

NATURE PROGRAMS & ACTIVITIES



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Spring 2009

The Mercer County Park Commission would like to invite you to participate in our first season of public nature programs. Our goal is to provide our park visitors and county residents with the best parkland experiences available. Therefore, we are thrilled to be offering new and exciting ways for county residents to use their parks. Our trails have been and are always open for park users, but now you can experience a favorite trail in a new light. These nature programs and activities are simple yet exciting, and there are activities for all ages. Program offerings vary, from brisk trail hikes at Baldpate Mountain to pond explorations and discovery-oriented preschool programs.

Is your family looking for a new way to spend time together on the weekends? Try one of the Sunday Strolls, a relaxed, trailside program that encourages nature education and recreation for families. Or, if you are looking for a refreshing way to exercise, join us for a Tuesday Trail Trek and invigorate your body with the sights and sounds of nature.

This season's nature programs and activities are just a taste of what is to come. With each season, we look forward to expanding our activities and offering fresh ways for Mercer County residents to experience nature and use their county parks.

Spring is right around the corner; the time of new life and new beginnings. We invite you to share in the spirit of spring and try a new activity – outdoors. Join us to kick off our exciting lineup of nature programs and activities.

A NOTE ABOUT OUR NATURE PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES:

Our nature programs and activities are hosted throughout the Mercer County Park system. Some activities are entirely outdoors while others are hosted inside and outside. This e-newsletter lists all of the programs being offered this spring. Registration for programs and activities is done on-line. For safety and planning purposes we ask that people register for all programs. Some of our programs have a minimal cost, while others are free. If you have any further questions, please contact jlear@mercercounty.org.

SPRING PUBLIC PROGRAMS



All nature programs and activities are led by County Naturalist Jenn Lear. Please email any program questions or concerns to jlear@mercercounty.org. Note that all programs and activities require pre-registration. To register, visit our website, click on the Nature Programs and Activities link and click on the link for the registration form. The Park Commission's website is: <http://nj.gov/counties/mercer/commissions/park/>

YOUTH NATURE ACTIVITIES

To register for a program go to the Park Commission website: <http://nj.gov/counties/mercer/commissions/park/>. Click on the Nature Programs & Activities link and then click on the registration tab.

Baldpate Birders: Young Birders Club

Baldpate Mountain has been identified as an "Important Bird Area." Get hooked on birding in a park rich with bird life. During these hikes you'll have a chance to view a diversity of species, from our common chickadees to elusive ground-nesting warblers. In addition to identifying birds, you'll develop a better understanding of their behavior and importance to the environment. Young birders will take part in conservation projects for Mercer County Parks to ensure the presence of birds in the future. The Park Commission has a limited number of binoculars for loan. We encourage young birders to bring their own set of binoculars on field trips.

Monday, March 2 from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at Baldpate Mountain Visitor Center AND **Sundays, March 15, April 19, May 17, and June 14** from 8 to 10:30 a.m.

At Baldpate Mountain; various parking lots

For ages 11 – 14 years

\$45 per person

We will need adult chaperones to assist with field trips on a rotating basis. Any interested parent should contact Jenn Lear, County Naturalist, at jlear@mercercounty.org or 609 989 6540.

FAMILY PROGRAMS

To register for a program go to the Park Commission website: <http://nj.gov/counties/mercer/commissions/park/>. Click on the Nature Programs & Activities link and then click on the registration tab.

Wonders of Waterfowl

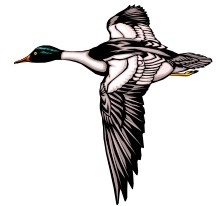
Dabblers and divers, herons and egrets. What's the difference and what makes them so special? Get an up close look (and touch) of waterfowl adaptations and see why these birds so well suited for life on and in the water. Then join the County Naturalist for a morning watching waterfowl. Parents, if you've got a little one that loves your backyard birds, watching ducks is a great next step to get kids hooked on birding. Bring your binoculars!

Sunday, March 8 from 10 a.m. to noon

At Roebling Park, meet at the Marsh Nature Center

For families

\$5 per person



Sunday Stroll: Spring Scavenger Hunt

Put down the newspaper and lace up yours and your little one's sneakers. Spend time as a family and grow closer while playing in nature. This month's relaxed, Sunday-styled program will send your family along the trail in search of the signs of spring. Be sure to bring along your "nature detective eyes"!

Sunday, March 22 from 10 to 11:30 a.m.

At Mercer County Park, Tennis Center Lot

For families

\$4 per person

Sunday Stroll: Slimy Salamanders

Put down the newspaper and lace up yours and your little one's sneakers. Spend time as a family and grow closer while playing in nature. This month's relaxed, Sunday-styled program will send your family along the trail in search of some amazing amphibians, specifically salamanders. We'll learn the "friendly" way to roll logs, turn rocks and move leaf litter in search of these slimy creatures.

Sunday, April 5 from 10 to 11:30 a.m.

At Rosedale Park Picnic Area

For families

\$4 per person

Family Programs continued

Nature's Eggs and Easter Egg Hunt



Chickens and ducks come from eggs, but can you think of any other baby animals that start their life inside an eggshell? Together, we'll discover the different animals that lay eggs and where they lay them. And we'll even search the park for some of nature's eggs before we have our own Easter egg hunt in the backyard of the Nature Center. Remember to bring a small basket for the egg hunt!

Wednesday, April 8 from 1 to 2:30 p.m.

At Marsh Nature Center, Roebling Park

For children ages 3 to 6, with an adult

\$ 8 per child

Spring Flowers: Pick and Press

Flowers are a sure sign that spring is here, but why do plants make them? Learn, with your little one, the different parts of a flower and the importance of these beautiful blooms. As we walk along the trails to spot some, we will collect a few and press them. When we meet a second time, we'll make a beautiful floral card, just in time for Mother's Day!

Wednesday, April 22 from 1 to 3:30 p.m. AND **Wednesday, May 6** from 1 to 2:30 p.m.

At Baldpate Mountain Visitor Center

For children ages 3 to 6, with an adult

\$10 per child

Water Life at Spring Lake

The Lake's flowers are in bloom, birds are nest-building, and turtles are basking in the sun. But who are the animals in the water, and what are they doing? Be prepared to get your hands wet as we discover why Spring Lake is such a good habitat. Please dress in clothes that can get dirty, and wear rubber boots if possible. Parents, bring an extra pair of socks and shoes for you and your child.

Sunday, May 3 from 10 a.m. to noon

At Spring Lake, Roebling Park

For families

\$5 per person



Sunday Stroll: Birds Abound!

Put down the newspaper and lace up yours and your little one's sneakers. Spend time as a family and grow closer while playing in nature. This month's relaxed, Sunday-styled program will send your family along the trail, searching high and low for our local feathered friends. Children will make a guide of birds they see along the trail. Bring your binoculars!

Sunday, May 10 from 10 to 11:30 a.m.

At Baldpate Mountain, Pleasant Valley Road Parking Lot

For families

\$4 per person

PRESCHOOL PROGRAMS

To register for a program go to the Park Commission website: <http://nj.gov/counties/mercerc/commissions/park/>. Click on the Nature Programs & Activities link and then click on the registration tab.

Marsh Minnows

A parent and child nature program

Spending time in nature fuels a child's imagination. Parents, why not join in the experience? With the guidance of Mercer County's Naturalist, you and your child will search for multi-legged critters, dissect a plant or flower, and explore the marsh for birds and frogs. Through hands-on nature explorations, children develop their attention to detail as they use their senses to discover the outdoors. Programs include a group story or experiment, an outdoor hike and a craft. Grow to appreciate nature with your little one.

Session A

Thursdays, March 26, April 2, 9 & 16 from 10 to 11:30 a.m.

Program Themes: In Search of Spring, Mud Mania, Flower Power, Amphibian Amble

At the Marsh Nature and Interpretive Center

For children ages 3 to 5 and their parent

Cost: \$32 per child

Session B

Thursdays, May 14, 21, 28 and June 4 from 10 to 11:30 a.m.

Program Themes: Animal Moms, Busy Birds, Forest Story Time, Wonderful Wetlands

At the Marsh Nature and Interpretive Center

For children ages 3 to 5 and their parent

Cost: \$32 per child



ADULT NATURE ACTIVITIES

To register for a program go to the Park Commission website: <http://nj.gov/counties/mercer/commissions/park/>. Click on the Nature Programs & Activities link and then click on the registration tab.

Early Birds

Join us for a casual hike -- with your binoculars, of course. These early a.m. walks are dedicated to spotting our fine-feathered friends. Never picked up a pair of binoculars before? No problem. All abilities of birders are welcome. All Early Bird hikes are free.

Monday, March 9 from 7 to 8:30 a.m.

At Roebling Park, Nature Center Parking Lot

Monday, March 23 from 7 to 8:30 a.m.

At Herrontown Woods

Monday, April 6 from 7 to 8:30 a.m.

At Baldpate Mountain, Visitor Center Parking Lot

Monday, April 20 from 7 to 8:30 a.m.

At Curlis Lake, Equestrian Center Parking Lot

Monday, May 4 from 7 to 8:30 a.m.

At Mercer County Park Northwest, Federal City Road Parking Lot

Monday, May 18 from 7 to 8:30 a.m.

At Rosedale Park, Picnic Area

Mercer County Parks are alive with migrating songbirds, leafing trees and blooming wildflowers, which makes spring the perfect time to experience the great outdoors.

Tuesday Trail Treks

Become inspired by nature; get motivated to exercise, or join us to discover new hiking trails. Mercer County is bursting with beautiful parkland and is here for your enjoyment. Take in fresh air, energize your body and enjoy the sights and sounds of nature with Mercer County's Naturalist on Tuesday morning treks. Wear sturdy hiking shoes and bring a water bottle. All Tuesday Trail Treks are free.

Tuesday, March 17 from 9 to 10:30 a.m.

At Mercer County Park Northwest, Blackwell Road Parking Lot

Tuesday, March 31 from 9 to 10:30 a.m.

At Baldpate Mountain, Fiddlers Creek Road Parking Lot

Tuesday, April 14 from 9 to 10:30 a.m.

At Roebling Park, Nature Center Parking Lot

Tuesday, April 28 from 9 to 10:30 a.m.

At Hopewell Borough Park, meet at Gazebo

Tuesday, May 12 from 9 to 10:30 a.m.

At Rosedale Park, Picnic Area

Tuesday, May 26 from 9 to 10:30 a.m.

At Herrontown Woods



Explore Your Parks

Get out of the house and go explore! This NEW Sunday afternoon program will unite you and other outdoor enthusiasts for a fun, brisk hike. These hikes are a great alternative if you can't make our Tuesday Trail Treks. All Explore Your Parks hikes are free.

Sunday, March 15 from 1 to 3 p.m.

At Baldpate Mountain, Fiddlers Creek Road Parking Lot

Sunday, April 19 from 1 to 3 p.m.

At Herrontown Woods

Sunday, May 17 from 1 to 3 p.m.

At Mercer County Park Northwest, Blackwell Road Parking Lot

OTHER ACTIVITIES

Information on School Trips

Currently, the Park Commission does not offer formal nature field trips for school groups. Look for our school field trip brochure beginning this summer for the 2009-2010 school year. However, if a classroom is interested in a seasonal nature walk with the County Naturalist please contact Jenn Lear at, jlear@mercercounty.org. These school group nature walks can be hosted at any Mercer County Park and will run from 60 to 90 minutes.

Requested Group Hikes

Naturalist-led hikes in Mercer County parks are available for groups. Hikes feature current natural events such as blooming wildflowers, and how organisms prepare for winter. During the hike the group will seek common insects and birds, and animal tracks and signs. To request a group hike at a County park, email jlear@mercercounty.org.