



Brightwood Kids - Nature Detectives!

March 2022 Newsletter

Spring is on its way! The weather is warming, buds are sprouting, ducks are bonding. Love is in the air! Come check out the wonder of spring!

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 olds with adult

11-11:45 AM 4 -5 year olds

3:30-4:30 PM 6 - 8 year olds

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

March 2, 2022	Classes for ages 2 to 8: Read Across America/Dr. Seuss Day
March 17, 2022	Classes for ages 2 to 8: Animal Homes & Hibernation
March 22, 2022	McKinley Elementary School PTA event with FOBP
April 21, 2022	Classes for ages 2 to 8: How do animals move?
April 24, 2022	Earth Day Family Event in cooperation with the Westfield Green Team

May 7, 2022	Family event: Adopt a native plant for our demonstration gardens in celebration of Earth Day! Rain date: May 14
May 19, 2022	Classes for ages 2 to 8: Plants and Flowers
June 16, 2022	Classes for ages 2 to 8: Natural Habitats



Brightwood's Ducks

Take a walk around Brightwood Pond, and you will likely see some ducks all year round. Have you ever stopped to look at how many different types of ducks visit Brightwood?

According to the eBird Field Checklist, 9 duck breeds have been reported in Brightwood Park: ¹

How many of these have you seen? Have you found any beyond the nine breeds listed? Our photographers did.

eBird Field Checklist	
Brightwood Park	
Union, New Jersey, US	
ebird.org/hotspot/L4777296	
122 species (+1 other taxa) - Year-round, All years	
Date:	_____
Start time:	_____
Duration:	_____
Distance:	_____
Party size:	_____
Notes:	_____
Waterfowl	_____ Canada Goose
	_____ Wood Duck
	_____ Blue-winged Teal
	_____ Gadwall
	_____ American Wigeon
	_____ Mallard
	_____ Ring-necked Duck
	_____ Common Merganser
	_____ Ruddy Duck
Pigeons and Doves	_____ Rock Pigeon
	_____ Mourning Dove
Swifts	_____ Chimney Swift

Male and female ducks of the same breed look quite different. Male ducks look fancier than female ducks. Because the males have to court females, they want to look their best! They will put on a show and hope that a female will choose them to be their partner.

Ducks find a mate between December and March each year. To attract a female, males perform head pumping, head-up-tail-up maneuvers, and grunt-whistling.² They hope their performance will find them love. You can watch a video of some fancy courting here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmp8e9_Fa50

When you are in the park, be sure to listen for the ducks. Did you know that all ducks do not "quack?" Click on the links below to hear what sounds the different duck breeds make.

¹

https://ebird.org/printableList?regionCode=L4777296&yr=all&m&fbclid=IwAR10K2dxjdKkviAVJvAP7VTgxu8yzChqTEUzjc_ixfuIp1hVlwQ--U-IU5k

² <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/news/what-to-watch-for-duck-courtship-video/>

Mallards



You can find Mallard ducks in Brightwood Park year round.

Female mallards have brown feathers on their heads and bodies. Their wings have a bright blue “speculum” outlined by white stripes. Their brown bill shows some orange coloration, and their feet are orange.

Photo by Chuan-Chu Chou

Male mallards have iridescent green feathers on their head with a white ring around their neck. Their bill is yellowish, and their feet are orange. Like the female, the male’s wings also have a blue “speculum” with white stripes.

Mallards are “dabbling ducks”—they feed in the water from pond surface plants or tipping forward and grazing on underwater plants. They almost never dive.

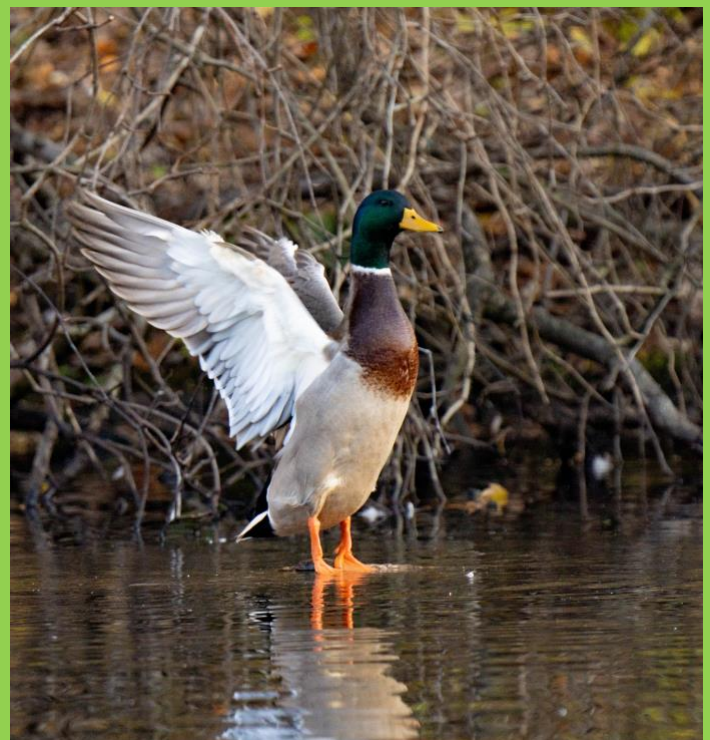


Photo by Kevin Redden

Mallards speak in “quacks”: <https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Mallard/sounds>

Wood Ducks

Can you guess which is male and which is female?



All Wood Duck photos by Chuan-Chu Chou

Wood ducks are particularly beautiful in coloring and patterning.



Males have iridescent green feathers with intricate bands of white and dark brown and a swept back crest on their heads. Their bodies have a dark back contrasted to a white belly. Their chestnut feathers accent their neck and tail. They have blue on the speculum of their wings.

Females have a soft greyish brown head and small swept back crest. Their eyes are ringed in a white teardrop shape giving them an elegant and distinctive profile. Their bellies are also white. They have blue speculum wing marking.

These birds live in wooded wetlands. They find holes in trees along ponds or lakes to nest within. Unlike most ducks, they have strong claws that can grip bark so that they can perch on branches.



Wood ducks mate in January and can lay up to two sets of eggs each year.

Ducklings jump down from their nests without any help from their parents and follow their mother down to the water.

Like Mallards, Wood Ducks are dabblers. Although they are omnivores, they eat mostly plants.

Wood ducks are one of the few birds with red eyes. This young male has not fully developed his fancy plumage yet.

Wood ducks have a much higher pitched call than Mallards:

https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Wood_Duck/sounds



American Wigeon

These two beautiful female American Wigeons show off their blue/grey bills and smoky brown eyes. They sport greyish brown feathers.



Like other duck species, the male Wigeon is more colorful than the female. Its head is white on top with an iridescent green stripe from its eye towards the back. Its neck is brown with black speckles three sides and black in the back. Male Wigeons have a brown body, white underbelly and black tail.

Photo by Chuan-Chu Chou

American Wigeons like to come together in groups in marshy wetlands. They are dabblers who mostly eat plants. Their shorter beaks help them tear off plants not only in the water but also on land.

American Wigeons have a very distinctive whistle-sneezy voice. You can hear their voice here: https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/American_Wigeon/sounds

Hooded Merganser



Hooded Mergansers are smaller ducks. This female is swimming with its cinnamon colored head crest fully open. She has a grey body, and is swimming with her longish tail in the water.

Males are quite showy white, black and cinnamon colored ducks. Their heads are black with a white wedge shaped feather section within their very distinctive crest. When their crest is folded down, the white appears to be a stripe.

Photo by Chuan-Chu Chou

Hooded Mergansers have short serrated bills. They dive and swim underwater to hunt for their meals. They eat fish, crayfish, and aquatic insects and swallow their catch whole. They also eat vegetation.

The Hooded Merganser also has a very distinctive voice that sounds more like a croak:
https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Hooded_Merganser/sounds

Common Merganser

This female Common Merganser was recently seen in Brightwood Park. She has a shaggy copper feathered head and grey body. Males have smooth iridescent green heads, black backs and white bodies. Common Mergansers have long serrated reddish beaks.

These ducks spend most of their time floating on the water in groups with other ducks including Buffleheads. They dive to hunt salmon, trout and other prey. They eat mostly fish, but also feed upon aquatic insects, crayfish, birds, small mammals and plants. These larger ducks are at the top of the aquatic food chain.



Photo by Chuan-Chu Chou

The Common Merganser has a call similar to a whirring sound:
https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Common_Merganser/sounds

Bufflehead

Buffleheads are smaller ducks with short beaks.

Male buffleheads have iridescent green and purple feathers on their head and neck and a large white patch on the back of their heads. Their bodies are white.

All Bufflehead photos by Chuan-Chu Chou



Female Buffleheads are brown and grey with distinctive white cheek patches.

Buffleheads stay mostly in the water and are rarely seen on land. They dive for their food and can stay underwater for up to 25 seconds. They eat invertebrates, crustaceans and mollusks while still underwater.

Buffleheads are one of the few duck species that stay with their same mate for years. Most other duck breeds choose a new mate each year.



Buffleheads have a more muffled “quack:”

<https://www.allaboutbirds.org/guide/Bufflehead/sounds>

Odd couple?

This couple visited Brightwood this winter. This smaller male Bufflehead was accompanied by the much larger female Common Merganser. These two enjoyed themselves swimming in the unfrozen water in Brightwood pond. In the winter, these two duck species like to hang out together.



Ducks sometimes mate with other breeds.

Photo by Chuan-Chu Chou

Fun Duck facts:

Mother ducks do not feed their babies. They lead them around, but baby ducks forage for themselves.

Ducks have very good vision, and because their eyes are on either side of their head, they can see almost 340 degrees (that is, they can see in front, to the side and some of what is behind them at the same time!)

When ducks preen themselves, they are actually waterproofing themselves. While they are cleaning away dust and dirt, they are also spreading a waxy substance from a gland near their tails. So, when they dive down in the water, their underfeathers stay dry.

Ducks feet don't get cold. If you see them walking on ice or swimming in icy water, no worries. They don't have nerve endings in their feet!

For more information about ducks, check out The Cornell Lab website www.allaboutbirds.org

Mighty Oak Trees

There is a saying, "*Mighty oaks from little acorns grow!*" If you look at a tiny acorn, you might not see its potential to grow 100 feet tall! The saying reminds us that, like oaks, in the seeds of life there is tremendous potential... that goes for each of us.

- An acorn is a fruit of the Oak tree. ³
- Oak trees produce about 1,000 acorns a year in general. However, there are some years they produce a higher volume in a "boom" called a "mast" year, or a much lower number in a "bust." Scientists are not quite sure why this happens, but there are some benefits to the tree. In a boom year, the oak produces so many acorns that animals that rely on the acorns for food cannot eat them all leaving more to germinate and grow into trees. On the other hand, in a bust year, there is a limited amount of food for



³ Photos of leaves, acorn, and germinating acorn are from: <https://www.factsjustforkids.com/plant-facts/tree-facts-for-kids/oak-tree-facts/>

the animals, and this keeps their population numbers in check.⁴ That balance ensures that in boom years, some acorns will be able to survive.

- Many animals that eat acorns live in or around Brightwood Park such as squirrels, chipmunks, mice, birds, deer, racoons, and opossums.
- An acorn can take weeks to germinate into a plant. Many of the acorns that fall to the ground get eaten before they get a chance to sprout.
- If an acorn manages to grow into a sapling, it can take 20 years before it can produce acorns of its own.
- When an acorn does survive to grow into a tree, it can live hundreds of years and grow 100 feet tall.
- Oak trees can be deciduous or evergreen. Deciduous Oak leaves look like this:
- Oak trees are marcescent. That means that their leaves don't fall off in autumn. In the winter, you can see brown papery leaves still clinging to branches.
- This photo from a tree in Brightwood Park shows what Oak tree bark looks like on a very old tree.
- Oak trees can live hundreds of years.
- Oak trees are very important for the earth's biodiversity and ecology as they support thousands of different species that rely on them for food, habitat and shelter. From fungi (mushrooms) to insects to birds to animals, oak trees are important for their survival.



There are about 500 different species of Oak trees world-wide, but 19 species are native to New Jersey.

Because Oak trees provide food and habitat for so, so many species, they are a vital part of a healthy New Jersey ecosystem. For biodiversity and for all of us, Oaks really are “mighty.”

⁴ Check out the NY Botanical garden website for more information: <https://libanswers.nybg.org/faq/222824>

Earth Day

The earth's future is in our hands.

April 22 is a day to celebrate the Earth and to recognize that the environment needs protection. People in 192 nations celebrate this day as a time to focus on the health of our planet.

Here are some things that you can do for Earth Day and for every day:



1. Take a walk in the woods and experience nature.
2. Hold a scavenger hunt in Brightwood Park. Remember to leave only footprints and take only photographs. See if you can find an oak leaf, acorn, pine cone, woodpecker, Canadian goose, duck, chipmunk, moss, mushroom, woodpecker hole in a tree.
3. Make a bee and butterfly garden. Plant milkweed, black eyed Susans, coneflowers, and other plants native to New Jersey.
4. Plant an acorn.
5. Pick up litter.
6. Make a bird feeder and hang it in your yard.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P9BFnTQR-L8>
7. Learn how to reduce waste in your house.
8. Reuse and repurpose things in your house rather than throwing them out.
9. Recycle whatever can be recycled.
10. Turn off lights when you leave a room.
11. Unplug electrical items not being used.
12. Remember that on May 4, there will be a new bag law in effect in NJ for stores.
Don't forget to bring reusable bags when shopping!

BRIGHTWOOD PARK NATURE WORD SEARCH



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
Divers
Quack
Nature

Bufflehead
Wood
Dabblers
Environment
Feathers

Merganser
Wigeon
Biodiversity
Trees
Crest

Mallard
Acorn
Ducklings
Milkweed
Iridescent

Duck
Earth
Oak
Butterflies
Spring

Springtime Reading List:

