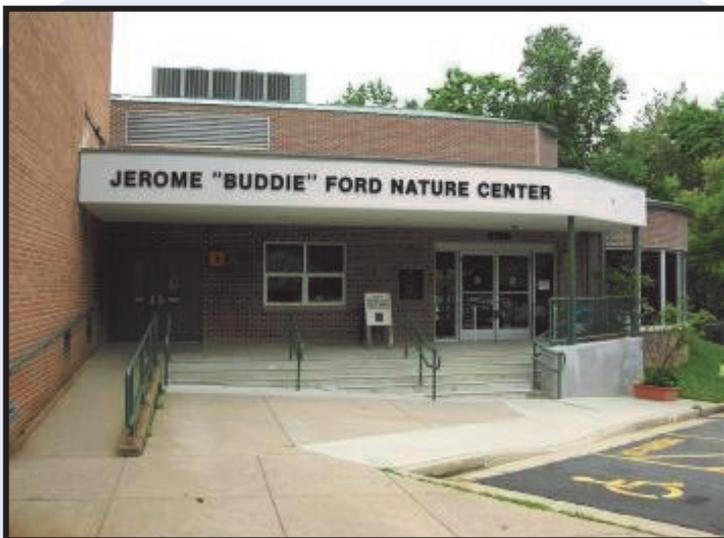
The Nature Center offers birthday parties for children ages 3 to 12 featuring outdoor hikes, live animals, crafts, and a private room. The fee is \$165 for parties of up to 12 children. Additional children \$10 per child. Registration required.

Facility Rentals

The Nature Center's activity room is available to rent for meetings! Call for more information.

Community Service Events

Have your class, group, or club volunteer for a conservation or trail maintenance project at Dora Kelley Nature Park.



Jerome "Buddie" Ford Nature Center

5750 Sanger Ave

Alexandria, VA 22311

Phone : 703.746.5525

Hours: Wednesday-Saturday 10am-5pm

Sunday 1pm-5pm (April 1-Nov 30)

Center Director: Mark S. Kelly

Naturalist: Jane Yeingst

Volunteer Coordinator/Naturalist: Vacant

Recreation Leader II: Majd Jarrar

Custodian: Juan Aguilar

The City of Alexandria complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

To request reasonable accommodation, or an alternative format, please call:

703.746.5525

or email

mark.kelly@alexandriava.gov