

Tracks Newsletter



Spring, 2008

Get Connected

by Andrea Johnson, Park Naturalist

Are you and your family connected? I am not talking about internet or cell phones. I'm talking about nature. Are you connected with nature? Today people are spending less and less time outdoors. Sometimes the only exposure to the outdoors a person may have in a day is walking from his car into work, school or the store.

Richard Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods; Saving Our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, talks about how today's children are growing up with little or no contact with the outdoor world and the negative effects of this trend. This book is a must-read for parents and adults working with children. Kids spend more time watching T.V., playing video games, or on the computer than playing outside. Louv quotes a fourth grader who said. "I like to play indoors better 'cause that's where all the electrical outlets are." Wouldn't we want them to like the outdoors better? To me nature is a precious, beautiful gift. When I spend time in nature I feel relaxed, rejuvenated and happy. If I spend

hours indoors, I feel the total opposite.

Louv's book talks about nature-deficit disorder, which is not a true condition, but rather a term for this growing trend of lack of exposure to the outdoor world. Louv says that "direct exposure to nature is essential for healthy childhood development—physical, emotional and spiritual. What's more, nature is a potent therapy for depression, obesity, and ADD."

At Ernie Miller Nature Center, I direct one of our Outdoor Discovery Camps. We have many structured outdoor activities, but we also allow time for just "playin' in the woods." The kids can build forts, roll in the grass, look for bugs or just sit under a tree with friends. This seems to be the favorite time. Sometimes when parents come, their kids try to hide because they don't want to go home. Through the outdoors I have

seen kids gain more self-confidence, have the opportunity to run off energy and gain an appreciation and sense of responsibility for nature. (To learn more about our summer camp opportunities visit www.jcprd.com)

Parents of today have many concerns about the outdoors. Fears include mosquito and ticks, sunburns, heat or



Camp kids building a fort in the woods at Ernie Miller Nature Park.

Continued on page 2

Spring Special Events & Programs

- KC Wildlands Workdays, February 23 & May 3
 - Bird House Workshop, March 1
- Animal Tales, March 5 & 26, April 9 & 23, May 7 & 21
- Spring Time Preschool Programs, March 8, April 5 & May 10
 - Spring Fling Programs, March 17-21
- TimberRidge Adventure Center Open House, April 12
- Map & Compass: Orienteering Workshop, April 12
 - 2008 KC Earth Fest & Walk, April 19
- Kansas City's Passport to Adventure Kick-off, April 20
 - La Grande Birding Fiesta, April 26
- Wildflowers & Butterflies: Spring Walk, May 10

See pages 3 & 4 for details and registration information.

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cold, strangers and injuries. These fears often keep children indoors where parents can keep a watchful eye on them. It is understandable that parents want to keep their children safe, but we cannot become paralyzed by the things we hear on TV or read in the paper, which are often exaggerated. With the proper preventive measures we can still be outside and be safe. We would probably be a lot more healthy too if we were outside more.

My parents made us spend most of our time outside. Though I didn't have a forest or open field to play in, there was plenty of nature in our neighborhood. My parents also took camping, and fishing. We often hiked at the local nature park and or went to my grandparents' farm.

I have so many fun, happy and exciting memories of the outdoors. When I think of it, my memories of playing indoors seem insignificant to those of the outdoors. Are you and your families creating those same type of memories? Get your kids and yourself outside, have some fun or just relax. I know you will enjoy yourself.

Have fun getting connected to nature!

**Thank you
Krispy Kreme Donuts**



**For there donation of
donuts for October's Scary
Stories and February's
Laura's Legacy.**

New Faces



Martika Daniels is the new Animal Caretaker at the Nature Center. She is a Olathe Northwest High

School Senior, a member of the drama club and enjoys reading and surfing the web. At home she has a dog named Pepper who is a Australian Shepherd/Border Collie mix. Martika plans to go to Johnson County College next fall and then continue on to Kansas State University and pursue a Masters degree in Veterinary Medicine.

Bill Araujo is the newest volunteer at Nature Center. As a "semi-retiree" he brings a variety of experience to our program. He currently is a challenge



course facilitator at JCPRD's TimberRidge Adventure Center. Bill also has been a docent at Kansas City's Zoo for 6 years where he loves presenting programs. Last year alone he volunteered over 500 hours at the zoo. Photography and golfing are 2 of the other activities he enjoys. Last year he spent two weeks in Kenya on a photo safari. Bill's goals this year include learning to be a better photographer, becoming a golf course volunteer marshall, and learning more about interpretation.

Special Thank you

Thank you to the following people who donated to the Holidays for the Animals program:

- Manhart Birthday Party
- Lydia Sauders and Family
- David Markham
- Richard Voss
- Vern Searls

Items donated included detergent, hay, ferret treats, suet cakes, animal cages and containers, cedar shavings, sisal rope, dryer sheets, bleach, corn cakes, peanuts and corn. Donation will be used to care for the many animals that we use in nature awareness programs given to thousands of people every year. In addition we will use donations to feed the animals in the wildlife viewing area. If you would like to donate to the animals at the nature center please call Elaine Giessel at (913)764-8580 ext. 27.

WE WANT YOU . . .



TO BE A VOLUNTEER!

- Meet interesting people!
- Help us maintain fascinating creatures!
- Lead people through the wilds of Ernie Miller Park!
- Learn cool stuff about nature and history!

**BE PART OF THE FEW,
THE PROUD,
THE ERNIE MILLER PARK
VOLUNTEERS!**

Training and support will be provided. Must be at least 18 years old. Call (913) 764-8580 x 26 for more information.

Nature Center Programs

Some of the following nature center programs require preregistration. Please call (913) 831-3359 Voice or (913) 831-3342 TDD for registration information. 10% discount for Johnson County residents (on preregistered programs only) 1st price listed: county residents / 2nd price: non-residents.

For a complete listing of programs, see the JCPRD Activities Catalog or visit www.jcprd.com

SPECIAL EVENTS



Spring Fling Fun — March 17-21, 10-10:45 am (All Ages) Come enjoy spring with a trip to Ernie Miller Nature Park. Visitors are welcome to view the aquarium and hike the trails all

week. Park naturalists will entertain guests with a special program every day.

MON. - Celebrate Celtic stories, music and traditions.

TUE. - Discover reptiles with live snakes, turtles and lizards.

WED. - Wildlife Wagon showcases a variety of live animals.

THU. - History comes alive with stories from Laura Ingalls Wilder

FRI. - Learn about amazing feats of flight with live birds of prey.

For more information call (913) 764-7759. 1-45 min. session - \$1.75 per person including adults, paid at site

KC WildLands

Workdays — Sat.

Feb. 23 and Sat.

May 3 (All Ages)

Interested groups and individuals are invited to assist with prairie restoration efforts at a



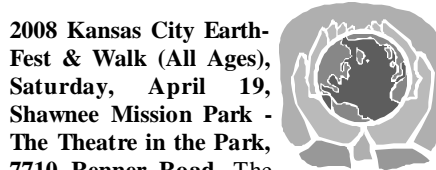
small prairie remnant at Ernie Miller Park during two spring workdays planned in conjunction with Kansas City WildLands, a local conservation coalition. A workday on Feb. 23 will focus on prairie restoration, while a workday on May 3 will also involve the planting of prairie species. These are great opportunities to help with hands-on conservation work on the metro area's dwindling wild acres. Participants should dress for the weather - long pants are suggested. KC WildLands will supply work gloves and drinking water. Some tools will be provided on-site, but participants are encouraged to bring their own loppers, small saws, and hand shovels. **For more information or to register for either workday, call KC WildLands Coordinator Linda Lehrbaum (816) 561-1016 x116 or email to Linda@bridgingthegap.org 1-3 hr. event - FREE**

TimberRidge Adventure Center Open House, 9 am - 3pm, (All Ages) & Climbing Tower, 9 am - Noon (Ages 12 & Older), Both Sat. April 12. If you have not seen TimberRidge Adventure Center yet, now is your chance! During our third-annual Open House, choose from several activities: canoeing, kayaking, pedal boating, hiking, BB-gun shooting, and archery. Catch and release fishing also available, however par-

and older participants age 16 are required to have Kansas fishing licenses. Licenses will not be sold on site. Cops n' Bobbers will be on site with poles and bait available for use or you may bring your own. Guided tours of the challenge course will be available. Visit and see all the programs and amenities that TimberRidge has to offer. Experience the Hawk's Nest Climbing Tower! An open climbing event for interested parties ages 12 and older will be held. Climbers will need to pre-register as space is limited. Participants are required to complete medical and liability releases prior to participating. Children under the age of 18 must have parent or guardian's signature. To register call (913) 856-8849.

TIMBERRIDGE ADVENTURE CENTER OPEN HOUSE 1- 6 hr. event - FREE CLIMBING TOWER OPEN HOUSE - Pre-registration is required—1- 3 hr. event - FREE

2008 Kansas City EarthFest & Walk (All Ages), Saturday, April 19, Shawnee Mission Park - The Theatre in the Park, 7710 Renner Road. The 12th Annual Kansas City EarthWalk is a fundraising event for Bridging the Gap and its programs - including recycling programs, area cleanup and beautification efforts, environmental education for youth, environmental consulting for small businesses and much more. Kansas City EarthFest is a free regional event meant to celebrate family, fun and our planet. Now in its third year at The Theatre in the Park, EarthFest features live entertainment, games, crafts and activities for kids of all ages (and



adults too!) EarthFest and Walk are rain-or-shine events. For more information visit www.earthdaykc.org or call (816) 561-1087. Register for the EarthWalk through Bridging The Gap by calling (816) 561-1087. **EARTHWALK 1- 2 hr. event - \$18 for Adults, \$12 for Youth, EARTHFEST 1- 4 hr. event - FREE**

Kansas City's Passport to Adventure 2008 Kick-off, Sun. April 20, 1-4 pm, At the New Bass Pro Shop, 18001 Bass Pro Dr., Independence, MO. This event will have tables set up from KC area nature centers and historical sites. It will include live animals and hands-on activities. Pick up your Passport at the Kick-off and take it with you to the participating natural and historical sites. Answer the question on each site's passport page to receive a special gift and stamp each time. Once you have completed the passport, turn it in to any participating site by September 30 to receive a special prize via mail. Visit www.passportkc.org/ or call (913)764-8580 ext. 23 for more information.



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*** La Grande Birding Fiesta, Sat. April 26, 8:30 am - Noon** (Ages 6 & Older - Children must be accompanied by one Parent/Adult chaperone per group of 5) It's springtime so let's celebrate! Join us at Ernie Miller Park to welcome back hummingbirds, orioles, warblers, and other feathered friends from their winter vacation in Latin America. Take a guided bird hike through the park and learn the basics of birding. Participants may also visit bird-related information booths and children's activity stations at their leisure. See live birds of prey! Make a bird feeder to take home, and find out how to attract birds to your yard. In the event of rain the booths and stations will be moved indoors. Appropriate for school-age children and beginning birders. Great activity for small scout groups! **For more information, contact Elaine Giessel, Park Naturalist at (913) 764-8580 ext. 27. 1- 3.5 hr. event - FREE in conjunction with Outdoor Kansas Kids Day - Come and go as you please.**



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Nature Center Programs

PRESCHOOL

Our preschool series emphasizes natural and cultural concepts and is intended to be both fun and educational. Instructors: Park Naturalists.

Preschool Package: Spring Time Series

(Ages 4-5) Don't miss any of the action. Bring your preschooler to Ernie Miller on Saturdays to see spring budding all around! Enroll in the package for the whole spring series or choose your favorite one. The spring preschool package includes Busy Bees, Spring Fling, and To Mother Nature....With Love. **3-90 min. sessions - \$29 (\$32 nonresidents) Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913) 831-3359 to register. Class code: 82-2142-016-01**

Preschool: Spring Time 1 - Busy Bees — Sat. March 8, 10-11:30 am

(Ages 4-5) Soon spring will be here and the honeybees will begin their honey-making tasks. Do a bee dance and taste a bee-made snack. **1-90 min. session - \$11 (\$12 nonresidents) Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913) 831-3359 to register. Class code: 82-2142-016-02**

Preschool: Spring Time 2 - Spring Fling — Sat. April 5, 10-11:30 am (Ages 4-5)

Spring has arrived at Ernie Miller Park. Explore the signs of spring as you take a natural scavenger hunt. Return to the Nature Center and make a springtime creation of your own. **1-90 min. session - \$11 (\$12 nonresidents) Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913) 831-3359 to register. Class code: 82-2142-016-03**

Preschool: Spring Time 3 - To Mother Nature....With Love — Sat. May 10, 10-11:30 am (Ages 4-5)

It's an Earth Day celebration for Mother Nature. Learn about the gifts she has for us to enjoy – wild plants and animals! Discover what you can do to help wildlife, especially animals who are hurt or orphaned. Make a special gift, take a walk, and discover Mother Nature's gifts to us! **1-90 min. session - \$11 (\$12 nonresidents) Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913) 831-3359 to register. Class code: 82-2142-016-04**



Storytelling: Animal Tales — Wednesdays, 10 & 11 am (Ages 2-6 with Adult)

Visit the Nature Center for stories, songs, and surprises geared to preschool children. Come listen and learn. Meet a special animal friend every time. All small children must be accompanied by an adult. Join us at Ernie Miller Nature Center. **1-30 min. session - \$1.75 per person including adults, paid at site**

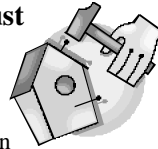
Bug Buddies	3/5	Turtles	3/26
Bees	4/9	Birds	4/23
Lizards	5/7	Bunnies	5/21

YOUTH

Birds: Bird House Workshop — Sat. March 1, 9:30-11 am

(Ages 5 & Older - Must be accompanied by Parent/Guardian)

Bird nesting cavities in dead trees are hard to find in our city backyards. Attract birds like wrens and chickadees to your yard by building a bird house. Interpretive staff at the Ernie Miller Nature Center will help you construct a bird house which we supply. Please bring a hammer and screwdriver. Information on birds and tips on how to attract birds to your area will be shared. One bird house per registrant. Please note: Registration deadline is Friday, February 22nd. Instructor: Interpretive Staff. **1-90 min. session - \$15 (\$17 nonresidents) Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913) 831-3359 to register. Class code: 82-2108-016-01**



ADULT

Map & Compass: Orienteering Workshop — Sat. April 12, 9-12 am (Ages 16 & Older and Children accompanied by Parent/Guardian)

Do you like to hike cross-country but fear losing your way? This beginner's workshop introduces you to orienteering, a fun way of learning the basic skills for using a topographic map and a magnetic compass. This class includes a practice orienteering hike in the



park. Workbook and loan of compass are provided. Dress for the weather. Instructor: Possum Trot Orienteering Club. **1-3 hr. session - \$15 (\$17 nonresidents) Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913) 831-3359 to register. Class code: 82-2112-016-01**

Wildflower & Butterfly: Spring Walk — Sat. May 10, 1-3 pm (Ages 18 & Older)

Red, blue, orange, yellow... Ernie Miller Park is a rainbow of wildflowers. Appreciate their beauty and learn to identify our wildflowers and their insect visitors. Handouts are included. **1-2 hr. session - \$11 (\$12 nonresidents) Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913) 831-3359 to register. Class Code: 82-2111-016-01**



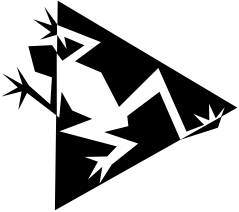
Trip: Squaw Creek Birdwatching — Sat. March 15, 8 am-3:30 pm (Ages 18 & Older)

Join us for our late winter birdwatching trip to Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge. Observe the migration of ducks and geese as they fly north to their breeding grounds. Other wildlife we may observe include white-tailed deer, pheasants, and the bald eagle. For lunch, we will eat at Camp Rulo, which is famous for fried catfish and other entrees in Rulo, NE. We will leave Antioch Park at 8 am and return around 3:30 pm. Van transportation and tour guide services are included. Participants must provide own meal expenses and should bring binoculars. For more information call (913) 438-7275 ext. 391. **1-7 ½ hr. trip - \$31 Pre-registration required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913) 831-3359 to register. Class code: 82-2109-011-01** *Outdoor Adventures Cancellation Policy*
No refunds within ten business days of trip unless a replacement can be found.

For more field trips around the Kansas City area check out Burroughs Audubon Society's **Field Trips** page at <http://www.burroughs.org>

SUMMER CAMP ENROLLMENT HAS BEGUN!

Do you want your child to have a fun, outdoor experience this summer? Johnson County Park and Recreation offers a number of nature and outdoor summer camps.



Ernie Miller Nature Center Outdoor Discovery Camp
Shawnee Mission Park Outdoor Discovery Camp
Blast from the Past • Junior Naturalist • Fine Art of Nature
Wonderful Week of Water • Girl Power • Summer Vacation
Climbing & Rappelling • Fishing & Canoeing • Summer Tots

Space is limited and camps are filling up fast. All camps require pre-registration. For more information visit www.jcprd.com or see the JCPRD Activities Catalog that can be found at all Johnson County Park facilities and libraries.

Or call (913) 764-7759 and speak to one of our Park Naturalists.



Mud Pies

Hands-on nature activities for pre-schoolers

By Molly Postlewait



Little Cedar Reader: **Children's Literature Corner**

I throw myself to the left
I turn myself to the right
I am the fish in the water who
glides, who twists, who leaps
Everything lives, everything
dances and everything sings

African pygmy saying

Nature Activity:

Scavenger Hunt—Children love to discover and enjoy the thrill of the hunt for interesting items. This activity helps children by allowing them to use observation skills and enhances curiosity.

Spring is a great time to take a walk and look about. Emphasis that the hunt is not to collect but to locate. Some kids like the satisfaction of crossing off the found item. Make your own scavenger hunt on a piece of paper with things you know might be easy to find. Here are a few suggestions.

- A tree with smooth bark and one with bumpy bark.
- A home for a rabbit and a place for a frog to live.
- A place for deer to hide and a place for a squirrels to play.
- Find a dead tree and look for mushrooms and other fungi.
- Listen for birds and insect sounds.
- Turn over rocks and logs. What do you see?
- Find something shiny and find something with thorns on it.

As adults we are often worried that we don't have the right facts or that we are not skilled enough to answer questions. Don't be concerned about technical information. Just allow your child (and yourself) to explore.

These things are important and they can't be taught in a school classroom or on TV. Wander around and be there at right moment for the earth to be the teacher. The earth is a wonderful teacher. And we are never too old to be students of nature.



ERNIE MILLER NATURE CENTER

909 North Highway 7
Olathe, Kansas 66061


Phone: (913)764-7759

<http://www.emiemiller.com>

Ernie Miller Nature Park

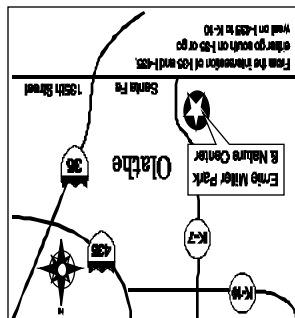
Hours
Monday—Saturday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.
Sunday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Winter hrs. run from Nov. 1 to Mar. 31
(close at 4:30)

Park trails open every day
dawn to dusk



Nature Center Staff
Andrée Ables.....Secretary
Leon Gordon.....Park Supervisor
Bill McGowan.....Outdoor Education
Manager
Molly Postewart...Smr. Park Naturalist
Andrea Johnson.. Park Naturalist and
Tracks Editor
Elaine Geissel.....Park Naturalist

Ernie Miller Nature Center
909 North Highway 7
Olathe, Kansas 66061
(1 mile north of I-35th Street)
(913) 764-7759



Johnson County Park and Recreation District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age and handicapped status in employment or the provision of programs and services.

Nature's Corner
at the
Gift Shop
Ernie Miller Nature Center

Looking for something
naturally unique?
Edible bug treats ❖ Books ❖ Jewelry
❖ Polished Rocks ❖ Bird Feeders
New items in stock
Push Audubon birds with real bird
calls ❖



Discover/Mastercard/Visa accepted