



Tracks Newsletter

Regina Wasson, Park Naturalist



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Nature Center Hours

Nov. 1 – Feb. 28

(March 1– Oct. 31)

Monday – Saturday

9 am to 4:30 pm

(9 am to 5:00 pm)

Sunday: 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm

(1:00 to 5:00 pm)

Park trails are open every day dawn to dusk

**909 North K-7 Highway
Olathe, KS 66061
Phone: 913-764-7759**

**www.erniemiller.com
www.jcprd.com**

Hungry Birds

As we fall into winter, you may notice the birds migrating South. Kansas becomes the temporary home for many species of birds. Some of these migrants fly from places as far as Alaska to spend the winter in Kansas. Sixty-eight species of birds can be seen at Ernie Miller Nature Park during the winter.

Trees become dormant and the insects disappear as the temperatures drop making it more difficult for birds to find food. Supplying these feathered friends with seeds and water is a way you can aid their survival. Water is the most crucial thing you can provide this winter. Water may not be available due to low dipping overnight temperatures. Using a heated water bowl will allow the birds to access water at anytime.

Choosing the right seed is as important as deciding to feed. There are many commercial bird foods available. During winter, birds often seek out high caloric foods like black oil sunflower seeds. These seeds provide

twice as much fat and calories as the striped sunflower seeds. Black oil sunflower seeds are eaten by cardinals, juncos, chickadees, and nuthatches as well as many others.

Another valuable food you can provide is suet. Suet cakes are made from animal fat mixed with seeds, peanuts, cornmeal, and fruits. The hardened cakes are then placed in a square wire basket outside. When insects are not available woodpeckers often eat suet for energy.

Peanuts are a favorite snack of humans and birds. They are a prized high calorie food by woodpeckers, chickadees, and titmice. Be aware that European starlings and squirrels may also seek out peanuts and may leave your feeder in shambles after they visit.

Safflower seeds are a popular option for bird feeding. This seed is preferred by cardinals, but, disliked by squirrels. Think carefully before purchasing a wild bird food mix; fillers like red millet may make up the bulk of the seed. Red millet is a seed

that is often picked out and discarded from the feeder creating a mess at the base of your feeder.



Choose a location that is easy for you to access, clean, and refill your feeder. Consider a place you don't mind the mess and birds can easily find cover after feeding. A thicket of bushes will allow birds to safely hide during the cold night and poor weather.

Once you begin to feed the birds, you will develop a greater appreciation for them. The birds visiting your feeder may intrigue you enough to learn their names. Keeping a pair of binoculars and a field guide nearby is handy for quick identification. This winter, feed your appetite for bird knowledge by attending programs offered at Ernie Miller Nature Center. (See page 2 for birding events)

A Bittersweet Moment



American bittersweet (*Celastrus scandens L.*) was once a common vine found in Ernie Miller Park. Perhaps over harvest is to blame for its decline in the park. Bittersweet is most spectacular when all the other leaves have fallen. In the autumn, the stunning berries are displayed on their woody

vine. The bright red fruit ripens in the late fall providing food for animals in the winter. Ground birds, squirrels, and rabbits eat the fallen fruit.

These vines are often found growing close the ground; but are known to twine together to climb up telephone poles extending 30 feet from the ground. The woody vine is covered with alternate, oval leaves that yellow in the fall.

American bittersweet is a Kansas native plant that is often confused with Oriental bittersweet. They are

distinguished from each other by looking at the fruit. The fruit of Oriental bittersweet has yellow or golden brown capsules while the native species has bright orange capsules (see the picture to the left). The non-native species is known to be particularly invasive. American bittersweet can be easily controlled by allowing deer and rabbits to browse on it.

Take a hike through the park and search for bittersweet vines along the trails. Be sure to leave the berries for animals to eat and other visitors to enjoy.

January Programs



Coffee with the Birds, Tuesdays, Jan. 2, 9, 16, 23 & 30; 9:00-10:30 am (Adults) Winter is a wonderful time for bird watching. Enjoy the comfy Wildlife Viewing Room at Ernie Miller Nature Center every Tuesday in January and February to sit, drink free coffee, and visit while watching our feathered friends at the feeders. **Free!**

Sunday Family Series, Sundays, Jan. 7, 14, 21 & 28; 2:00 pm (All Ages) Bring the family to our Sunday afternoon programs for entertainment and educational experiences. Presented by Park Naturalists, Park Police Officers, and Volunteers, these programs are approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour. \$3 per person (including adults) Paid at site. Ages 2 and under free.

Jan. 7 **Snakes Alive** - Why is it that these creatures seem so terrifying? See Kansas snakes as we explore the facts and fallacies of these legless wonders of the natural world.

Jan. 14 **Birds of Prey** - Join our Interpretive staff as they show why rodents fear these great birds. Participants will see up close examples of the Nature Center's magnificent raptors and their special adaptations.

Jan. 21 **Biomimicry** - Come and learn how cockleburrs and kingfishers have influenced technical advances.

Jan. 28 **Kansas Symbols** - Celebrate Kansas' Statehood day. See some of the natural symbols of our state

Yoga: Green at Heart, Wednesdays, Jan. 10 to February 28; 6:00-7:00 pm (Ages 16 & older) Come try Yoga at the Nature Center. This class will focus on gentle stretching, serenity, and rejuvenation. It will be tailored to individual abilities. Please bring your mat to class. **Registration required.** 8 - 60 min. sessions; \$61/\$67 nonresidents. **Barcode:** 41286

February Programs

Coffee with the Birds, Tuesdays, Feb. 6, 13, 20 & 27; 9:00-10:30 am (Adults) Enjoy the comfy Wildlife Viewing Room at Ernie Miller Nature Center every Tuesday in January and February to sit, drink free coffee, and visit while watching our feathered friends at the bird feeders. **Free!**

Escape Room: Rescue the Animals, Friday, Feb. 9; 6:30 - 8:00 pm (All Ages) Your team must try to beat the clock by solving puzzles and using clues to unlock both rooms to help the animals make a great escape. **Registration required.** \$9/\$11 nonresidents. **Barcode:** Room A 41977; Room B 41978

Great Backyard Bird Count, Saturday, Feb. 17, 9:00 am-4:00 pm (All Ages) Join us for 15 minutes or stay for an hour to help us with the bird count. Learn about the birds that spend winters in Northeast Kansas from experienced birders from Burroughs Audubon Society of Greater Kansas City. **Free!**

Sunday Family Series, Sundays, Feb. 4, 11, 18 & 25, 2:00 pm (All Ages) Presentations are approximately 45 minutes to 1 hr. in length. \$3 per person (including adults) Ages 2 and under free. Paid at site.

Feb. 4 **Animal Clues** - Find out what clues to look for on your next walk though the park. Meet animals that leave tracks in the snow.

Feb. 11 **Laura's Memories** - Meet "Laura" as she tells stories that inspired the Little House on the Prairie books.

Feb. 18 **I Heart Spiders** - Discover the beauty and purpose of these quiet critters. See live spiders up-close.

Feb. 25 **Wildlife Who's Who** - Meet an amphibian, reptile, bird, and mammal. Discover their similarities and differences.

Do you want to spend the summer outdoors with kids? **We're hiring!**
We are looking for hard working camp counselors for the Outdoor
Discovery Camp. Check out www.jcprd.com for more details.

Spring Break Camp

Spring Break Discovery Camp, March 12 -16; 7:30 am - 5:30 pm (Ages 6-10) Take an adventure this spring break at Ernie Miller Nature Center. Meet critters big and small, hike in the fresh spring air, create nature treats with newly found friends, & join us on a field trip. Earns JCPRD U Physical credit. **Enrollment is limited to 20 campers.** \$128/\$140 nonresidents. **Barcode:** 41281

Spring Break Adventures Camp, March 12 -16; 7:30 am - 5:30 pm (Ages 11-13) Join us for five days of outdoor adventure! Throughout the week we will go canoeing, fishing, team building, and zip lining at the challenge course at TimberRidge Adventure Center. Earns JCPRD U Physical credit. **Enrollment is limited to 13 campers.** \$141/\$155 nonresidents. **Barcode:** 41282

To register for our programs visit jcprd.com and search using the barcodes or call (913) 831-3359.

For full descriptions, visit our Events Calendar at erniemiller.com or call (913) 764-7759.

March Programs



Spring Fling Fun, March 12-16; 10:30 - 11:15 am, (All Ages) Come enjoy spring with a trip to the Park. Our staff will entertain guests with a special program with live animals everyday. \$3 per person (including adults) Paid at site.

- Monday **Animal Tales** - Kick off spring break hearing stories and seeing live animals.
- Tuesday **Birds of Prey** - The amazing feats of these flying feathered raptors will be the highlight of this program.
- Wednesday **Surprising Snakes** - Discover and learn to identify some local reptiles.
- Thursday **Wildlife Webs** - Live animals tell the story of survival on the prairie, in the forest, and in the streams.
- Friday **Wake Up it's Spring!** - Learn about the spiders, bats, birds, and bees making a spring appearance.

Yoga: Green at Heart, Wednesdays, March 21 - May 9; 6:00-7:00 pm (Ages 16 & older) Come try Yoga at the Nature Center. This class will focus on gentle stretching, serenity, and rejuvenation and will be tailored to individual abilities. Please bring your mat to class. **Registration required.** 8 - 60 min. sessions; \$61/\$67 nonresidents. **Barcode:** 41287

Juliette's Dream, Saturday, March 24; 10:00-11:30 am (All Ages; children must be accompanied by 1 adult per group of 5) Juliette Gordon Low loved adventure and nature and thought girls should go camping. In 1912, this spirited woman introduced Girl Scouting to American girls. For additional information or to register a group by phone, call (913) 826-2800. Earns JCPRD U Intellectual Credit. **Registration Required.** \$5/\$7 nonresidents; including adults. **Barcode:** 41426

April Programs

****Check out the latest My JCPRD brochure for new adult classes including: sailing, yoga & outdoor fitness!**

Art in Park, Saturday, April 7, 9:00 am - Noon (All Ages) Artists, exhibit your skills by creating and finishing an art piece in the park. Artists must register by March 30 for the event. Visitors will walk the trails and watch as local artists complete beautiful works of art in Ernie Miller Park. Stop into the nature center to vote for your favorite piece. The winners will have the artwork displayed in the nature center. Free for spectators. Adult Artist:\$15/\$17 nonresident; Youth Artist: \$10/\$11 nonresident **Barcode:** Adult 41293; Youth 41294

Yukon Pack, Saturday, April 14, 9:00 - 10:00 am (Ages 18 & older; Ages 12 to 17 must be accompanied by Parent/Guardian) Spring is here let's go outside and explore. Learn how to make a Yukon pack to take on your next adventure. Then take a hike on some secret trails in the nature park. \$22/\$24 nonresident **Barcode:** 41291

Orienteering Workshop, Saturday, April 28; 9:00 am - Noon (Ages 16 & Older; Children accompanied by Guardian) 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. Workbook and loan of compass are provided. Dress for the weather. Instructor: Possum Trot Orienteering Club. Earns JCPRD U Environmental credit. \$15/\$17 nonresidents **Barcode:** 41284

TimberRidge Adventure Center Open House, Saturday, April 28, 9:00 am - 3:00 pm (All Ages) During our annual Open House, you can try canoeing, kayaking, pedal boating, hiking, BB gun shooting, and archery at TimberRidge. Catch and release fish with Cops n' Bobbers. Poles and bait available for use or you may bring your own. People 12 years & older can experience the Hawk's Nest Climbing Tower! **Climbing Registration Required.** Choose a time from 9:30-12:30. To register, call (913) 856-8849. **Free!**

Preschool Programs

Animal Tales, Wednesdays, 10:30-11:00 am (Ages 2-6 with Adult) Visit the Nature Center for stories, songs & animals for preschool children. Children must be accompanied by an adult. \$2 per person (including adults). Paid at site.

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|------|--------------------|------|------------------------|
| 1/3 | Winter Nap | 3/7 | Animal Riddles |
| 1/17 | Under the Snow | 3/21 | S is for Snakes |
| 2/7 | Busy Beavers | 4/4 | Who's under the Rocks? |
| 2/21 | Birds in the Trees | 4/18 | Mother Nature |



Nature Time Yoga, Wednesdays, 10:30-11:00 am; Jan. 31, Feb. 14, March 28 & April 11 (Ages 2-6 with Adult) Join the Nature Center staff as parents/adults and children act out stories with animal and yoga movements that encourage creativity & coordination. See a live animal every time. All children must be accompanied by a participating adult. \$2 per person (including adults). Paid at site.



Ernie Miller Nature Center

909 N K-7 Highway
Olathe, Kansas 66061
Phone:(913-) 764-7759

Visit us at www.erniemiller.com

Follow us on: Twitter @JCPRDemncnature

Facebook: Ernie Miller Park & Nature Center



Ernie Miller Nature Center Staff

- Bill McGowan.....Outdoor Education Manager
- Andrea Joslin.....Outdoor Education Specialist
- Cindy Lawrence.....Interpretive Assistant
- Leon Gordon.....Park Supervisor
- Molly Postlewait.....Sr. Park Naturalist
- Diana Bliss.....Park Naturalist
- Regina Wasson.....Park Naturalist and *Tracks* Editor
- Rachel Magathan & Tuesday Meredith.....Animal Caretakers



Christine O'Brien

Volunteer at Ernie Miller Nature Center



After the completion of the Master Naturalist program, through the Kansas Extension, Christine began to volunteer at the nature center. She enjoys sharing information about birds especially with our Coffee with the Birds participants. This past fall, she volunteered for numerous special events at Ernie Miller Park. Her enduring kindness and patience make her a joy to work with. Christine loves to travel. She has been to the far reaches of Australia and New Zealand. She enjoys gardening, walking her Jack Russel terrier, and completing home improvement projects.

From fairy wand making to s'mores, she will do it all with a smile. Thank you Christine, for your dedication to our programs!

**If you want to be a stellar volunteer too, contact Andrea at andrea.joslin@jocogov.org

Thank You!

- **Arbor Creek Animal Hospital, PetLand** on K7 Highway & **Price Chopper** on K7 Highway for your continued support.
- To Mr. Allison and Mr. Schatz for the monetary donation.
- To all who participated in Holiday for the Animals by donating much needed supplies: Blue Valley School District, Jared R., the MacPhearson family, Ms. Keller, Mr. Knight. Ms. Barbar, Mr. Solar, Landon, Mr. & Mrs. Wittman, Ms. Sander, Ms. Suddath, and storeupalot.com

Eco Meet



1st Place SMS Team A (L-R): Hannah Klein, Lauren Bridson, Madison Goerz, Max Ramsey, Coaches: Dave Wright & PJ Born



2nd Place BVN Team (L-R): Jackie Perry, Mira Bhagat, Asmika Bahere, Victoria Gaa, Coach Chris Ollig

Eco-Meet, held annually at Ernie Miller Nature Center, is sponsored by Kansas Wildlife, Parks, and Tourism. The Eco-Meet's mission is to challenge and inspire an interest, appreciation, and understanding of the natural sciences and the Kansas environment through interscholastic competition.

Eleven Teams competed in our regional Eco-Meet. The teams worked together to give a short educational program and searched the prairie and woods for plants in a scavenger hunt. Individuals competed on two

written tests about the tallgrass prairie and herpetology.

Shawnee Mission South High School Team A won 1st place. While 2nd Place was awarded to Blue Valley North & 3rd place was earned by Shawnee Mission South Team B at the regional Eco-Meet at Ernie Miller Nature Center. These 3 teams continued on to competed in the state meet at the Webster Conference Center near Salina, KS. The state meet was won by Shawnee Mission South Team A in 1st place followed by Team B in 2nd and Blue Valley North in 3rd place.

Thank you to all of our participants, coaches, judges, and volunteers for helping to make this event possible. Congratulations to Shawnee Mission South High School and Blue Valley North High School on placing at the state competition.



3rd Place SMS Team B:(front;L-R) Harper Peck, Reagan Christie, Jack Householder, (back) Coach Dave Wright, Joseph Ward, Coach PJ Born

Mudpies

Nature Activities for Children

Molly Postlewait,
Senior Park Naturalist



Winter Owl Craft

On a bitter cold winter's day, stay inside and make your very own owl!

Materials needed:

Brown lunch sack, newspaper scraps, stapler, glue, 2 paper muffin cups, crayons, and white and orange construction paper.

- Have your child stuff the bottom of the sack with newspaper.
- Fold the opening of the sack down to make a face for your owl; then staple the sack shut.

- Cut out two white circles from the construction paper, just a little smaller than the bottom the muffin cups. Draw a dime size circle in the center of the paper circles. Have your child color the smaller circles. Glue each paper circle inside a muffin cup. You have now made the owl's eyes. Glue the eyes on your owl's face.
- Cut out an orange triangle for the owl's beak. Staple the beak below the eyes and near the bottom of the owl's face.

For fun, admire your owl and read *Owl Babies* by Martin Waddell

Go Owling

Winter is time for owls to nest, raise their young, and defend territory. They are often heard hooting on a cold winter's night. Find a park that is open late and is a safe area to be in the dark. Play an owl call like the Barred Owl. When the barred owl hoots, they seem to say "Who cooks for you, who cooks for you all." Once you play the call, quietly wait and listen for an owl to call back to you. Visit online resources like www.owlpages.com for more great information and calls of owls.