

Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council

13555 Beaver Dam Road
Cockeysville, MD 21030

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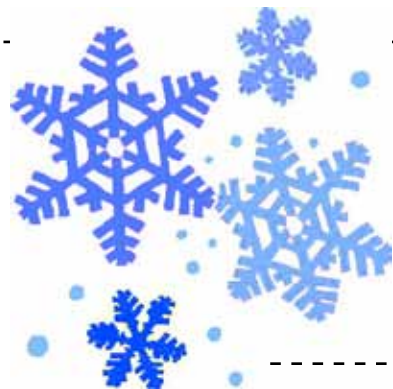


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Is Your Membership
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**DRIVE CAREFULLY:
USE YOUR SEAT BELTS**



**RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP
AND SIGN UP A FRIEND, TOO!**

Renew now or at the Pancake Breakfast, and please ask a friend to join. Remember, camp registration is coming up! To see if your membership is current, please check your mailing label for your membership status. "C" means current, "E" means expired, and "X" means this is your last issue unless you renew now.

MEMBERSHIP FORM

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ State _____ Zip _____

- \$15 Individual
- \$20 Family
- \$12 Senior Citizen/Student
- \$25 Non-Profit
- \$ 50 Sustaining
- \$100 Corporate
- \$100 Patron
- \$150 Lifetime



Checks payable to ORNC Council, 13555 Beaver Dam Rd., Cockeysville, MD 21030

TRAILBLAZER

Feb/March 2011



Supporting Oregon Ridge Park
and Nature Center for 28 years

COUNCIL SPEAKER SERIES

THE HISTORY OF THE BLUEBIRD MOVEMENT
presented by Katharine Patterson

Monday, March 21, 7:30 PM

Henry David Thoreau once said, "The bluebird carries the sky on its back." His is an apt description of one of nature's most beloved wonders, and a somewhat fragile one at that. The Eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) is monogamous, but not exactly prolific. They have persistent native and foreign enemies competing for their nesting sites, often destroying eggs and killing the parent bluebird in the process. It is likely that up to 70% of bluebirds die before the end of their first year. If lucky, a bluebird pair may raise two or three broods per season.

Luck often includes a helping hand. That is exactly what the North American Bluebird Society (NABS) does. It's goal as a non-profit education, conservation and research organization is to promote the recovery of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting bird species in North America.

An avid birder, Katharine Patterson has studied bluebirds for over 16 years as a bluebird trail monitor here at Oregon Ridge and as a caretaker on her own property. During her power point presentation, Katharine will talk about the history of the *Bluebird Movement* and the establishment of the NABS. She will provide an overview of the natural history of bluebirds, including their habitat, nesting behavior, and the challenges they face from predators and competitors. Listeners will learn about nest box design, gardening for wildlife, and the importance of monitoring nest boxes. They will go home with some useful resource handouts and bluebird box construction plans.



Photograph by Christine Shanks, www.christineshanks.com

Katharine Patterson is a volunteer naturalist at Irvine Natural Science Center. A former Child Life Therapist, Katharine holds a degree in Early Childhood Education from the University of Delaware and a Certificate of Environmental Studies from Johns Hopkins University. She believes children should spend time outdoors, learning about the natural world. She lives on a small farm in Butler, MD, where she and her two daughters raise a 4-H flock of sheep, and even spin wool.

TRAIL GUIDES HIKE, LEARN, SHARE!

Trail Guide volunteers at Oregon Ridge do all of the above and more. They help children appreciate nature and have fun doing it!

Training occurs twice a year, winter and fall. The only prerequisites are a yen for the outdoors, enthusiasm, and enjoying children. The winter session takes place February 1 through 4, from 10 AM to 1 PM. The \$25 fee is totally refundable after leading your first solo hike.

During February's training you will learn how to lead a maple sugar hike, follow Teacher/Naturalist Andi Musser in search of frogs, salamanders and other reptiles and amphibians, learn about birds and bird nests from ORNC Naturalist Courtney Peed, and hear from a special guest speaker.

After training, you will be encouraged to tag along with an experienced Trail Guide as often as necessary to feel comfortable taking out a group of your own alone. Your inner child may awaken while tramping through the woods with the children, sweeping insects from the meadow and sloshing in the stream in search of crayfish and other critters. You will observe how Trail Guides engage the children so they will want to learn more about nature and the environment on their own or with their families. It is all about fun, not scientific facts.

An extra perk is a monthly adventure just for the Trail Guides -- a wildflower hike at Shenks Ferry, searching for rare Yellow Lady Slippers in our park, or visiting Ladew Topiary Gardens. Joins us. We need you.



IT'S BACK! MAPLE SUGARING, THAT IS!

Freezing nights - brrrrrrr!
Warm days - ahhhhh! Put them together and maple tree sap starts flowing for us to tap. The Sugar Shack will be steaming while we make fresh syrup from the sap. Add a bit

of snow, spill a little hot syrup, and we have taffy.

Snow or shine, Maple Sugar Days begin on February 19 and continue on February 20, 26 and 27, from 10 AM to 4 PM. All is free, so gather up your family and friends and drive on over to Oregon Ridge to bid farewell to winter and welcome spring. Hikes to the Sugar Bush will take off on the half hour and the evaporator will be boiling sap all day, providing you with a taste of the real thing and warmth to ease the chill.



HOT CAKES COMIN' UP!

OREGON RIDGE NATURE CENTER COUNCIL'S

ANNUAL PANCAKE BREAKFAST

Oregon Ridge Lodge
March 5 and 6, 2011
8 AM to Noon

MENU

Pancakes hot off the griddle
Hot sausage grilled to perfection
Maple Syrup, pure and sweet
Cold Milk
Fresh OJ
Hot Coffee
Fun and Friends Galore
(Seconds on all, except sausage)

And Nifty Raffles, Too

Tickets at the Door

Adults - \$6
Children 2 to 8 - \$3

SUPPORT ORNC!
JOIN US!

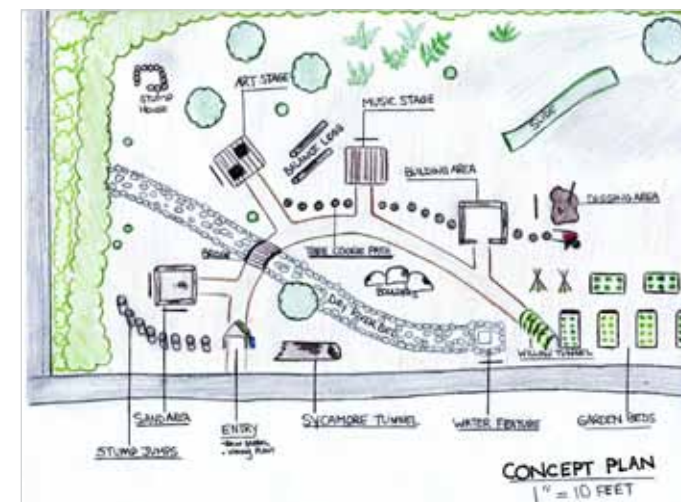
NATURAL PLAY AREA COMES SOON!

Oregon Ridge Nature Center has begun building a natural play area located just across from the chicken and turkey pen, which will replicate the backyards and home ranges of yesteryear by giving our children a piece of nature to explore, manipulate, and love. Instead of enforcing the motto "take only pictures and leave only foot prints," this outdoor space will be made up of natural materials and will encourage visitors to interact with nature directly by digging, planting, touching, building, climbing, and more. Researchers have found numerous benefits derived by children playing in nature: creativity, problem-solving, self-discipline, focus, cooperation, flexibility, self-awareness, stress reduction, reduced aggression, increased happiness, and reduction of the symptoms of ADHD.

Currently, two Eagle Scouts and two Girl Scout Gold Award Candidates are working on features in the play area. Additional features will be added as funds and volunteers become available. The Natural Play Area will consist of hills, tall native grasses and other vegetation. In addition, listed below are some of the features planned for the area.

- Entrance arbor with rain barrel
- 8 X 8 foot sand area
- 10 X 10 foot music area
- 10 X 10 art area
- Digging area
- Tree tunnel
- Six raised garden beds
- Dry river bed
- Bridge
- Water feature
- Stump jumps
- Tree cookie walkway
- Stone walkway
- 10 X 10 foot building area
- Two tepees
- Balance beam trees
- Tree stump house
- Willow tunnel
- Boulders
- A slide embedded into the side of the hillside
- Seasonally changing natural materials (seed pods, leaves, pine ones, etc.)

The open-ended free play that will take place in the Natural Play Area will help foster the love of nature in children. Complementary programs will be offered at ORNC to give children the education and knowledge needed to help protect the earth. Hopefully, this combination will create adults who will be better caretakers of our planet.



Concept Plan (top) and Model (bottom) of Natural Play Area

USE LINE 37 ON YOUR TAX RETURN TO RESTORE THE CHESAPEAKE BAY!

You can help restore the Bay and conserve endangered species by donating to the Chesapeake Bay and Endangered Species Fund. Simply fill in the amount you wish to give on a line in your Maryland Income Tax Return: Line 37 of Form 502 or line 13 of Form 503, and if applicable, line 33 of Form 504 and line 39 of Form 505. Tax donations provide Chesapeake Bay education and restoration projects for students, stream cleanups and tree plantings by community volunteers, habitat research, protection and enhancement for threatened plants and animals, and so much more. Donations are divided evenly between the Bay restoration grants program of the Chesapeake Bay Trust and the nongame and endangered species programs of the Wildlife Heritage Service of the Maryland Department of Natural Resources.

Your donation, which will be deducted from your refund and added to your tax payment, is tax-deductible in the following year.



OREGON RIDGE NATURE CENTER COUNCIL SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Each year the ORNC Council awards scholarships to college-bound high school seniors from Baltimore County and City. Recipients should show a high level of commitment to the health of the environment and plan to continue their studies in environmental science and nature education.

This year our goal is to support at least two scholarships up to \$3,000 each!

We hope you will help by giving generously to the 2011 Scholarship Fund.

To make a tax-deductible donation, checks should be made payable to the *ORNC Council*, specifying on the note line *"Scholarship Fund"* and sent to:

Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council
13555 Beaver Dam Road
Cockeysville, MD 21030

The names of all donors will be published, so if you would like to make a gift in another's name, please specify the donor's name as it should appear on the list.

If you know a high school senior who may be eligible for the scholarship, please have the student call the Nature Center for an application form (410 887-1815). Applications should be postmarked no later than April 1, 2011.

Thank You for Helping Us Educate Future Environmentalists!

ANN CANOLES SHINES IN 2010

The recipient of the 2010 Shining Star Award for Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council is Ann Canoles. At the Shining Star awards ceremony on December 20, Baltimore County Executive Kevin Kamenetz honored Anne and 44 other volunteers for volunteering countless hours of their personal time to their councils.

"Our council volunteers are essential to the success of our recreation programs and councils and make a critical difference in both the quality



With Anne are (L to R) Recreation & Parks Director Barry Williams, Baltimore County Executive Kevin Kamenetz, and District 3 Representative Todd Huff.

of programs that we are able to offer and the quality of life in our neighborhoods," said Kamenetz.

Anne has volunteered for more than 14 years with the ORNC Council. One of her first volunteer jobs was to re-open the gift shop in the Nature Center. She organized the purchase of display cases and began a new line of inventory. She and husband Noot still operate the Gift Shop and can be found there on most Sunday afternoons.

Ann is also the Council's treasurer and has developed a comprehensive bookkeeping system to keep track of Council funds. Her duties as treasurer require her to be present at all of our special events. She is meticulous and reliable, coming in earlier and leaving later than other volunteers. She spends many hours at home writing checks, putting together monthly treasurer reports, and working up the final statistics for our special events. She is the answer lady for all budget questions.

When she isn't volunteering at Oregon Ridge, Anne enjoys early morning walks with her friends and hiking with her family. Hawk Mountain and the Appalachian Trail are two of her favorite weekend getaways. Her family has nicknamed her "Plan Ann" because she is so focused on setting up field trips for them to take together.

Congratulations, Ann! You are a Shining Star!

BE ONE OF MARYLAND'S FIRST MASTER NATURALISTS

If you enjoy being "first," here's your chance. Register now to become a member of the first group to complete the Maryland Master Naturalist program. This program, which is similar to the Master Gardener program, is for volunteers who want to learn and share knowledge of the natural world. It is offered through the University of Maryland Extension and the Maryland Department of Natural Resources. Certification involves 48 hours of classroom and field training. Courses relating to Maryland's flora, fauna, and natural history are taught by environmental and university specialists. Final certification comes with completion of 40 hours of volunteer service.

Classes meet on Mondays from 9 AM to 3:30 PM, beginning on March 14th and ending May 2nd. The \$200 course fee includes all materials. The registration deadline is Feb. 15, 2011. Call Oregon Ridge to register today!

MARK YOUR 2011 CALENDARS FOR THESE FREE MAY EVENTS

THE HABITAT TEAM IS HABIT FORMING!

Aliens are overtaking Oregon Ridge Park — alien plants, that is! Help us control invasive plants, repair trails, plant trees and more! Wear long pants, a long sleeve shirt, and gloves. Beginning in May, we will meet on the third Saturday of each month at 9:30 AM and the fourth Thursday of each month at 5 PM. Please call if you want to start a new habit by joining the Habitat Team!

PRIMITIVE TECHNOLOGY WEEKEND

May 7 and 8, 2011
10 AM to 4 PM

MUSIC IN THE WOODS

May 14, 2011
10 AM to 4 PM

CHESTNUTS ON THE RIDGE

by Jim Curtis

Many are familiar with the plight of the American chestnut tree, but few realize the full story. As a way of providing a little background, here is a brief explanation of the chestnut story.

The American chestnut, *Castanea dentata*, was once the dominant tree of the Piedmont and mountains of the Eastern United States. One of the largest trees of the eastern forest, it produced an abundant and reliable supply of edible nuts.



Mature trees could be hundreds of years old, up to 5 feet in diameter and 100 feet tall. Many forms of wildlife depended on these nuts. Squirrels, deer, turkey, bears, and many birds gorged on the nuts each fall. Native Americans and European settlers enjoyed these tasty nuts and found the chestnut wood an excellent, rot-resistant building material.

Around 1900 the chestnut blight was first detected in the New York City area. The blight soon spread, and by 1950 the entire range of the chestnut, from Maine to Georgia, was decimated. The blight, a fungus called *Cryphonectria parasitica*, was believed to have originated from chestnut trees imported from China or Japan. The Chinese chestnut is resistant to the blight, but does not have the timber or ecological value of the American chestnut. The loss of the American chestnut was a tremendous shock to wildlife populations and a significant loss for rural Americans.

The chestnut blight, spread through airborne spores, is nearly impossible to control. Once a tree is infected with the blight fungus the vascular system of the tree is eventually

destroyed. An infected tree often dies within a year or two. However, the blight does not destroy the roots of the chestnut, and this fact gives us hope for recovery of the species. Thankfully, the chestnut is somewhat unique in its ability to resprout from its roots, time and time again, after the treetop has died. To this day one can find chestnut trees sprouting from old root systems at Oregon Ridge, only to die back before the tree matures.

Occasionally, one can find a rare American chestnut tree reaching maturity and producing nuts. In fact, here at Oregon Ridge we have located such a tree and collected a few nuts that will be planted in the spring. It is doubtful that this "mother tree" will survive very long, but possibly its offspring may show some blight resistance.

In spring of 2009, volunteers at Oregon Ridge planted 100 American chestnut seedlings atop the Ridge. These trees were grown from nuts of several different surviving mother trees managed by the Maryland Chapter of the American Chestnut Foundation. Hopefully, some of these trees will show some blight resistance and can be used in chestnut recovery research or in breeding.

On a national level, several organizations have been using nuts from surviving mother trees to selectively breed a blight-resistant American chestnut. In these breeding programs American chestnuts are initially crossed with blight-resistant Chinese chestnuts. The resulting hybrids, after testing for blight resistance, are backcrossed with pure American trees for several generations until a blight-resistant tree with American characteristics is created.

The American Chestnut Foundation now has some sixth generation trees that have exhibited good blight resistance. As these blight resistant trees mature, nuts for general distribution will become available. Hopefully, at some time in the future, these nuts can be acquired and planted, restoring the American chestnut to Oregon Ridge.

For more information on the American chestnut please visit www.acf.org and www.mdtaf.org or read the *Mighty Giants: An American Chestnut Anthology*.

[The top photo, taken by Jim Curtis, is of an American chestnut growing here in Oregon Ridge Park. The second photograph shows a close-up of ripening chestnuts.]

NEW EXHIBITS MODERNIZE NATURE CENTER

by Joe Warfield

The hodgepodge of animal holding tanks, which for years have been scattered about the animal room on an assortment of tables and benches, has been replaced by a beautiful, three-section display wall which houses 14 animal tanks and an additional end display case. The center section remains permanent against the wall, while the two end sections rotate 90 degrees to make an attractive enclosure with viewing from both sides of each section. The moveable sections can be rotated back against the wall to free-up space for events such as wreath making or for Honey Harvest vendors.

This exhibit came about through a joint effort of the Exhibit Committee, the staff, and Adler Display. When you enter the animal room, you may first notice the wonderful nature scene graphics which make up the skin of the display sections. Adler Display produced these graphics using excellent photographs taken by longtime council member and volunteer, Bill Diegel. Each panel is composed of Bill's photographs of beautiful scenes



which are located right here in the woodlands of Oregon Ridge park. We thank Bill for his fine photography.

The frogs, turtles, snakes and salamanders living in the Nature Center are now consolidated inside the tanks housed in this exhibit. Maintenance is easier for the staff and each compartment has a lock that provides security for the critters. We hope all council members and other visitors enjoy this upgrade in the display and care of our animal friends.

Two other exhibits are in progress. A new tree exhibit will be installed along the window in the main exhibit hall. This will consist of an 84" x 14" panel, with a 15" LCD screen

and a series of interactive buttons enabling visitors to view slides or videos showing important facts and characteristics about some of the trees commonly found in the Ridge woodlands. The other project in progress is a new bird egg exhibit in the animal room. The eggs will be displayed in a new cabinet that will match the existing animal skull cabinet. Adler Display will wire the cabinet with 18 buttons and their related L.E.D. bulbs, which will provide an interactive exercise whereby visitors can search for and learn which egg belongs to which egg layer.

TRAILBLAZER STAFF

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The bluebird photo on the front page was taken by photographer Christine Shanks. For more about Christine's bird photography work, see: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/cjshanks/>

OREGON RIDGE NATURE CENTER COUNCIL, 13555 Beaver Dam Road, Cockeysville, MD 21030
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Articles for the April/May/June issue are due February 22.