



# REDDING NATURE EXPLORERS

## NOVEMBER 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.

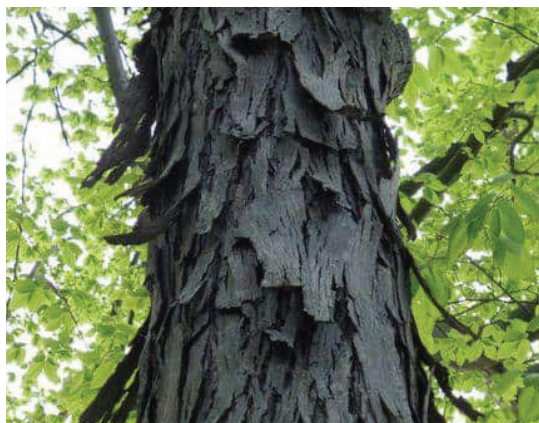


### AMERICAN WITCHHAZELS

Just when other shrubs and trees are losing their leaves and shutting down for winter, our witchhazels are flowering and brightening our woodlands from October through December! This is the perfect time of year to discover their bright yellow flowers. They have 4 long petals and red centers, and look like bursts of confetti. They are pollinated by the owlet moth. When their seeds are formed they burst out of their capsules with such force that they travel 30'-40'!

#### More for you to discover:

When looking at witchhazel leaves you often find growths that look like little witches' hats—what are these? Find out how witchhazel branches were used to find water! Find a bottle of witchhazel in the store—it really does work on bruises!



### SHAGBARK HICKORIES

We have so many beautiful trees in our woodlands, and when the leaves fall, it is the perfect time to admire the many different types of bark and branching patterns. We have beech trees with smooth bark, oak trees with ridged bark, but one of the most unique bark patterns belongs to the shagbark hickory. It is perfectly named because, as the trees age, sections of their bark peel away in large, flat, curving plates giving the tree a very shaggy appearance. These majestic trees can grow to be 100' tall and, in undisturbed woodlands, live for over 300 years. These trees are important to our wildlife. Squirrels, raccoons, chipmunks, mice, foxes, bears, woodducks, and turkey are just some of the animals that come to dine on their hickory nuts.

#### More for you to discover:

What are some of the ways our Native Americans used this tree? How do we use the wood from this tree today?





## EASTERN BOBCATS

Redding’s open spaces, with their combination of woodlands, fields, and wetlands, provide welcomed habitats for a healthy population of bobcats. These elusive nocturnal predators can be anywhere from 26”-41” in length and weigh 10-30 pounds. Their characteristic “bobbed” tail is 4”-7”. Even though they are rarely seen, it is wonderful to know about these neighbors! As carnivores, their varied diet includes rabbits, woodchucks, squirrels, mice, voles, birds, and more. If they are fortunate enough to be very successful on a hunt, they will cache (or hide) what they cannot consume under logs or leaves, saving it for later. Look for their tracks in the mud by streams and ponds, because of their retractable claws, claw marks do not show.

During the winter months, when food is more difficult to find, bobcats are frequently sighted during the day. With their brown/gray dappled fur, they are beautifully camouflaged. Distinguishing features include pointed ears with tufts of black fur at the tip, a large white spot on the back of each ear, and a bobbed tail. Young bobcats stay with their mother through the winter. A group of bobcats is called “A Clutter”.

### More for you to discover:

Learn how to distinguish bobcat tracks; learn the sounds they make; If you catch a glimpse, please become a Citizen Scientist and report it to DEEP <https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/Wildlife/Community-Science-Volunteer-Opportunities-CT-Wildlife-Division>

## WILD TURKEYS

Wow! This is definitely a great year for wild turkeys! We have been seeing rafters (flocks) with 15+ birds walking through the fields and woodlands. They travel more than a mile each day searching for berries, acorns, beech and hickory nuts, seeds, insects, and even snails!

These heavy-bodied birds with their long necks and bare heads are easy to recognize. The males can be distinguished by their blue and red throat wattles as well as by the long “beards” made up of bristles emerging from their breast feathers (note: about 20% of females also sport “beards”). Male turkeys are covered by a dizzying assortment of beautiful iridescent feathers. The smaller females are covered with iridescent bronze-green feathers. Both of them have boldly barred brown and white wing feathers, which are often found in the woodlands after they molt.

Turkeys are wary of predators like coyotes, fox, and bobcats. As the sun begins to set, entire flocks make their way up to the treetops to roost until dawn. There is a great deal of squawking during this rather clumsy process. We are all familiar with the classic, “Gobble, Gobble, Gobble,” but turkeys are known to have more than 25 distinct calls with different meanings.

### More for you to discover:

What are young male turkeys called? How about older males and females? What do their tracks look like? Learn about their different calls. Did you know turkey beards are actually made of modified feathers?

## PILEATED WOODPECKERS

Have you ever been out walking and heard a loud, almost prehistoric, whinnying call coming from the treetops? This, along with loud, slow, resonant drumming, belongs to our largest woodpecker, the Pileated. Reaching 19” in length, these black and white birds have flaming-red crests, females have a black “mustache” and males have a red “mustache”.

These amazing creatures require 150-200 acres of mature woodlands to support their diet of insects. They use their long chisel-shaped beak to drill distinctive rectangular-shaped feeding holes in decaying trees. Their 4” retractable tongue is barbed on the end and just perfect for reaching into the holes and sweeping out carpenter ants, beetle larvae, and termites. While up in the treetops they also enjoy caterpillars, berries, and small nuts, but carpenter ants make up the vast majority of their diet—that is why it is so important to leave decaying trees in our woodlands.

Their undulating flight showcases their impressive 26”- 29” wingspan. In flight, look for white crescents on the upper side of their wings.

### More for you to discover:

What other types of woodpeckers do we have living in our woodlands? Why don’t woodpeckers get headaches when pecking on trees? How does their 4” tongue fit into their skull? Learn the calls of the pileated woodpecker.

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](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.\***