



Brightwood Kids - Nature Detectives! June 2022 Newsletter

Event Calendar:

FOBP will offer programs for children ages 2 through 8 years old through the Westfield Recreation Department the 3rd Thursday of the month, weather permitting, as noted in the calendar below.

Class Schedule:

10-10:45 AM 2- 3 year old with adult
11-11:45 AM 4 -5 year old
3:30-4:30 PM 6 - 8 year old

Register for classes at <https://secure.rec1.com/NJ/westfield-nj/catalog>.

June 16, 2022 -	Natural Habitats
July 2022 -(date tbd)	Real or Make Believe
August 2022- (date tbd)	Dirt + Water = Mud
September 15, 2022	Butterfly Life Cycle
October 20, 2022	Spiders, Bats and Things that move in the night
November 17, 2022	Migrate, Hibernate, Stay – BP birds and animals
December 15, 2022	Winter/Seasons – weather and snow

Squirrels

Photos courtesy of Chuan-Chu Chou

Have you ever taken time to watch squirrels? These acrobatic animals can teach us humans a thing or two about taking chances and making things work out even when they don't go exactly as planned.

You may have seen squirrels jumping and leaping from tree to tree or walking on an electrical wire high above ground. They are sure footed and perform death defying jumps. Scientists studying squirrels have not only noted their agility but also their decision making!¹



Squirrels contemplate not only where to jump to but also where to jump from. They seek out limbs or surfaces that will support the spring they need to launch a particular distance.

While they don't always make a perfect landing, they know how to make adjustments so that they stick it!



In other words, these athletes know how to make the most of the situation they find themselves in!

Brightwood Park has many of these industrious animals that help the park's ecosystem stay healthy in a uniquely squirrely way! Their pattern of storing food underground actually plays a role in regenerating forests.

Squirrels are omnivores. They can eat a wide variety of foods including seeds, nuts, fruits, vegetables, mushrooms, insects, and so on. However, their diet relies mostly on seeds and nuts. These foods are plentiful in spring, summer and fall, but squirrels need to eat all winter too. So, squirrels prepare for winter by caching nuts and seeds.

A squirrel cache is a collection of nuts and seeds that they have buried in the ground to access in the winter when food is scarce. Squirrels generally bury the cache in various locations about 1" deep in the soil. They have to remember where they have planted their caches so they develop a mental map. Still, they sometimes forget where all their caches are.



When squirrels leave caches of seeds and nuts in the ground, they are actually helping those seeds or tree nuts to grow and repopulate the forest.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/05/science/squirrels-olympics-leaping.html>

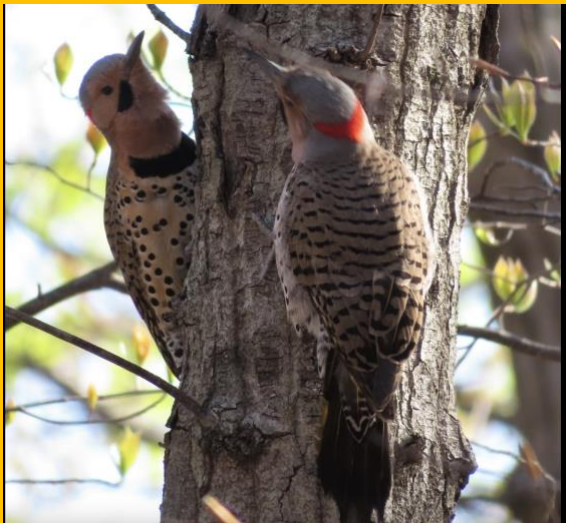
Here are some other things you should know about these hardy animals:

- A squirrel's front teeth continue to grow throughout its lifetime. Squirrels need to chew to keep their teeth a proper length.
- Squirrels use their tails for balance.
- Squirrels rub their faces on acorns. Scientists think this is a way for them to put their scent on the nuts so that they will have an easier time finding them later.
- Squirrels chirp and shake their tails to communicate.
- Squirrels will sometimes create decoy caches to protect their real ones from other animals.

Squirrels! These amazing animals show us resilience and a never give up attitude! They deserve our respect.

Flickers

Photos courtesy of Chuan-Chu Chou



Spring has brought a new kind of woodpecker to Brightwood Park! Northern Flickers!

Flickers are a larger species of woodpecker, growing up to a foot in length with a wingspan of between 16" to 20." They can weigh between 4 and 5 lbs.

Flickers are beautifully feathered birds with mostly brown patterned plumage. Their breasts are spotted, their backs striped, and they have a bright red crescent on the back of grey heads.

Eastern flickers have yellow feathers on their tails, while western flickers tails sport red feathers.

Our Brightwood eastern flickers have beautiful yellow flight shaft feathers!



Male flickers have a black “moustache.” Females do not. Can you spot the males from the females in these photos?



Flickers live in tree cavities that they dig out themselves or find already drilled. Both male and female woodpeckers help with homebuilding.

Unlike many species of woodpecker, they do not primarily peck at trees for their food. Rather, they are ground feeders, pecking into the dirt to find a stash of tasty ants or beetles! They seek out insect larvae that live underground using tongues that can extend 2” to snatch their meals. Their diet includes all kinds of insects and even snails. In the winter, they eat berries and seeds – including those of poison oak and ivy.

This spring, the flickers were busy courting and making their homes in the park. If you walk in the park, you may hear them singing. If you want to read more about and hear what flickers sound like, you can listen to their call at The Cornell Lab’s All About Birds website: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Northern_Flicker/overview

Who are Pollinators and Why are they important?



If you walked through Brightwood Park this spring, you may have seen some areas blocked off with caution tape. The tape is to protect pollinator gardens we planted this spring.

So, what is a pollinator garden? It is a garden of flowering plants that attracts pollinators. Pollinators are animals, such as bees, butterflies, flies, moths, hummingbirds, bats, and others, that spread pollen from one plant to another.

Pollen is a yellow powdery substance that flowers produce that needs to be spread to other flowers to create fruit and seeds. A plant is pollinated when pollen spreads from one flower to another. Pollinators play a major role in getting that pollen from one flower to another. For example, bees collect nectar and pollen from flowers for food. They carry

pollen on their legs. As they move among the flowers, they spread pollen from one flower to another. Any plant with seeds or cones needs to be pollinated. Pollinators are a crucial part of the pollination process.

Pollination of plants is critical for survival of all living things! The food we eat is dependent on pollination. Our environment also needs plants that are produced as a result of pollination. For example, plants produce oxygen and remove carbon dioxide from the air. They also improve water quality by holding soil in place with their root systems. Their leaves capture rain water and allow moisture to remain in the air.



There has been a decline in pollinator populations throughout the world due to a number of factors:

1. **Habitat loss:** Pollinators need a place to live and eat, i.e. natural vegetation and unimproved land;
2. **Non-Native Species:** Native pollinators have evolved alongside native plants. Their bodies are designed to feed off specific plant structures. They are not equipped to feed off non-native plants. When non-native plants out-compete and push out native plants, it leaves native pollinators without food sources. When non-native insects are added to the mix, they may compete with native insects for food.
3. **Pesticides:** Pesticides can directly kill pollinators, poison their food supply, kill plants they need to survive.
4. **Climate Change:** Due to changing climate patterns, pollinators and plants may not be in synch with one another.
5. **Parasites and Disease.**

You can find more information on pollinators at the National Park Service website:

<https://www.nps.gov/subjects/pollinators/index.htm>

In the park, we planted zinnia, cosmos, Indian blanket, and partridge pea seeds along with some milkweed, ragwort and other native flowering species. If all goes well, the flowers will hopefully bloom in mid-July. Next year, we will hope to expand our gardens.

You can help pollinators, too! Plant a pollinator garden in your own yard or volunteer to plant pollinator gardens in Brightwood Park!

BRIGHTWOOD PARK NATURE WORD SEARCH

M C Q K Y T W O O D P E C K E R O M U E
O I A K D L D L N B X U P G R F S V S J
P F L C S B G J B U E X Y O G P S G E F
C L K K H H J T A V A E W U L O L Z E Y
R X B Z W E U W T V A O H I J L Q Y D Q
G Q U Y W E B M Z X G C F N Z L E F S U
V B T P S V E B M O Z I O U H I G N B K
S N T C D K P D B I S R T R B N J C C Q
O G E T O N L L A E N S D R N A E M E K
N T R N X N A T U R E G B X B T C Y P O
G B F G E F F C K M C J B P M O J E A T
L S L V R C W L O M M V C I U R L O R X
Z M Y G P L T P O S S A I P R V H A K W
J I Z A N U J A G W M N G S Q D F G V R
N O I R U S K Y R L E O S E R C L D Z C
L J N D S U T L C N Q R S K G P I K P D
E C N E A M A C O R N P B S K I C P V J
E U I N N M Y R P L B D M W X Y K V L B
W S A D T E B R I G H T W O O D E S I N
V V O Z S R C P P E B S Q U I R R E L C

Can you be a nature detective and find these words associated with the park in this word search? Look for words going backwards, forwards, horizontal, vertical, and diagonal.

Brightwood
Park
Squirrel
Cache
Acorn

Flicker
Woodpecker
Ants
Plumage
Song

Pollen
Pollinator
Garden
Flower
Seeds

Nectar
Bee
Butterfly
Bat
Hummingbird

Summer
Zinnia
Cosmos
Milkweed
Nature

Reading List:

