

Nature Niche

Nature By The Yard – Fostering a Natural Sense of Wonder

Winter, 2009

Volume 6, Issue 4
Calendar of Events
Please call the hosting organization for reservation information.

Tues. Dec. 8, 11-12 noon. **Toddler Walk.** Kids ages 18-36 months with adult. Plainsboro Township Parks and Recreation. (609) 799-0909 ext. 332 Fee

Wed. Dec. 9. 10-11am. **Toddler Walk.** Kids ages 18-36 months with adult. Buttinger Nature Center. Pennington, NJ (609) 737-7592. Fee.

Fri. Dec. 11 4:30-6pm. **Trim A Tree For Wildlife.** Families. Join us for a fun, informal program where we will make several treats for the animals in your backyard. Bowman's Hill Wildflower
(continued)

Birds at My Feeder

I get enormous satisfaction watching birds at my feeders. I love the spastic antics of chickadees and titmice so full of nervous energy. The deliberate, focused eating of cardinals and house finches. And the alarming bomb of the bluejay, who joins the feast with such an exuberant entrance, it often startles the others momentarily, causing an explosion of fluff and feathers before they all settle down at their respective perches.

I don't have an elaborate feeding system; just two sunflower seed feeders, a thistle feeder, and two suet feeders. I also have a heated bird bath that seems only attractive to the 6 squirrels that share my yard. I hope when every puddle or water collection is frozen, the birds will show an interest in my offering.

On a recent glance, I noticed the feeders were suspiciously

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Trim A Tree For Wildlife

During the holiday season, we often think of gathering family and friends, gift giving, parties and decorations. We also think of special foods such as cookies, latkes, nuts, cakes and roasted meats. Why not combine two of these traditions and extend your giving to the animals that live in your neighborhood with special foods just for them.

Winter can be a difficult time for wildlife and finding food and fresh water is a challenge. By decorating a tree outside with gifts for the animals or reusing your discarded Christmas tree, you'll be helping them survive

the harshest of seasons. In turn, they will pay you back with hours of enjoyment watching them.

Screw eye loops into dried corn cobs and hang them from tree branches. This will keep the squirrels busy and you entertained for hours.

Alternate golden raisins and cranberries in six to eight inch chains for a colorful icicle effect that will attract fruit eating birds as well as opossums and raccoons.

Make chains of popcorn to drape on a tree like garland.

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Preserve. Reservations
215.862.2924. Fee.

Sat. Jan. 23 4-6pm.
Creatures of the Night. Bring the family for a close look at some familiar animals that come out at night. Join us along with The Mercer Wildlife Center for a fun evening, meeting local wildlife, walking through the winter woods and sipping hot cider with cookies. Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve. 215.862.2924. Fee

Fri. Jan. 29 Time tba.
Nature Inside Out-Using fiction picture books as a springboard for nature discovery. Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education Conference. Princeton. visit <http://anjee.net> for more information.

Two great books to read to your kids this holiday season are: "The Night Tree" by Eve Bunting and "The After Christmas Tree" by Linda Wagner Tyler

Sending you and your family warm holiday wishes for a very Happy New Year.

Pam

We're on the Web

<http://naturebytheyard.com>

Birds (continued)

empty for several minutes. If we were experiencing a warm day, I'd understand as many birds take advantage of insect hatches that occur when we have warm spells, but this was a cold day. I suspected my neighbor's cat who seems to delight in stalking our backyard for easy pickings.

I went outside with the intention of chasing this cat out of my yard, but was surprised and admittedly pleased to find an adult sharp-shinned hawk,

sitting on the fence.

Sharp-shinned hawks are bird specialists, often catching feathered friends on the wing and eating them. They frequently hunt backyard bird feeding stations for easy prey, not unlike my neighbor's cat. But this is one predator I don't mind sharing my yard with. Birds are birds. Well, not really, my hackles still go up when the starlings devour the suet, but that's a different story.

Trim A Tree continued

Many people have heard peanut butter is dangerous for birds because it can clog the breathing tube under their tongue. I have heard conflicting thoughts on this, so a good solution is to mix the peanut butter with corn meal so it isn't so sticky before using it. Tie a string or ribbon to the top of a pine cone (I like to use the white pine cones since they are long and have open bracts). Spread the peanut butter mixture all over it and either

roll it in bird seed or stick berries, raisins, seeds and nuts on each bract. Then hang the coated cone out and watch the birds come.

If you don't want to use peanut butter, you can melt a plain suet cake in a sauce pan. Dip the pine cone in the suet holding it by the string then roll it in the seeds. This is a great alternative for kids with peanut allergies. Just be sure the seed mixture is safe as well. Happy Holidays to all creatures.

About Our Organization...

Nature By The Yard was started in January, 2001. We offer fun, hands-on nature education programs for schools, scouts, camps, libraries, birthday parties, garden clubs, nature centers, wildflower preserves and other organized groups. We also provide

workshops for teachers on using the schoolyard as a classroom tool as well as offer advice and expertise on designing school yard habitats. For details on our services, visit <http://naturebytheyard.com> or call Pam at (609) 610-6292.