

5 RIVERS

TRIBUTARY

Spring 2005

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center

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Unsung Heros of Spring

Spring is here! It's the time of year when living things can heave a sigh of relief after the struggle of a long, cold winter. There is green once again in the trees, long-forgotten flowers begin to color our gardens, we see more variety at our bird feeders, turtles and frogs and other hibernators are waking up to a warm sun and to their first meal in months, and we humans can step outside to enjoy it, finally without having to pile on layer upon layer of cold-weather gear.

With all of nature's marvelous surprises that appear in the springtime, it's easy to become overwhelmed by the beauty waiting just outside that window through which you've been daydreaming. But there are some aspects of spring that are under-appreciated.

It seems that the tulips and the butterflies get all the glory come April, while there are so many unsung heroes of the season that need a little more attention. In light of that, the following is a list of the *Top Four Things About Spring You Never Knew You Loved*.

Rainy Days

Ever been bummed out when spring rains canceled your picnic or fishing trip or day at an amusement park? Well, bum no longer! There are hundreds of activities out there that are designed to stave off the boredom of a rainy day. One of the simplest is an exercise in using the five senses. Throughout our work and schooldays, we tend to get into a routine and sometimes forget to experience the world with more than our eyes and ears. If you're brave enough, put on some old clothes and head out into the rain. Feel the drops, smell the atmosphere, enjoy running through a downpour. Turn a gloomy day into a springtime joy.

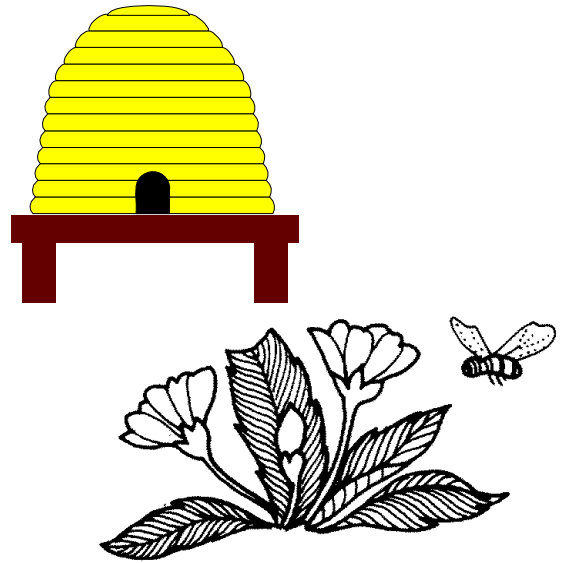


Little Ones “Lost”

Spring is a great time to see the wonder of life at its beginning. Often we find young animals, especially baby birds and rabbits, that seem to be lost or abandoned, because they’re alone. But appearances are deceiving; this is usually not the sad story of spring you may think it is. Often the animal’s parent is not far away; it may just be hiding from the presence of a human. Or it may be that the youngster is independent, but not yet fully adept at keeping out of sight of predators.

Does will leave their fawns alone for many long hours, returning only to nurse them at night, when they are sure that there are no predators around. Cottontail rabbit mothers will do the same thing. So if you find an “abandoned” fawn, or a nest of “orphaned” baby rabbits, resist the temptation to walk over and investigate more closely. Your scent may be what attracts the predator to the young animal. Baby birds seldom “fall out of the nest,” they just flutter around while they learn to fly, and often the parents are watching closely.

It is rare that young animals in the wild are truly in need of rescuing. The most helpful thing for us to do is marvel at the chance to see a creature at this immature stage, and walk on. Although they may look adorable, wild animals do not make good pets and might even die if taken out of their natural environments. If you do spot what appears to be a wild orphan, you can call Five Rivers for more information at 475-0291. But remember that a good rule of thumb is “If you care, leave them there.”



What’s That Buzz?

Sure their stings hurt at first, but after applying a paste of baking soda and water to the site you can take a moment to reflect on the importance of a seemingly “nuisance” insect. Besides making delicious honey, honeybees are responsible for pollinating a great many species of flowers.

When a bee lands on a flower, the bee’s purpose is to extract the plant’s nectar, which it will then eat or take back to the hive to be made into honey. In the process, however, the bee’s body gets covered with the flower’s pollen, which the bee then transports to other flowers the bee feeds from. The spread of pollen is how many species of plants reproduce, and they depend on the bees for this purpose. No bees, fewer flowers. So let’s give that stinger its praise! After all, it probably gave its life to get your attention.

Going Batty

Bats are some of the many creatures who wake up from hibernation in the springtime. From there they are active as long as it's warm, and many of us know that tiny holes just under our roofs make excellent homes for these creatures.

Take a moment to glance up at the evening sky and observe bats in flight sometime. You'll notice that they fly very fast and close to objects without touching them. That's because bats have a built-in sonar that makes them expert navigators. They "see" by sending out vibrations. The bats can sense what's in front of them as the vibrations are interrupted by solid objects, creating a sophisticated map of their immediate environment. This process is known as echolocation. It really is a springtime amazement to witness.

Hopefully this list has given you more reasons to head outdoors and experience nature now that the warmer weather is here. Bees, bats, rain, "orphan" wildlife: all heroes of the season.

Sarah Johnson

Student Conservation Association

*Environmental
Educator*



DIRECTOR'S NOTEBOOK

Over 2.5 Million Served

Pouring bright sunshine over fresh snow is always a recipe for success at Five Rivers, and the thousands of weekend visitors who filled the Center parking lot to overflowing on January 29 and 30 pushed the Center's all-time visitation past the 2.5 million mark.

It was a fitting reward for one of the Center's busier program weekends. Five Rivers staff led several guided snowshoe outings, including enthusiastic groups from Capital Region BOCES, the Albany Boys and Girls Club, and Big Brothers/Big Sisters. Hordes of cross country skiers and casual hikers, eager to ward off cabin fever, also found the trail conditions ideal.

"The Department is especially pleased that such a diverse range of visitors brought Five Rivers Center to this most impressive milestone," said Acting Commissioner Denise Sheehan. "It is especially important in winter to get regular outdoor exercise, and the Department is proud to offer many wonderful and accessible public facilities such as Five Rivers, where young and old alike can enjoy the refreshing benefits of the great outdoors."

The Center, which reached the "2 million served" milestone in 2000, has shown a steady 4% growth in public contacts for over 20 years, a growth rate comparable to that of the National Park system. The Center expects to hit the "3 million served" mark in early 2009.

Craig B. Thompson

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center
Spring Program Schedule 2005

Programs are free of charge unless otherwise noted. Participants should dress for the weather! We regret that we cannot accommodate organized youth groups at these programs. Please call to make special arrangements for a group.

We welcome those who have any type of physical challenge to all of our programs; please call ahead to let us know your needs. For further information or for pre-registration, call Five Rivers at (518) 475-0291. In the event of severe weather, programs may be cancelled. Please call the Center to confirm.

Saturday, April 2 *Watchable Wildlife*: ROBINS AND THEIR KIN 10:00 a.m.

John Burroughs proclaimed April the month of the Robin, with whose "first utterance the spell of winter is thoroughly broken." Join us on a field study of robins, bluebirds and our other friends in the thrush family as we celebrate the great Catskill naturalist's 168th birthday.

Saturday, April 2 *Family Fun*: MAKE A BIRDHOUSE 2:00 p.m.

This program, geared for parent-and-child participation, is all you need to get started on a birdhouse. You'll learn all about cavity-nesting birds, and then measure, screw and hammer together your own house suitable for bluebirds, tree sparrows or house wrens! Call to pre-register by March 18. \$5/box materials fee, FFR members; \$7 for non- FFR members.

Saturday, April 9 PROJECT WET WORKSHOP 10:00 a.m.- 3:00 p.m.

This workshop will introduce "Project WET" (Water Education for Teachers). Participants will receive a manual of activities suitable for teaching about water science, aquatic wildlife, and environmental issues. Pre-register by April 6. Dress for the outdoors. Teacher in-service credit can be coordinated through the Greater Capital Region Teacher Center.

Saturday, April 16 PUSSY WILLOW HUNT 2:00 p.m.

Join us on a quest for the elusive pussy willow, and a search for other trees or flowers that happen to be early bloomers. It's a little early for wildflowers, but we'll explore some ways of identifying trees by their buds and early leaves.

Thursday, April 21 ANIMALS OF SPRING: *A Family Reading Program* 2:00 p.m.

This program for parents and young children starts with the reading of a picture book about spring. After the reading, the group moves outdoors to discover the themes of the book in nature. We round out the morning with activities and snacks back in the building. Please call to pre-register by April 18. Parents and children must accompany each other. \$1/person FFR members; \$3/person non-FFR members.

Friday, April 22 TWILIGHT ENCHANTED 7:00 p.m.

April can be a fickle month. An almost-full moon could illuminate a field full of the promises of spring, or it could rain. If luck is on our side, this walk will be to the fields and ponds to listen and look for animals. If we're really lucky, we'll glimpse some spring constellations.

Saturday, April 23 DEER TRACKING 2:00 p.m.

How many deer live at Five Rivers? We guess it's a quite a few, but who really knows? We'll use the age-old techniques of tracking, looking for footprints, browse and scat, to begin a citizen science project to estimate the Center's deer population.

Friday April 29 *Frogwatch*: SPRING PEEPERS 7:00 p.m.

Ah, the sounds of spring—you know—the deafening ones. Frogs! On this walk to the marsh our quest will be our smallest frogs, the spring peepers. These diminutive tree frogs have voices out of all proportion to their size. Each spring, males make their way to the marsh to announce mating readiness to discriminating females. Bring flashlights if you have them, and shoes that you don't mind getting wet.

Saturday, April 30 *Watchable Wildlife*: WATERFOWL 2:00 p.m.

In addition to raising upland game birds, the Delmar Experimental Game Farm dabbled in waterfowl propagation. In fact, the Mallard was quite unheard of in the eastern flyway until Delmar's waterfowl program got underway. Join us on an outdoor survey of our ponds as we take a gander at common ducks and geese.

THE EARLY BIRDER

Walks are held on Thursday mornings: **May 5, 12, 19, and 26.**

The early birder gets the bagels! Plus some great birding in Five Rivers' woods, fields, and wetlands. This spring, birders will get some great coffee, too. We serve **shade-grown organic coffee** at our bird walks. This coffee is grown in a manner that preserves the rainforest canopy that is such an important habitat for so many migratory birds. It is "fairly traded," organically grown, and on top of all that, it tastes great!

Join us at 7:00am for refreshments and feeder birds. The outdoor walk begins at 7:30.

Beginners are always welcome! Bring binoculars and bird identification guides if you have them—we have some to lend.

Friday, May 6 *Watchable Wildlife: THE AMERICAN WOODCOCK* 7:00 p.m.

The great Catskill naturalist John Burroughs (1837-1921) only witnessed the American woodcock's unusual courtship flight on three occasions. Much has changed for this squatty gamebird since then. Join us for an uplifting look at woodcock management as we search field and fen for this most extraordinary bird.

Wednesday, May 11 HOMESCHOOL/FAMILY PROGRAM 10:00 a.m.

A special program of exploring habitats. See back page for registration information. Explore the forest or field to determine what animals can live there and why. Start a Nature Journal and a botany collection, and learn about animals' adaptations. Pre-register by May 9.

Friday May 13 FROGWATCH 7:00 p.m.

Join us for a frogwatch, a way of monitoring amphibian populations. This program is designed for children and youth groups. We'll acquaint you with the sounds of local frogs, and view some live animals, and then go outdoors to listen for calls. Families may attend without pre-registering; youth groups **must** call to pre-register by May 10. Bring flashlights if you have them, and shoes that you don't mind getting wet.

Saturday, May 21 HALL OF FAME INDUCTION CEREMONY 2:00 p.m.

DEC's Delmar facility has contributed mightily over the years to America's conservation movement and our proud and colorful legacy is revered far and wide. Join us for our 3rd annual DEC/Delmar Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony and Reception as we celebrate the lifetime achievements of Delmar staffers and site-related personnel who made a difference. This year's slate of inductees will be announced in late March. The honorees will be commemorated in the Center's permanent *Delmar Hall Of Fame* exhibit.

Tuesday, May 24 FLOWER IDENTIFICATION 7:00 p.m.

This adult-level class is for all who love wildflowers and want to put names to those beautiful shapes and colors. We'll learn plant family relationships as well as principles of identification, discuss uses for plants, including traditional historical uses from magic to medicine to food, and even taste a few of our finds. Please call to pre-register by May 22.

Friday, May 27 FROGWATCH 7:30 p.m.

Join us for a group frogwatch. First we'll acquaint you with the sights and sounds of our local frogs and toads, including a look at some live amphibians. Then we'll go afield to frogwatch: monitor the health of our amphibian population by documenting the type and intensity of calls we can hear in the Five Rivers wetlands. Bring flashlights if you have them, and shoes that you don't mind getting wet.

Saturday , May 28 THE BUZZ ABOUT BEES 2:00 p.m.

Bees intersect with our lives in so many ways: agriculture, cooking, cosmetics, medicine. The honey, wax, and other products bees make, and the pollination they provide, have a huge impact. Like to know more about this tiny insect that has such a big impact? This program will consist of an indoor talk, a walk to our hive with activities along the way, and of course, tasting. Candle-making will be an optional activity, and a donation will be requested for materials.

*New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
George E. Pataki, Governor
Denise Sheehan, Acting Commissioner*