

Nature Niche

Nature By The Yard – Fostering a Natural Sense of Wonder

Spring, 2006

Volume 3 Issue 1 Calendar of Events

Please call the hosting organization for reservation information.

Nature Story Hour

Wed. March 8. Kids ages 3-6. Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve New Hope, PA. Free for members, fee for non-members (215) 862-2924

Tiny Tot Walk

Friday March 17. Kids ages 18-36 mos. Buttinger Nature Center, Pennington, NJ (609) 737-7592. Fee

Nature Inside Out

"Marching into Spring" Kids 3-6 years. Mon. March 20 3:30-4:30pm or Tues. Mar. 21 at 11am Cotsen Children's Library, Princeton. 258-2697 Free

Nature Story Hour

Wed. April 12. Kids ages 3-6. Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve New Hope, PA. Free for members, fee for

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The Hope of Spring

As the end of February looms, I have a mantra I say to myself.

"Just get through March, Just get through March." March is a difficult time for me. It is long, windy, and it seems like it should be warmer than it really is. Plus, there can be a cold zap just when I'm lulled into a sense of false security. So I find myself looking for just one thing to keep up the hope. And that is where March really

shines. There is hope in March; a promise of things to come. Now, just telling myself there is better weather around the corner only works for about half the month. By March 15 though, I need confirmation. I want concrete evidence that winter is losing its grip and spring is pushing on the door. So I'll share my secret of seeking out spring. Take a walk.

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March of the Salamanders

There is a magical event that happens in the early spring. No one knows what triggers it and no one knows exactly when it will occur. It's a surprise. Don't you just love surprises? It is a secret trek of the Spotted Salamanders to their breeding pools.

In what seems like impossibly cold weather, these amphibians have waited underground for the first warm evening spring rain. Warm being a relative term because it is still only about 45 or 50 degrees. But without fail, as the rain falls, spotted salamanders come up

from their underground burrows and march sometimes by the hundreds, to vernal pools where they've been breeding for decades.

Vernal pools are shallow depressions in the earth where water collects in the spring but dries up by late summer or early fall. Salamanders will not breed in traditional ponds where predators such as fish loom.

Male salamanders migrate to their breeding pools and hang out in bachelor groups called congregations. But when the females arrive, the party really

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Calendar Continued

Non-members. (215) 862-2924

Tiny Tot Walk Thurs. April 20. 10-11am. Kids. 18-36mos. Buttinger Nature Center Pennington, NJ (609) 737-7592. Fee

Nature Inside Out "Happy Earth Day to You" Mon. April 24 at 3:30pm or Tues. April 25 at 11am. Kids 3-6 years. Cotsen Children's Library Princeton NJ. (609) 258-2697 Free.

Wildflower Walk Sat. May 6. 10-adult. 9:30-11:30am SBMWA Call for location and fees. (609) 737-7592.

Moonlight Walk Sat. May 6 7:30-9pm. Families. Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve New Hope, Pa. (215) 862-2924 Fee.

Tiny Tot Walk Fri. May 26 10-11am Kids 18-36 months Buttinger Nature Center Pennington, NJ 737-7592 Fee.

There's still time for Nature By The Yard to come to you're child's class for a curriculum supporting program on the topic of your choice. Contact us on the web or by calling (609) 610-6292

We're on the Web

See us at:

www.naturebytheyard.com

The Hope of Spring (*continued*)

Seems easy enough, bundle up, wear waterproof boots and get out into the woods. Not a meadow, but the forest. We're going in search of green.

So here's what you do. As you're walking, stop and lift some of the leaf litter. Just take a peek. The wildflowers that are starting to wake are sending green shoots up through the thawing soil and pushing up

through the leaves. There are Mayapple shoots that look like little heads stuck in their turtlenecks. Spring beauties with leaves like blades of grass. Bluebells with tightly squished up bunches of pinkish buds that turn blue as they open. There's so much to look forward to. I guess March isn't the bandit that robs me of energy. I'll think of it as a whisper of hope for the things to come.

Salamander March (*continued*)

starts. 40-50 Spotted Salamanders gyrate, rub against each other and rotate their tale in hope of attracting a female's fancy. If all this foreplay works, she'll follow him out of the crowd as he swims away. He'll then deposit a gelatinous sperm packet called a spermatophore. The female will trail him and pick up the spermatophore in her genital opening thus completing fertilization. Within a few days, she'll deposit 2-3 jelly-like balls with 50-100 eggs in each. The

egg sacs resemble snowballs that are attached to underwater sticks. After completing this task, both male and female adult salamanders leave the pool and return to their underground burrow until next spring.

The egg sacs remain underwater for 5-6 weeks when they hatch into tiny, gilled tadpoles. After feeding on small aquatic insects through the summer, the tadpoles metamorphose into miniature adults and leave the water by the fall.

About Our Organization...

Nature By The Yard was started in January, 2001. We offer fun, hands-on, nature education programs to schools, scouts, camps, libraries, birthday parties, garden clubs, nature centers, wildflower preserves or any organized group. We also provided

workshops for teachers on using the outdoors as a classroom as well as offer advice and expertise on designing school yard habitats. For details on our services visit www.naturebytheyard.com or call (609) 610-6292