



WELCOME TO REDDING NATURE EXPLORERS

Mark Twain Library, New Pond Farm Education Center, and conservationist John McLeran are partnering on a new and exciting nature adventure for you and your family to enjoy. Since many of you have been taking advantage of our splendid open spaces, we have developed a series of activities to enhance your explorations in the natural world. This ongoing program is easy to follow and is designed to help you discover and appreciate our rich selection of local flora and fauna. While the program is geared for parents with children between the ages of four and nine, adults and children of all ages can take pleasure in these activities.

How It Works

Each month you will receive a list of hands-on activities to enjoy either around where you live or in one of our many open spaces. All the animals and plants have been carefully chosen because they are relatively common to our area and are more easily found in that month. We encourage you to guide your child/children to respond to what they see/hear/smell; they may wish to draw a picture of, write about, or take a photo of their discoveries. We would love to share their work on our social media sites: send to sarah@marktwainlibrary.org or info@newpondfarm.org

OR tag us on Facebook, Instagram [@newpondfarm](https://www.instagram.com/newpondfarm) or [@marktwainlibrary](https://www.instagram.com/marktwainlibrary), or on Twitter [@newpondfarm](https://twitter.com/newpondfarm) or [@mtlredding](https://twitter.com/mtlredding)

Email any of your nature questions to:
askanaturalist@newpondfarm.org

The library will have a list of children's books that relate to the creatures featured each month.

Before You Go

Picking, picking up what you have found. In Town open spaces, all plants and animals are protected by Town ordinances so please enjoy things with your exploring eyes. Members of New Pond Farm Education Center are invited to explore their 102-acre property, following the same guidelines.

Poison Ivy: We advise you and your children to stay on the trails and to learn to recognize this common neighbor; "leaves of three let it be."

Ticks are out and about, but staying on the trails lowers your risk. Living in Fairfield County, we should all be doing regular tick checks at the end of each day.

Who else is out there? Yes, bears, bobcats, and coyotes are occasionally seen in Redding. There are no recorded interactions between these animals and people in Redding that have caused injury. Consider carrying whistles.

Masks: Please have masks with you, in case you encounter other explorers out on the trail.

What to Wear: Hats, long, light colored pants (easier to see ticks), and sneakers are okay. No need for boots unless you plan to veer off the trail into a swamp or stream.

What to Bring: Water, a basic first aid kit, bug spray (hopefully, the family friendly variety). If you plan to take advantage of Redding trails, we recommend borrowing or purchasing The Book of Trails from the Mark Twain Library. NPPEC members, please reach out to info@newpondfarm.org if you'd like a digital copy of our Trail Map.

JULY ACTIVITIES & CHALLENGES

AMERICAN ROBIN

Often seen in our backyards, this bird can be found in every state except Hawaii. They eat worms, insects, and fruits.

Activities

Listen to their song; watch them catch a worm and find out where they like to nest. Research how they find worms to eat: with their eyes, ears, or vibrations through their feet. Where do they go in winter?

WOOD THRUSH

Many say this bird of the forest has the most beautiful song of all. Learn what they sound like. Can you hear them where you live? If not, you can in Saugatuck Falls Natural Area and Stormfield, as well as in other open spaces. While they are elusive and shy, you may spot one if you walk slowly and quietly. You are most likely to hear them in the early morning, or late afternoon. (Note: the wood thrush and robin are in thrush family).

Activities

Learn where they like to nest. How many eggs does the mother lay & how many broods can they have? Research how their populations are doing in the North East. Are there other thrushes around that also have beautiful songs?

COMMON WHITETAIL DRAGONFLY

Common to almost all ponds, also many back yards. Found from mid-June until late August, they are busy catching insects – including mosquitoes and even wasps. Often seen on rocks or low vegetation, they will fly up, capture an insect, and then drop down again. Their jaws are powerful enough to crush up almost any insect they try to eat. Dragonflies spend 80% of their lives underwater as nymphs.

Activities

Check out how different the wing patterns are on the female & male white-tail. Visit a pond or even your yard and observe how different species look and fly. (152 species in CT, at least 50 in Redding). If you put a stick 3 – 6 feet in your garden or lawn, sooner or later, a dragonfly will come and land on it.

CICADA

You will recognize the song as soon as you hear it. It's very likely you have them living in your yard. Perhaps you have found their husks (sheds) a few feet up on a tree. These creatures can live underground as nymphs for one to 17 years. Very likely you have heard of the 17 year "locust". They are hard to find once they hatch out and fly up into the trees. These chunky insects are poor fliers and have been known to fly into people.

Activities

Check out their song, and find a good close up picture of this fascinating insect and its exoskeleton. Look for exoskeletons on trees around your house, and in the woods, after you hear cicadas singing.

GRAY TREE FROG

You have probably heard the song of this beautiful and secretive frog and thought it was a bird or insect. Likely you will have an ah - ha moment when you check it out. This frog is not only difficult to find because it lives in trees, it can change its color to match its background.

Activities

As you travel around town keep your ears tuned. How frequently do you hear this frog? Research its lifecycle. Where does it lay its eggs? How can it climb a tree?

COMMON MULLEN

A roadside plant that is easy to recognize by its tall spikes of small yellow flowers. Although not a native plant, the seed pods are enjoyed by woodpeckers in late summer and fall.

Activities

Check out the thick fuzzy leaves. Children love to touch and rub them. One nickname for this plant is Quaker's Rouge because the finely divided hairs on the leaves can be irritating and they can make your cheeks pink. At one time, the leaves were used to line shoes for warmth. If the stalk is in flower, does it smell?

Additional Challenges:

BUTTERFLY WEED

Look for this bright orange flower along the roadsides or in Fred Schroeder Meadow past the brook, Saugatuck Falls Natural Area. It's in the milkweed family, butterflies love it.

SKIPPER BUTTERFLIES

Look for these in your back yard, and all open areas. Note their flight patterns are very different from other butterflies. These small butterflies are the acrobats of butterflies.

BIG BROWN BAT

Likely you have them where you live. They can be elusive, you may have to look up after dark for a number of evenings. We used to have a more common bat, the little brown bat. Sadly, it has been just about wiped out by a fungus that scientists have, to date, not been able to cure.





Dear Parents — A Few Thoughts On How To Organize & Enrich Your Outdoor Experience

- Focus your child's attention at the start of your venture. Ask questions, suggest things to look at and listen for.
- A sense of joy and excitement on your part will set the tone. Children key off the attitude of their parents.
- Allow each discovery to unfold at your child's pace — this can be challenging, but worth the effort. Be ready to move on or discontinue an activity when your child has lost interest.
- No need for lots of facts, it's more important to express your feelings — “Wow, isn't that blue flower beautiful”. Tease out your children's thoughts too.
- Be receptive to sounds and smells, allow time to pause quietly and to listen while on the trail.
- Bring along a note pad with a soft pencil. Encourage a drawing or a few reflections and observations. Not only will this enhance your child's observation skills, it may also generate a cherished keepsake, and broaden skills learned in school.
- Magnifying glasses are recommended for explorers of all ages. We suggest a 2.5-3 inch glass magnifier in a slipcase, these work well for small hands. Plastic can scratch quickly & glass usually has better resolution. 2-4 power works well. Consider buying 2, they tend to disappear. EBAY, Amazon both have a selection. Should not cost over \$5-9.

Resource Guide (*available at MTL)

AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES

Amphibians & Reptiles of Connecticut:* M. Klemens.

Lists reptiles & amphibians by town. Also good background info.

Frogs & Toads of North America:* Lang Elliot.

Great song recordings & pictures of all frogs & toads of N.A.

BIRDS

Connecticut Audubon Society: State birding lists, Sites to visit in CT.

National Audubon Society: State birding lists, sites to visit in CT.

Note: Confusing, yes, but there are many “State” Audubon orgs. that function more-or-less independently from the National & each other.

Cornell Lab of Ornithology: Bird pics/songs, excellent programs, age appropriate, for K-12.

INSECTS, SPIDERS, ETC.

Connecticut Entomological Society:

Connecticut Butterfly Society

Connecticut Butterfly Atlas: CT DEEP Lists 117 species of butterflies in CT with distribution maps.

MAMMALS

Department of Energy & Environmental Protection

CT Wildlife Magazine Articles about assorted animals and plants here in CT.

PLANTS – TREES, WILDFLOWERS, ETC.

CT Botanical Society: CT Plant lists & pics.

Native Plant Trust (was NE Wildflower Society): GoBotony

Great wildflower, vine, grass, reed, sedge ID guide.

Google Photo App: great for flora, fauna ID

FIELD IDENTIFICATION WEBSITES

These sites are an online community of naturalists who delight in viewing your pics & giving you back common & scientific names of the plant / animal you sent them. **iNaturalist.org**.

Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv, Workman Publishing Co., The many benefits derived from spending time in the out-of-doors. Now a classic.

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