



REDDING NATURE EXPLORERS

OCTOBER ACTIVITIES & CHALLENGES

Mark Twain Library, New Pond Farm Education Center, and conservationist John McLeran continue to partner on exciting nature adventures 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.



RED SQUIRREL

A bit smaller than our more common gray squirrel, these frisky critters live near coniferous trees and feed on the seeds found in green pine cones, as well as fungi, nuts, buds, and a variety of other seeds. They are common to Stormfield, Saugatuck Falls Natural Area, and other locations with conifers. They nest in tree hollows or in leafy treetop nests. They can be quite inquisitive. If you see one and stop, they may well decide to scamper towards you to investigate. Red squirrels are very territorial and chatter insistently as they chase intruders away from their homes. They are rusty red in color with white undersides.

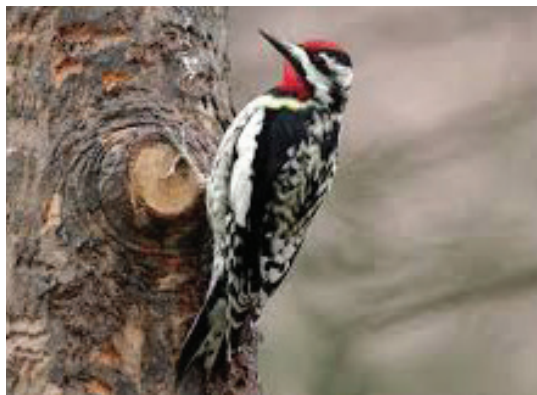
Activities

Keep an eye out on your next hike and listen for their chatter. If you come upon a large collection of green pine cones hiding under a log, this may be a red squirrel cache. See if you find our more common gray squirrel and red squirrel living in the same area. If you like to feed the birds when the snow falls, you might be lucky enough to see a red squirrel popping up through the snow under your feeder. These clever rodents make use of tunnels beneath the snow so they can travel safely from their tree to their various caches of food while avoiding hungry predators like hawks and foxes.



LEAVES AND NUTS

October is the perfect time to look for many different nuts, seeds, and leaves. While our oaks, hickories, and walnuts are dropping their autumn bounty, understory plants are also shedding their seeds. All of these plants are producing the potential next generation. As you marvel at the splendor of our autumn leaves, it's interesting to note that the bright colors we enjoy in the fall have been in the leaves all along, they have just been overwhelmed by the green pigment, chlorophyll. As the trees shut down for winter, their sap travels down to the roots, the leaves are no longer being "fed", the chlorophyll disappears, and rainbows of color emerge!



Activities

Give each hiker a bag to collect their favorite leaves and press them between the layers of newspaper, placing some weighty books on top. In a week or so they will be ready for an assortment of crafts. See how many different nuts and seeds you can find. Are the seeds designed to fly on the wind, hitch a ride on a traveling animal, or are they inside a delicious berry that will be eaten by one of our wild neighbors?

YELLOW-BELLIED SAPSUCKER

Perhaps, while wandering through an old apple orchard, you have seen rows of small round holes evenly spaced around the tree, this is the work of the yellow-bellied sap sucker. Using their chisel-shaped beak, they actually make two types of holes-deep round ones and shallow rectangular ones (usually above the round ones). These “sap wells” are maintained by the sapsucker so they will not only have a supply of sap but also a supply of insects that are attracted to, and sometimes trapped in, the sap! Other wild neighbors like hummingbirds, squirrels, and bats also visit these sap wells. As you explore the woodlands look for their holes in maples and birch trees as well.

Activities

At this time of year our elegantly marked sapsuckers are migrating through to their warmer wintering grounds, but it is the perfect time to watch for and learn more about their relatives. Try to learn the calls of our common woodpeckers -- the pileated, red-bellied, hairy, downy, and northern flicker -- so that you will know who is calling from the treetops on your woodland walks. Learn about their amazing adaptations: bill shape, strong tail feathers, barbed tongues, protective skulls, and their zygodactyl feet -- WOW what amazing creatures!! If suet is included in your winter feeding station, you will have a chance to learn more about their beautiful markings and eating techniques.



CRICKETS

There are many species of crickets living in Redding-field crickets, tree crickets, and the always awesome mole crickets. The Orthoptera group also includes katydids and grasshoppers. Most of the background noise this time of year is the “singing” of the crickets. The males make their music by scraping two textured wings together in a process called *stridulation*. Did you know that crickets have hearing organs on their front legs?

Activities

Listen for their chirps and see if you can tease out different frequencies and songs. Can you track one down by following its song? Beware, what you hear and where the “singing” cricket is located is almost always different. Look up Dolbear’s Law which relates the frequency of chirps to the temperature – it’s fascinating.

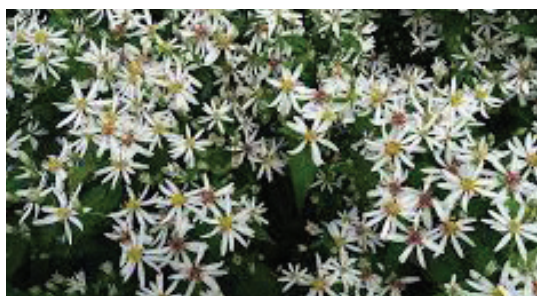


WINTERBERRY

This showy member of the holly family (*Ilex verticillate*) is quite common here and favors the perimeter of our wetlands. Now is the time to look for these smallish shrubs, typically six to ten feet tall. Female bushes are sporting bunches of bright red berries along their branches. While it is tempting to pick them, they almost always drop their berries in a day or two and it’s better to save them for wildlife. Cedar Waxwings, Eastern Bluebirds, and Robins are just a few of the birds that will feast on these berries.

Activities

Add this beauty to your next hike or even road walk. See what other shrubs and small trees live in the same area. Do any others have berries?



ASTERS

Along with the ever present goldenrods, these fall bloomers are almost as common, with many varieties often growing in the same area. The white wood aster is likely the most common, seen frequently along the road and in wooded areas, favoring the shade. You may also find other varieties like the showy New England aster. All of these fall wildflowers provide important late season pollen and nectar for our pollinators.

Activities

Check out the Go Botany website to view Connecticut asters. You will be surprised how many may be growing right around you.

To catchup 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 or 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

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.

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.*