



Tracks Newsletter

www.erniemiller.com

Volume 30, Issue 2

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While your out-of-state families visit for the holidays, Kansas becomes their temporary home. This winter, 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 bird can be seen at Ernie Miller Nature Park during the winter.

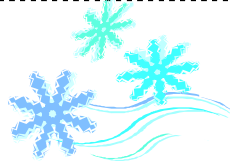
Food can become sparse in the winter, but you can help their survival by providing food and water. Supplying water is the most crucial thing you can provide this winter. Water may not be available due to low dipping temperatures over night. Using a heater underneath a ceramic bird bath will allow the birds to access water at anytime.



Tufted Titmouse, Photo by Gary Blatt

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

Another valuable food you can provide is suet. Suet and suet cakes are made from animal fat mixed with seeds, peanuts, cornmeal and fruits. The harden cakes are then placed in a square wire basket outside. The suet provides a needed supplement to woodpeckers when insects are not available. As peanuts are a favorite snack of humans, they are also a high calorie feed you can provide for the woodpeckers, chickadees and titmice to enjoy. Be aware European starlings and squirrels may also seek out peanuts and leave your feeder in shambles. (continued on page 2)



Make it a Green Holiday! Celebrate the season and the world we live in!

StoneLion Puppet Theatre is partnering with the Ernie Miller Nature Center to offer an afternoon of fun with FREE puppet shows, music with Dino O'Dell kid rocker, holiday art activities, games, refreshments, story time with live animals, face painting and environmental information on how to make your holiday a little bit greener. Construct holiday ornaments, make homemade wrapping paper, see puppet shows by StoneLion Puppet Theatre, create your own puppet, dance to the music and learn a little about how you can help the planet this season.

Featuring StoneLion Puppet Theatre's tiny tent show (yes crawl inside to see our smallest show yet – Blue Fish), visit the extinct animal train, and dance with the Holiday marionettes... "SNOW; a chillingly good time"

When: Dec 3, 2011

Time: Activities 1 – 4 p.m. Show times on the half hour.

Where: Ernie Miller Nature Center

For information call: 816-221-5351

This is a free event.



New Animal Caretaker Michelle Beas

The animals at the nature center have a new friend and caretaker. Michelle lives in Edgerton with her husband Chris and two-year old son Hayden.

Prior to coming to Ernie Miller Nature Center she worked at Lowes Home Improvement. Before coming to the Kansas City area Michelle lived in Springfield, Missouri. There she worked at the Bass Pro Shop as an Aquarist, where she cared for a variety of animals and provided programs on wildlife to the public. She also attended Missouri State University studying Wildlife Biology.

Michelle enjoys wildlife photography and baking at home. We are excited to have Michelle as part of the team at the nature center!

Home for the Holidays (continued from page 1) Safflower seeds are another option for bird feeding. This seed is preferred by cardinals; in addition, squirrels dislike safflower seeds. Think carefully when 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.

Location, Location, Location! Choose a location that is easy for you to access, clean and refill the 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 to learn their names. Keeping a pair of binoculars and a field guide nearby is handy for quick identification. It's fun, it's free and no batteries needed to begin this family activity.

This winter, feed your appetite for bird knowledge by attending programs offered at Ernie Miller Nature Center.

- * **December 3, 6:45am –2 pm Squaw Creek Eagle Days Trip**
- * **Tuesdays in January and February, 9-11 am —Coffee with the Birds**
 - * **January 8, 2-2:45 pm—Hungry Birds**
 - * **February 19, 9am-3pm—Great Backyard Bird Count**

For more information on these programs and more see pages 3-4.

ECO-Meet

On October 26, about 50 students from Johnson County High Schools came to Ernie Miller Nature Center to participate in an ECO-Meet. There were 14 teams from 7 different schools. This is the fourth time the ECO-Meet has been hosted at the Nature Center. As part of the competition the teams took two table top examinations, one on woodland ecosystems and the other on ornithology. They also performed a 5 minute interpretive program and did a scavenger hunt for plants found in the park.

The first place team overall was Blue Valley Team CAPS. Second place went to Shawnee Mission South Team C and third place was Shawnee Mission South Team A. Stephen DeHart from Olathe South took 1st place individually in the Woodland and Ornithology Tests. Second place in the Woodland test went to Austin Rice from Blue Valley. In Ornithology second place went to Landon Callihan from Shawnee Mission South.

There were nine Regional ECO-Meets held this year. The top three teams and top two individual winners in the ecosystem and ornithology events from all nine regional ECO-Meets were qualified for the state meet, held at Camp Wood near Elmdale, KS. Stephen DeHart from Olathe South took 1st place in both Ornithology and Woodlands for the state competition.



1st Place: Austin Rice, Vivek Menon, Holly Reynolds, Taylor Scott, Eric Kessler (Coach)



2nd Place: PJ Born (Coach), Rylee Goodson, Monica Funk, Stacy Stringer, Kaitlyn Soria



3rd Place: PJ Born (Coach), Landon Callihan, Josh Ford, Neil Johnson, Andrew Hoolingsworth

Nature Center Programs

Special Events

Kansas Day Celebration Sun. Jan. 29 2-4 pm,
(All Ages) (Children must be accompanied
by an adult per group of 5)

Celebrate all things Kansas on our State Hood Day! Can you name the Kansas Symbols? See some of the natural symbols live and in person. Have a piece of cake for the state's birthday and be delighted by the stories from a pioneer. Participate in fun activities for all ages and join in a rousing chorus of Home on the Range! **For reservation and more information call (913) 764-7759. Reservations required. \$5 per person (including adults)**



Laura's Legacy
Sat. Feb. 11, 10 am-12 pm

(Ages 5 & Older and must be accompanied by one adult per group of 5) Celebrate the birthday of Laura Ingalls Wilder, early Kansas pioneer. Participants will make a rag doll, experience lessons from 1800's school, and hear music from the time period. Refreshments will be served as Laura tells favorite stories of her childhood from long ago. Participants are invited to wear pioneer clothing. **For reservations and information call (913) 764-7759. Reservations required. \$7 per person including adults (\$8 nonresidents)**



Winter Solstice Celebration (All Ages)
Sat. Dec. 17, 6:30-9 pm

Take a break from the busy holiday festivities as we hike through the woods, along Little Cedar Creek to witness the natural display of winter's quiet time. Warm up by the fireside and listen to ancient stories about the longest night of the year. Visit live owls and discover animal mysteries of survival during the long winter. Gather round for campfire treats of toasted marshmallows and hot chocolate. Please dress for the weather. **For more information and reservations call (913) 764-7759. \$6 per person including adult (\$7 nonresidents) Paid at site.**

Great Backyard Bird Count
Sat. Feb. 18, 9am-3pm

Every year biologists and researchers count on *you* to help them determine the health of bird populations. Join us as we count birds and contribute to a worthy cause. It just takes 15 minutes and you may see northern cardinals, black-capped chickadees and many more feathered friends. Learn about the birds that spend winters in Northeast KS from experienced birders from Burroughs Audubon Society of Greater KC. **For more info, call (913) 764-7759 - FREE**



Sunday Family Nature Series (All Ages) Sundays, 2 pm

For info. call (913) 764-7759. 1-45 min to 1 hr. program - \$2.75 per person (Ages 2 & under free) Paid at site.

Hungry Birds (Jan. 8th) The winters of Kansas can be a great time to view and feed our feathered friends. Juncos, Finches and Waxwings are among the birds you might identify in the winter. The whole family will learn the best food to attract the birds and how to make a suet cake at home. Weather permitting; go on a short bird hike.

Snakes Alive (Jan. 15) Why is it that these creatures seem so terrifying? Could all the stories you have heard about snakes be true? See Kansas snakes as we explore the facts and fallacies of these legless wonders.



Nature Photography Fun (Jan. 22) Photographing plants, animals and landscape can be a wild adventure! What makes a good photograph? Discover how to compose beautiful works of art and memories that will last a lifetime and beyond. Learn from nature photographer enthusiast and Nature Center volunteer, Bill Araujo. This hour long session will focus on basic skills for beginner photographers. Bring your camera to take a picture of an owl! **Recommended for ages 8 and up.**



Good, the Bad, and the Smelly (Feb. 5) Take a different look at some of the not-so-glamorous animals around such as spiders, snakes, and skunks. These critters may not be loveable to all, but learn why they are important to our lifestyles and environment. Live snakes and spider will be displayed.



Being Bold in the Cold (Feb. 12) Discover how dangerous cold weather can be. Find out what tools and traits can help you survive the cold weather if you get lost on a hike, including how to build a fire. Learn about how some animals have adapted to the cold, and meet a live rabbit.

Nature, Treasure, Expedition (Feb. 19) See rainforest parrots and Kansas critters on a "Nature Treasure Expedition" as we explore nature locally and around the world. We hope to inspire you to set sail on your own family adventures.



Birds of Prey (Feb. 26) -By day or night, out of the sky flies a rodent's nightmare, a bird of prey. Using live birds, participants will see up close examples of these magnificent raptors and their special adaptations.

Spring Break Camps



Nature & Science: Spring Break Discovery March 12-16 (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, and join us on a field trip. Weather permitting, try your hand at catching some fish. Activities begin at 9 am and continue until 4 pm. For the convenience of working parents, supervision will be provided from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm daily. Children should bring a nutritious sack lunch, snacks, reusable water bottle, and drink. Parents will receive a detailed letter describing camp activities and a medical form which must be completed and brought to camp on Monday morning. Enrollment is limited to 20 campers. **For more information call (913) 826-2806. Refund policy: All fees non-refundable. \$109 (\$119 nonresidents) Preregistration Required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913)831-3359 to register. Class code: 5369**

Nature & Science: Spring Outdoor Adventures March 12-16 (Ages 11-13) If exploring wild areas, finding long forgotten trails, and learning secrets of survival appeal to you, join us for five days of adventure! Participants will need to bring a backpack with sack lunch, water bottle, and comfortable all-weather clothing. Outdoor Adventure Spring Break Camp will meet every morning at the Ernie Miller Nature Center. Programmed activities will begin at 9 am and conclude at 4 pm. For convenience of working parents supervision will be provided from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm. Throughout the week we will go canoeing, fishing, climbing, and do teambuilding at the challenge course. The last day of camp we will have a cookout. Activities may vary due to the weather conditions. Parents will receive a detailed letter describing camp activities and a medical form which must be completed and brought to camp on Monday morning. **For more information call (913) 826-2804. Refund policy: All fees non-refundable \$130 (\$143 nonresidents) Preregistration Required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913) 831-3359 to register. Class code: 5370**



Adult Programs

Coffee with the Birds (Ages 18 & Older) Tuesdays starting January 10, 9-11am

Winter is a wonderful time for bird watching. Chickadees, woodpeckers, juncos, cedar waxwings and more can be seen busily eating at the feeders to warm their little bodies. Join us in 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. **10-2 hr sessions - FREE (Come and go as you please)**

Youth Programs

Kids & Nature: "Nature Pals" (Ages 6-12) 6 Thursdays Starting 1/12, 4-5 pm

Come with us on an adventure through Ernie Miller Park. Participants will explore different habitats and see animals up close. Each session will focus on a different nature theme. Instructor: Park Naturalist, Molly Postlewait - **\$42 (\$46 nonresidents) To register call (913) 831-3359 or visit www.jcprd.com. Preregistration required. Class code: 3908**

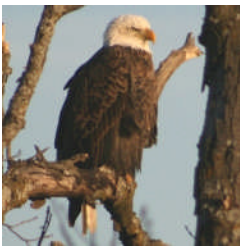


Travel

Outdoor Adventure: Squaw Creek Eagle Days Sat. Dec. 3, 6:45-2pm

(Ages 18 & Older and Children accompanied by Adult) Visit the yearly celebration of "Eagle Days" at Squaw Creek National Wildlife Refuge. This is always a participant favorite, allowing everyone to view our national bird up-close. When we arrive at the refuge area, we will attend a special presentation which includes an up-close look at a mature Bald Eagle. We will tour the refuge and look through spotting scopes to view this amazing bird. It is not unusual to observe 150-200 Bald Eagles on the refuge and surrounding area including other wildlife such as ducks, geese, deer, etc. We will stop for lunch after birding. Depart Antioch Park at 6:45 am and return around 2 pm. Van transportation is provided. Participants must provide meal expenses and should bring binoculars. **For more info. call Andrea Johnson at (913) 826-2806.**

To register call (913) 831-3359 or visit www.jcprd.com. \$38 Class code: 1161



Preschool Programs

Animal Tales Story Time

(Ages 2-6 with adult) Wednesdays, 10:30 am
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 children must be accompanied by a paying adult. **1-30 min. session \$2.00 per person (including adults) Paid at site.**

- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| 12/7 Winter Wonders | 12/21 Visit with Santa |
| 1/4 Animal Senses | 1/18 Hibernation |
| 2/1 Birds | 2/15 Bug Buddies |

Breakfast With Santa, Saturday, Dec. 10, 9-10:30 am (Ages 3-5 with Adult)

Kids! Bring a parent and have breakfast followed by a visit with Santa. Enjoy pancakes and juice. Afterwards Santa will explain the winter habits of his animal friends. He also will help you construct a gift for wildlife. Of course, Santa will have a gift for each child and will listen to your Christmas list. Special Guest: Mr. Claus. **1-90 min. session - \$7 per person including adults (\$8 nonresidents) Preregistration Required. Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913)831-3359 to register. Class Code: 117**



Preschool Programs Continued

Preschool Package: Winter Fun 1/7, 1/21, 2/25 Sat. 9:30-11 am

(Ages 4-5) The Preschool Package includes all three Winter Fun Series preschool programs below: **3-90 min. sessions - \$37 (\$41 nonresidents) Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913)831-3359 to register. Class code: 5371**



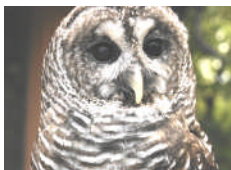
Preschool: Winter Fun 1 - Winter Wonderland Sat., 1/7, 9:30-11 am (Ages 4-5) Bundle up and take a winter walk in the woods. Learn about snowflakes and make a snowflake of your own. See live animals and discover what they do when there is snow on the ground.- **\$14 (\$15 nonresidents)**
Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913)831-3359 to register. Class code: 5407

Preschool: Winter Fun 2 - Dinosaur Adventure Sat., 1/21, 9:30-11 am (Ages 4-5)

Big and small we love them all! Learn about the giants that roamed the earth a long, long time ago. Compare your footprint to a dinosaur's. See a relative of an animal that lived during the dinosaur age. Have some fossil fun and practice being a paleontologist. **\$14 (\$15 nonresidents)**



Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913)831-3359 to register. Class code: 5408



Preschool: Winter Fun 3 - Whooo Goes There? Sat., 2/25, 9:30 -11 am (Ages 4-5)

Be amazed as the story of Owl Moon comes to life! Hear owl calls and touch an owl's feather. See live owls and learn about these mysterious creatures of the night. **\$14 (\$15 nonresidents) Visit www.jcprd.com or call (913)831-3359 to register. Class Code: 5410**



Mud Pies



Hands-on nature activities for children,
by Regina Wasson and Andrea Johnson, Park Naturalists

Fun With Feathers



On a cold winter's day feathers can provide hours of fun for your children. Buy feathers of different colors and sizes from the craft store. Here are some ideas for playing with the feathers.

- * Touch and feel the feathers.
- * Put them in a pillowcase and feel them without looking.
- * Feel the feather on your cheek, neck & arm.
- * Hold a feather above your head and drop it.
 - * Throw it up in the air.
 - * Gather a hand full & throw them all in the air.
 - * Sort by colors and sizes.
 - * Hide and seek the feathers.
 - * Use a feather as a paintbrush.
- * Glue them on paper to make a bird of your own!

Soda Bottle Bird Feeder

A great way to repurpose plastic bottles and chopsticks!

Supplies

- * Clean, dry Plastic bottle
- * 2 - 1 foot pieces of dowel rods ¼ inch diameter,
wooden chopsticks or tree sticks
- * Thumb tack
- * Scissors
- * Small eye screw
- * Hanging Twine



1. Begin by marking perch holes and food slots. Mark the lower perch. Mark food slots 1 inch above the perch, then rotate the bottle 90° and mark again. This will allow the rod to go through both sides of the bottle. Repeat process for the upper perch and food slots
2. Use the thumb tack to make the several small holes for the perch and food slots.
3. Use the thumb tack to round out the holes making them large enough for the dowel rod to fit through. Scissors may be needed to trim the plastic.
4. Using thumb rack, round out the food slot to a ½ inch diameter hole. Repeat this step of the upper perch and food slot
5. Twist the eye screw into the bottle cap and place twine through for the hanging
6. Fill with birdseed, hang outside and enjoy watching the birds!

Ernie Miller Nature Park

Nature's Corner Gift Shop

Do Your Holiday shopping at the Nature Center and find the perfect gift and stocking stuffers for nature lovers of all ages!

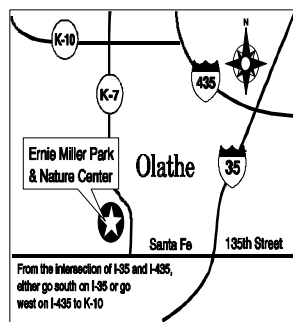


Nature Guides, Children's Story and History Books, Stickers, Rocks, Honeysticks, T-shirts, Jewelry, Edible Bug Snacks, Nature Games, Hats, Stuffed animals and Much More!

Discover/Mastercard/Visa accepted

Ernie Miller Nature Center

909 North Highway 7
Olathe, Kansas 66061
(1 mile north of 135th Street at the intersection of 127th/Harold & Highway 7)
(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 of the provision of programs and services.

Hours

Winter hours-from Nov. 1 to Mar. 31
Monday-Saturday 9 am to 4:30 pm
(Closed from 12-1 pm for lunch)
Sunday 12:30 pm to 4:30 pm

Park trails open dawn to dusk daily



JOHNSON COUNTY
PARK & RECREATION
DISTRICT

Nature Center Staff

Cindy Lawrence... Interpretive Assistant
Leon Gordon..... Park Supervisor
Bill McGowan..... Outdoor Education
Manager
Molly Postlewait... Snr. Park Naturalist
Andrea Johnson... Park Naturalist
and Tracks Editor
Regina Wasson..... Park Naturalist

THANK YOU

Girl Scouts from Olathe North View Troop 431, Meadow Lane and Woodland Elementary Troop 411, and Olathe North High School Troop 397 for making 200 Magic Wands to hand out to all the Whimsical Woods participants!

Timber Creek Elementary Colt Case Crew Community Service Group and Girl Scout Troops from Timber Creek for making 300 suet cakes for our birds at Ernie Miller!

Brodie and Brenna Fosher of Shawnee for donating Supplies for animal care.



Holiday for the Animals

The holidays are a time of gifts and generosity. Whether you're an individual, family, or a group looking to make a difference, how about contributing a gift to the animals at the Ernie Miller Nature Center? The Nature Center has ongoing needs for supplies for both the animals we keep at the center and the wild animals that come to our feeders.

Please look over the following list and consider making a contribution.

- * Various sizes of clear Critter Keeper boxes from pet stores with snap tops
- * Bags of black oil sunflower, white millet, or safflower seeds for bird feeders.
- * Suet cakes for suet feeders.
- * Masking Tape
- * Disinfecting Lysol or Clorox wipes
- * Bags of pine shavings for mouse cage bedding.
- * Bags of Reptibark for reptile bedding.
- * Snake bags: gently used pillowcases.
- * Rolls of one-quarter-inch and three-eighths-inch sisal rope for hawk and owl perches.
- * Wood furniture for snake cages (branches, vines & log shelters) ~ need the pet store kind that are treated for insects.
- * Ferret hammocks/sleeping bags.
- * Bleach, Lysol or disinfecting cleaner for general cleaning.
- * Laundry detergent.
- * **GIFT CARDS for Price Chopper, Y Bar H in Olathe, Wal-mart or local pet stores.**

The animals thank you in advance!

