

Nature Niche

Nature By The Yard – Fostering a Natural Sense of Wonder

Winter, 2004

Volume 1, Issue 4

Calendar of Events

Please call the hosting organization for reservation information.

Nature Inside Out-
Cones. Tues. Dec. 14
3:30-4:30pm. Kids 3-5
years old. Cotsen
Children's Library,
Princeton 258-2697
Free

Tiny Tot Walk. Wed.
Dec. 15. Kids 18-36 mos.
10-11am. Buttinger
Nature Center 737-
7592. Fee

Nature Inside Out
Series- Cones. Thurs.
Dec. 16, 10-11am Kids
3-5 years old. Cotsen
Children's Library 258-
2697 Free

Decorate the Night
Tree. Fri., Dec. 17, 7-
8pm Families Cotsen
Children's Library 258-
2697 Free

Nature Inside Out
Series- Tracks. Tues.
Jan. 11 3:30-4:30 pm.
Kids 3-5 years old.
Cotsen Children's
Library 258-2697. Free

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Owl Prowl

Imagine you are awakened by a strange sound early one morning. It's an eerie, ghost-like whinny. The hair on the back of your neck stands up. What could it be? A ghost? your imagination? No, it's probably a screech owl. Surprised? Don't be. New Jersey is the year round home to 6 different kinds of owls, 2 of which are commonly found in backyards, and neighborhoods.

The Eastern Screech

Owl and Great-horned Owl look very similar, but the Screech Owl is 8" tall, while the Great-horned Owl is 20" tall.

Both Screech and Great-horned owls have tufts of feathers on the top of their head that resemble ears. They are mostly for decoration though.

Great-horned Owls (hoot owls) will eat most medium sized mammals such as

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Keeping Warm This Winter

Take it from the animals, layers are in. Actually, they never went out. Though it may not be on the runways this winter season, laying your clothes similar to the fur and feathers of animals is a great way to stay warm this winter.

Mammal fur and bird feathers are designed to help maintain body temperature, while keeping wind and rain away from the skin. This is done by layering different kinds of fur or feathers in a very specific order.

Mammals have soft

fluffy fur next to the skin and tough, course hair on the outside. The fluffy hair traps warm air, acting like an insulator. The outer hairs, called guard hairs, prevent moisture from coming in contact with the skin. In between the two is a layer of fur that acts as a buffer for more insulation.

Birds' feathers act in a similar fashion. Fluffy down feathers trap warm air in, while stiff contour feathers, repel water and break the wind.

Both mammals and birds will also puff themselves up,

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Nature By The Yard

(calendar continued)

Nature Inside Out Series-Tracks Thurs., Jan. 13 10-11 noon. Kids 3-5 years old. Cotsen Children's Library 258-2697 Free

Owl Moon Walk. Saturday Jan. 22 4:30-6:30pm Families Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve Live owls from Arc followed by a night walk (215) 862-2924. Fee

Nature Storytime Fri., Feb. 11, 10-11am Kids 3-5 years old. Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve (215) 862-2924. Fee

Looking for a really unique teacher/class gift this season? How about inviting Nature By The Yard to your child's class for a hands-on, fun, creative program? We offer programs that can complement most science/nature curriculum topics. Call or visit our web site for more information.

We're on the Web

See us at:

www.naturebytheyard.com

Owls (*continued*)

squirrels, skunks and rabbits. Screech Owls (the whinny owl) eat primarily insects and small mammals like mice, voles and moles.

Because of their nocturnal behavior, and brown, tan, black and white plumage that camouflages them, owls are often heard, but rarely seen.

Since owls breed in winter, listen for them in the late afternoon through early morning, as they call for a mate

and defend their territory.

If you suspect an owl in your backyard, search the ground around the base of the trees for wash (fecal matter) and pellets. Pellets are dark gray ovals of compressed fur, feathers and bones; parts of the owls' meal it couldn't digest. By dissecting the pellet, you can also discover what other animals are living in your neighborhood. This is a great activity to do with your kids.

Winter Warmth (*continued*)

raising the guard hairs and contour feathers in an effort to put even more space between their skin and the elements. The more layers there are, the warmer the animal will be.

Humans could take a lesson from our avian and mammalian friends. Wear a tight t-shirt next to the skin. This will keep your body's warmth where it is needed. On the very coldest days, wear a turtleneck to keep the warm air from escaping and a wool

sweater. Last should be a wind and water repellent coat. Top any outfit off with a hat. Warm air rises and about 20% of it comes off your head. Not wearing a hat is like baking cookies with the oven door open. Possible, but impractical.

This winter, stay warm and dry with layers and you will be able to laugh at whatever weather mother nature throws your way.

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 in-

service trainings for teachers on using the outdoors as a classroom as well as offer advice and expertise on designing and installing outdoor classrooms. For details on our services visit www.naturebytheyard.com