



Friends of Black Hill Nature Programs FOBHNP Newsletter SUMMER 2021

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Save the Date!
November 5, 2021
FOBHNP Annual Meeting. Whether virtual or in person, the FOBHNP annual meeting is a great way to be involved. We look forward to seeing you. Stay tuned for details.

FOBHNP supports Bluebirds

With more than 250 bluebird boxes located in Northern Montgomery County Parks, it is likely you have seen one (or more) as you have visited Black Hill and Little Bennett Regional Parks, Woodstock Equestrian Park, Little Seneca Valley Stream Park, the Boys and Girls Club of Germantown, South Germantown Recreation Park or various other local parks and schools. These boxes are part of a collaborative effort to promote bluebirds, supported by both the Parks and the Friends of Black Hill Nature Programs (FOBHNP). Tina Stachura, one of the naturalists at Black Hill Regional Park, manages the program for the Northern portion of the Parks and provided us with some background and updates on this wonderful program.

The program started unofficially back in the 1980's, but by 1997 data was being regularly compiled and it is now well established.

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Staff Appreciation Picnic

On June 17, the Board of FOBHNP had a Staff Appreciation picnic for all Black Hill staff to say thank you for all their work. Typically, the friends have a thank you luncheon for the staff, but given the challenges of covid, a picnic seemed in order. The Park Police were on horseback to greet everyone upon arrival and to partake in the picnic. Tables were decorated with beautiful flowers from the garden of Katrina Fauss. Everyone enjoyed the food, conversation and summer sunshine so much some think this should become an annual event! Thanks to Mary McKnight, Lynette Lenz, Jen Scully, Sheila MacLeod and everyone who attended and helped.

photo by Sheila MacLeod



September is Monarch Month!

The Monarch caterpillar enclosure is already set up outside the Black Hill Park Visitor Center complete with tiny caterpillars and eggs. Here's a sampling of some of the programs celebrating Monarchs. Please note that even though each of these programs is FREE, registration via Active Montgomery is still required.

Monarch Meet & Greet: Saturday September 4, 10 - 10:30, All Ages

Come to the visitor center to meet a monarch butterfly. See first-hand how monarchs change from a very hungry caterpillar, to a chrysalis, to a magnificent butterfly! Park naturalists will be tagging butterflies that are ready to migrate to Mexico and may need your help to release them!

Insect Hunt: Saturday: September 4, 10:30am – 3 pm, All Ages

Join moth expert and Smithsonian Research Associate, Dr. David Adamski, and Montgomery Parks' resident insect and reptile expert, Elmore Brown, in the meadow at Black Hill to hunt for insects of all shapes, sizes, and colors. Butterflies, praying mantis, dragon flies, and much more will be on hand for observation and discovery. So come get your bug on and hunt with the best! No reservations required, drop by anytime during program hours.

Monarch Information Station : Saturday, September 4, 1 – 3:30 pm, All ages

Monarchs are on the move to Mexico! Drop by the Visitor Center where we'll have an Information Station about the amazing life cycle and journey of these amazing insects. Check out the caterpillars and chrysalides in our outdoor exhibit and then visit our gardens and meadow to see if you can find any monarchs on your own.

Bluebirds from p. 1...

Tina reports that the number of bluebird fledglings varies, with the highest number being around 900.

In 2019, the Northern Montgomery Parks portion of the bluebird program monitored 189 broods with 624 fledglings! Bluebird trails are more than just poles and birdhouses though. There are approximately 15 volunteers who walk the trails from bluebird house to bluebird house keeping track of activity and report back to Tina on which birds are nesting, how many eggs are seen, how many hatch, and of course, fledglings.



Bluebird photos by Carol Gregoire

FOBHNP has been supporting the bluebird program with monetary support for more than 15 years. FOBHNP money is used to pay for boxes, poles and predator guards. Although the county provides some money, there have been times where funding has been cut or reduced and FOBHNP has been the only source of funding for materials for bluebird boxes and installations. Scouts will often make/install boxes as a project and always appreciate having the supplies paid for by FOBHNP.

By creating bluebird trails, we are providing essential habitat for bluebirds and other cavity nesting birds. Bluebirds, tree swallows and house wrens are three examples of birds that nest in cavities, such as a hollowed out tree (or a bluebird box), but don't build cavities themselves, like a woodpecker. As the countryside becomes more developed, old trees with appropriate cavities for cavity nesters disappear.

If you are interested learning more about bluebirds in general, Tina recommends the website www.sialis.org which provides detailed information on nesting materials, eggs, predators and problems with house sparrows, a non-native bird that will sometimes out-compete bluebirds for cavities. If you are interested in more information in the Northern Montgomery Parks Bluebirds in particular, please contact Tina at the Black Hill Nature Center. Please note that SSL hours are not available for bluebird monitors.



Here comes Fall

Consider leaving the leaves

It's better for pollinators and it's better for the environment! The concept is that we can help the local pollinators overwinter in our yards under the leaves. Providing habitat to overwinter is one of the most important actions you can take for pollinators in addition to planting native plants and avoiding pesticides. A few years ago, the Xerces Society for invertebrates started a campaign aimed at those of us who live in the built environment to "Leave the Leaves."

The science behind this Xerces Society campaign is that "leaves are not litter, they are food and shelter for butterflies, beetles, bees, moths, and more." To be most effective in mimicking the natural ecosystem, the leaves should be left whole rather than shredding them. The shredding the leaves may destroy essential organisms such as eggs, caterpillars, and chrysalis just to mention a few. Fallen leaves also provide valuable organic matter to build up a healthy soil while supplying weed suppression and moisture retention as mulch. The leaves will also provide insulation from the cold to your perennials. Leaves are particularly beneficial in garden beds and lawn edges.

You may be wondering when, if any, is a good time to tidy up. If you can manage to wait until apple trees are no longer in bloom, mid April to mid May – you should be safely in the clear from disturbing pollinators and interrupting their important work! At this time, the leaves can be added to a compost pile allowing it to break down naturally. Such efforts will keep the critters safe and you will benefit the following year with a rich compost.

For more information about protecting the critters in your yard visit the Xerces Society.org blog about nesting and overwintering habitat for pollinators and other beneficial insects.

Thanks to Anita Pustelnik for information about "leave the leaves" and the Xerces Society.