



# REDDING NATURE EXPLORERS

## AUGUST ACTIVITIES & CHALLENGES

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.



### AMERICAN CROW

Often seen in our backyards, this bird is equally at home in the woods as well as fields. They are very family-oriented and tend to travel in a group (also called A Murder of Crows!). If an owl or hawk enters their territory, they will sound the alarm. In late summer and fall many crows, sometimes a tree full, will harass the intruders. As one of our most intelligent, and studied birds, they will offer a fascinating world of observations all by themselves.

#### Activities

Listen to their song and watch what they eat – almost anything. Read up on where they roost in winter and learn about their habits and their amazing use of tools! If you have time, learn about our local Fish Crows—they are a bit smaller and they have a more nasal call. We are lucky to have both in our area!



### CATBIRD

Chances are you have one singing in your backyard. This bird is the trash talker of the bird world and can sing in an intimate throaty whisper, then thrash out a lengthy song lasting a half hour or longer. Listen for the cat-like “mew” which is a part of their song.

#### Activities

Check out their song and listen for catbirds as you go for your hike. When you have a chance to observe one, see if you agree that they are spunky and sassy.



### **EBONY JEWELWING DAMSELFLY**

Found in almost all streams and also many back yards. From mid-June until late August, these beauties, sporting jet black wings and iridescent green bodies, add a real spark to our local streams. Unlike dragonflies whose wings are positioned out to the side when resting, damselflies fold their wings over their backs.

#### **Activities**

Sometimes in your backyard, but usually along a stream bank, these elusive fliers may be difficult to spot. They may be perched hidden on a blade of grass for a while before they decide to flutter up over the stream. The key here is patience. While you are looking for Jewelwings, see what other stream-lurking creatures you can spot. How long does this damselfly live?



### **MONARCH BUTTERFLY**

Perhaps our most famous butterfly and with good reason. It is one of the few true insect migrators, flying each year from all over the U.S. to southern California and Mexico to overwinter. Although the butterflies enjoy the nectar of many different flowers, they choose to lay their eggs on plants that are members of the milkweed family, which are commonly found along Redding's roadsides and in fields. Dining on the toxic milkweed leaves provides the caterpillars with their own bitter tasting and protective toxins. Their bright yellow, white, and black stripes advertise to hungry birds, "Stay Away!"

#### **Activities**

Find for a patch of milkweed plants, and look closely for a caterpillar, or signs of leaf chewing. Note there are a number of other insects that feed on the nectar or leaves of the milkweed. See who else lives here. There are many good books (for both children and adults) about the fascinating life cycle.



### **LADYBUG**

Also called the ladybird beetle, ladybugs are more common than you may think. There are over 350 different species. Sporting orange, yellow, black or bright red, they can have two to fifteen spots, or no spots. Their favorite food is aphids.

#### **Activities**

In open fields and along roadsides, look for tall plant stems with small insects attached. Likely you are looking at aphids, and there are probably hungry ladybugs there as well.



### **ADDITIONAL CHALLENGES**

If you have enjoyed researching and observing our recommendations above, continue on with the activities below. They will take more time to find and observe, but will be well worth the effort.

#### **SYCAMORE**

One of our most beautiful trees, sycamores grow along river banks. As these trees mature they develop a mottled bark unlike any other tree in our area. Stand underneath, look up, and marvel. There is a magnificent specimen in Bethel, right next to the Sycamore Diner.

#### **KATYDID**

These creatures of the night have a song you will surely recognize. These cricket-like green insects live up in your trees and will usually sing their songs until the first frost. Scientists have discovered that their singing is very temperature-sensitive, and they will stop singing between 45 and 50 degrees. No, they don't bite.

#### **SWEET PEPPERBUSH**

Now in blossom, these common shrubs grow along swamp edges. Likely you will smell their beautiful fragrance even before you see them.

**To catch up on past activities, nature treasure hunts, stories and videos relating to Redding's plants and animals, please [click here](#).**

**To find out about New Pond Farm Education Center memberships, please [click here](#).**

## 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](mailto:sarah@marktwainlibrary.org) or [info@newpondfarm.org](mailto:info@newpondfarm.org)

**OR tag us** on Facebook, Instagram @newpondfarm or @marktwainlibraryct, or on Twitter @newpondfarm or @mtlredding

**Email any of your nature questions to:**  
[askanaturalist@newpondfarm.org](mailto: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](mailto:info@newpondfarm.org) if you'd like a digital copy of our Trail Map.

## 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:

### FOR KIDS (\* - AVAILABLE AT MARK TWAIN LIBRARY)

#### National Audubon Society first field guide.

#### Insects / written by Christina Wilsdon\*

A visual guide to the natural science of insects which includes information on the ten most common orders, pollination, and life-cycles; also works as a field guide.

#### National Audubon Society first field guide.

#### Wildflowers / Susan Hood.\*

#### Forest explorer: a life-size field guide / Nic Bishop\*

Depicts in detail several different deciduous forest habitats, with field notes about the insects and animals shown, as well as tips on how to explore a real forest.

### Look up!: bird-watching in your own backyard /

**Annette LeBlanc Cate.\*** A conversational, humorous introduction to bird-watching featuring quirky full-color illustrations portray dozens of birds chatting about their distinctive characteristics, including color, shape, plumage, and beak and foot types.

### FOR ADULTS (\* - AVAILABLE AT MARK TWAIN LIBRARY)

#### A field guide in color to insects / by Jirí Zahradník\*

#### Trees / Allen J. Coombes ; photography by Matthew Ward.\*

#### National Audubon Society the Sibley guide to birds / written and illustrated by David Sibley.\*