

Nature Niche

Nature By The Yard — Fostering a Natural Sense of Wonder

Summer, 2005

Volume 2, Issue 2 Calendar of Events

Please call the hosting organization for reservation information.

Tues. June 7 "Animal Homes" 11-12 noon Kids 3-6 years, Cotsen Children's Library, Princeton (609) 258-2697. Free

Thurs. June 9 "Animal Homes" 3:30-4:30pm. Cotsen Children's Library. Free

Fri. June 17 Tiny Tot Walk 10-11am. Kids 18-36 months. Buttinger Nature Center Pennington (609) 737-7592. Fee

Fri. July 8 "Fireflies" Families. Cotsen Children's Library. 258-2697 Free

Wed. July 13 Tiny Tot Walk. 10-11am Buttinger Nature Center (609) 737-7592. Fee

Wed. July 13 "Reptiles" 7-8pm. Kids 4-10 years. Hibernaria Branch Library. (973)627-2344

July 11 and 25 Nature

(continued)

Foster Parenting

Have you ever noticed a smallish black bird with a brown head on your lawn? You're looking at a Brown-headed Cowbird.

Cowbirds are among a few birds in this area that are parasitic nesters. That's not to say it steels another bird's nest.

What it does is steel another birds' space *in* a nest. They arrive in spring with the other migratory birds and set to the task of finding foster parents for their chicks. They scope

out where other birds have made their nest and wait until the homeowners leave to get food. In 20 seconds, the female cowbird flies to the host nest, lays an egg and leaves. 20 seconds!!!! When the homeowner comes back, they don't notice the extra egg, despite its often larger size. The unsuspecting foster birds then incubate the eggs until they hatch.

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Know your Enemy: Garden Pests

Who says "You can't teach an old dog new tricks"? This old dog learned the hard way that rabbits love tender sweet peas. They're especially fond of them when they're about 8" tall. This old dog also learned that birds prefer to eat blueberries just BEFORE they are ripe and tomato hornworms WILL in fact eat an entire tomato plant.

Like many people, I'm a home gardener. Nothing fancy, just the basics. I peruse the seed catalogs with grandiose ideas my plants will look just like the ones in the photograph. I wait impatiently until they arrive and start my seeds indoors when

the package says I should so the new plants will be strong and ready to go out after the frost date (May 10). At some point every year, as the new seedlings emerge, I forget to water them or water them too much and kill them. So when its time to plant, I drive to the local nursery and buy seedlings that someone else didn't neglect.

Determined not to make the same mistakes, when my son asked if we could try to grow peas again, I willingly agreed, but told him we needed a plan of attack.

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(Calendar continued)

Inside Out. 3-4pm Kids 3-5 years Cotsen Children's Library. Free 258-2697

Sat. July 16 "Community Open House Day Insect Safari" 10-4pm Families. Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve New Hope, PA (215) 862-2924 Free

July 18-22 or July 25-29 "Kids Nature Camp"
See below

Wed. Aug. 3 "Reptiles and Dragons" 10:30-11:30am Rocky Hill Library. (609) 924-7073. Free

Monday Aug. 8 "Reptiles and Dragons" 2-2:30pm. Kids 3-10. Ewing Library Free.

Fri., Aug. 19 "Moonlight Walk" 7:30-9:30pm. Families. Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve (215) 862-2924. Fee

Mon. Aug. 22 "Tiny Tot Walk" 10-11am. Kids 18-36 months. Buttinger Nature Center (609) 737-7592. Fee.

Looking for a great outdoor experience for your child this summer? Kids entering 2-4th grade can join us at Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve for a fun, exciting and educational camp experience. Call (215) 862-2924 for more information.

We're on the Web

See us at:

www.naturebytheyard.com

Cowbirds (*continued*)

In the baby bird world, bigger and louder means more food, so the Cowbird chick stakes its claim on the majority of food by hatching earlier, being bigger, hungrier and more aggressive.

Mom and dad work hard to keep up with demand, which never seems to cease. Often after a few weeks of relentless care, the cowbird chick is larger than its adoptive parents, but they keep focused on the task at hand, or wing; feed the babies.

In a two-year period, a female cowbird can lay 80 eggs!! But only about 3% of those eggs hatch and reach maturity. That's good news for the 220 kinds of birds a cowbird can select as a host.

For a great story to read with your kids about growing up in another animals' world, read "Stella Luna" by Janell Cannon.

Garden Pests (*continued*)

I was determined not to be an enabler to our already obese wild rabbits, so we carefully constructed a fence around the emerging pea plants. Voila! No rabbits allowed.

I opted to save myself the disgrace of killing seedling tomato plants this year, so I bought the plants I wanted and put them directly in the ground. My plan this year is to monitor the caterpillars and at the first sight, pluck them by hand.

My blueberries aren't happy this year, so I'm not optimistic

about our harvest. A trip to a pick your own farm may be in my future, but if we do get fruit, I've bought a net so the birds don't eat what I want to put on my cereal.

Home gardeners routinely encounter pests such as these, but common sense often prevails when it comes to winning this war: Know your enemy, plan carefully and don't forget there is always a nursery or farm stand close by to rescue you from failure.

About Our Organization...

Nature By The Yard was started in January, 2001. We deliver fun, hands-on, educational programs to schools, scouts, camps, libraries, birthday parties, garden clubs, nature centers, wildflower preserves or any organized group. We now are a

registered professional development provider in NJ offering teacher trainings on using the outdoors as a classroom. We also offer advice and expertise on designing schoolyard habitats. For details on our services visit www.naturebytheyard.com