

TRAILBLAZER

Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council

Supporting Oregon Ridge Nature Center since 1982

Winter 2022

In This Issue:

- 2 — Signs of the Season – Red Foxes in Winter
- 3 — Donating to ORNC Just Got Easier!
- 4 — The Exciting World of Foraging
- 5 — Don't Overlook Lichens!
- 6 — Invasive Plants – The Aliens Among Us
- 8 — Birds of a Different Feather
- 10 — Fun Facts – Did You Know?
- 12 — Kids' Corner – Wind Chimes
- 14 — ORNC Honey Harvest 2021
- 15 — ORNC Speaker Series

Signs of the Season - Red Foxes in Winter

By Jessica Jeannetta, Director/Naturalist



In the dead of winter, when much of nature appears to be quiet and asleep, you may come across the red fox (*Vulpes vulpes*) who stays active all winter long. You may wonder, how do they manage to survive in the winter cold? The answer lies in the fox's unique adaptations like growing thicker fur, storing extra fat, and decreasing activity levels.

Growing a longer, thicker coat that covers their foot pads helps to provide insulation from cold temperatures and provides traction on slippery surfaces. Like a dog's paws, a fox's paws are kept at a lower body temperature than the rest of their body through a countercurrent heat exchange — the blood flowing back from their paws is heated by the blood that is flowing up their legs. This combined with smaller appendages that decrease their body surface

area exposed to the cold helps to minimize heat loss and keeps the fox's core warmer.

Often red foxes are portrayed curled up in their dens; however, this is far from true. Instead they prefer to curl up into a ball in an open field to sleep using their thick bushy tail as a blanket and added fat stores to keep them warm.

The red fox is a stealthy hunter. They have a keen sense of hearing and eyesight that helps them to find prey even under the snow. They are omnivores that hunt and forage on fruits, seeds, worms, insects, and small mammals... varying their diet by season. In winter, they primarily feed on mice, voles, squirrels, and rabbits. A fox can eat about one pound of meat at each feed and they will cache away excess for later use when food sources are scarce.

During the winter the red fox is less active compared to warmer seasons. They are usually described as crepuscular; most active at dusk and dawn. Between January and March activity levels increase to accommodate mating. During this time they may be seen during the day. The red fox will pair each winter. After mating the female retreats to or makes a den while the male focuses on hunting for both him and his mate. They will remain as a pair through birth and rearing of their 4-6 kits born a short 45-55 days later.

The red fox can be quite elusive and you are more likely to find signs of a fox than actually spot one. They tend to be solitary animals

unlike other canine cousins: wolf, coyote, or dog. They leave a musky, skunk-like scent around, marking their territory for other foxes and communicating their availability to mate. You may also find their tracks. They are similar in shape to a dog but smaller and they walk in a single file line.

So now that you know just how the red fox gets by in wintertime, be sure to keep an eye (and a nose) out for signs of our elusive, active winter friend!

Donating to Oregon Ridge Nature Center Just Got Easier!

By Cole Snyder, Fundraiser Chair

The Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council has created a QR code! In addition to collecting donations through the ORNC website, cash direct when visiting the center, or cost of nature center programs, the QR code makes it more accessible for park enthusiasts to donate. Improving access to make donations allows more people to support the trails and exhibits in the nature center that we all love.

To use the QR code just hold your phone camera up to it. Without taking a photo, a link will appear taking you to a website where you can donate direct to the nature center. The QR code will appear in the newsletter, on signs around the park, on the website, and in more locations.

The council is hoping that the QR code will be a benefit to the community and the park. Thank you for your continual support of the Oregon Ridge Nature Center.

Scan the QR Code below
to make a donation to
Oregon Ridge Nature Center



Thank you!

The Exciting World of Foraging

By Judy Breitenbach, Maryland Master Naturalist

As winter fades into early spring new life surfaces from the earth offering an invitation for curious minds to investigate the nutritional value of eating wild plants. The gathering of edible plants for food, known as foraging, is customary for hunters and campers. However, there is growing interest in this wilderness activity spurred by the farm-to-table movement and buying food from local farms.



With over 30,000 edible plants in the world, this hobby could easily become overwhelming, but with some practice and knowledge, getting outside exploring the plants around us can be a fun experience for the whole family! The first thing you may want to do is get a field guide and do some online research on edible plants. There are also educational programs available that teach foraging basics. Attending classes from a reputable source will help you learn best foraging practices.



Learn to identify easy plants like dandelion, nettle, and lamb's quarters initially and avoid those with poisonous lookalikes. Be sure to know what part of the plant is edible, the season they are harvestable, and the habitat they grow in. Keeping a journal can be helpful to track your findings from year to year.



Foraging can be done just about anywhere. When you become knowledgeable enough to venture out on your own, remember that there are local, state, and federal laws that prohibit foraging in certain designated spaces including at Oregon Ridge. This is to protect the land from over usage and maintain the natural environment for all to enjoy.

Don't Overlook Lichens!

By Bob Cooke, Maryland Master Naturalist



Lichens are, both literally and figuratively, low-profile life forms. Attached to bark, stone and many other surfaces, they may seem to be just some insignificant discoloration. You could easily overlook them. But if you take a moment to look more closely, a whole, beautiful Lilliputian world opens up before your eyes.

Neither plant nor animal, lichens are actually two organisms from other kingdoms living together symbiotically. The dominant one is a fungus, which relies on captive green or blue-green algae to photosynthesize the nutrients it needs. In return, it enables its algae to survive in diverse habitats, from desert to tundra.



You can easily learn to recognize the three major types of lichens:

Crustose lichens are the lowliest — crust-like and stuck tight to the substrate — but also some of the most colorful species.

Foliose lichens rise more above the surface, forming leaf-like structures that have both bottom and top surfaces.

Fruticose lichens are structured as an array of stems, hairs, branches or cups. They are sometimes mistaken for mosses.



If you're out walking, look for patches of lichens on the trunks and branches of trees and shrubs, stones and rock outcroppings, weathered wood and other surfaces. Lichens display a wide range of colors, from intense oranges and yellows to subtle shades of green and grey. And if you have a loupe or other kind of magnifier, you can use it to discover intricate patterns and fascinating details.

Become mindful of lichens and they'll add a whole new and rewarding dimension to your appreciation of the natural world around you.

Invasive Plants - The Aliens Among Us

By Elaine Kasmer, Maryland Master Naturalist and Master Gardener



Invasive plants — they might look pretty in the woods, in neighbors' yards, and at your local nursery, but what exactly are they and why should we care about them?

Invasive plants are not native plants...meaning they are not indigenous to a given region or ecosystem. Invasive plants are usually introduced by human intervention to help solve a "problem." The real problem is that their growth pattern easily takes over and undermines the ability of native plants to flourish and help maintain the natural balance of our ecosystems in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Native plant species provide food in the form of leaves, fruit, berries, and nuts. They also offer shelter, nesting sites, and overwintering

protection for wildlife. They have evolved specific relationships with their pollinators, and the animals and insects that feed upon them. In comparison, invasive plants do not provide these services. They do not have natural enemies in this region to keep their growth in control and, in fact, they may actually harm those species that feed upon them. For example, Heavenly Bamboo berries are a poison to birds seeking winter food and Butterfly Bush provides less nutritious nectar than native species.

One significant concern is that invasive plants crowd out native species by the following mechanisms. They erupt earlier in the spring and stay greener throughout the summer/fall months. This allows them to shade out

competition and monopolize use of water and nutrients from the earth. They produce copious amounts of seeds and spread extensive underground roots which results in choking out native plants' ability to reproduce and grow. They also have the ability to change the chemistry of the soil to foster their growth and diminish availability of nutrients for native flora.

At Oregon Ridge the worst invasive offenders include lesser Celandine, that perky little yellow flower with glossy leaves in spring, which give way to summer mudflats where nothing else will grow. Japanese Stilt Grass creates monocultures that shade out everything else. Garlic mustard quickly blooms and seeds from the previous years' low-lying rosettes, changing the soil beneath making it less hospitable to natives. Mile-a-Minute is a thorny annual vine that rapidly overgrows other plants. Shrub-like Japanese Knotweed quickly fills the soil with roots, sending up more sprouts that interfere with native species growth.



You might ask yourself what you can do to help lessen the growth of non-native (invasive) species. Here are a few suggestions:

- When planning your spring and summer gardens, seek input from your local nursery on which native plants they offer for sale.
- Learn more about the biology of invasive and non-invasive plants.
- Use a plant guide that highlights native plants.
- Fill your garden with 70% native plants and 0% invasive plants.
- Volunteer at ORNC to help remove invasives and plant native plants.

For more information visit the following webpages:

- Plant Invaders of Mid-Atlantic Natural Areas (<http://www.invasive.org/alien/pubs/midatlantic/maidatlantic.pdf>)
- <http://mdinvasives.org>
- <https://extension./umd.edu>



Birds of a Different Feather

By Bob Cooke, Maryland Master Naturalist



The Canada goose and the great blue heron, both more conspicuous at this time of year, have one thing in common: they prefer living near the water. But beyond that, the contrasts between them are striking...

It wouldn't seem like autumn or spring if geese didn't take to the skies in their iconic "V" formations. When we see herons flying, they are most often solitary, cruising low with head tucked back, long legs trailing and wings beating slowly.

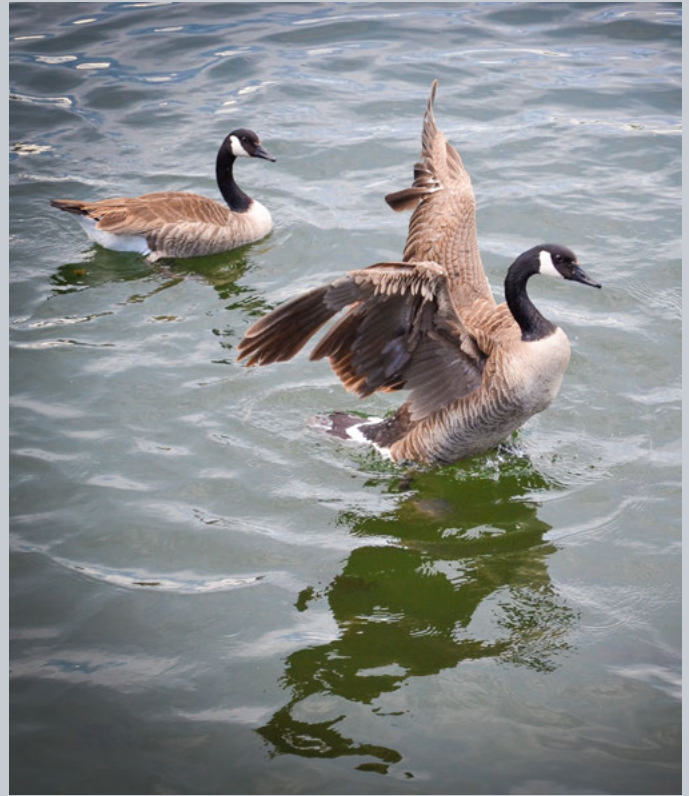
Geese like to flock together when flying and feeding, while herons spend much of their time alone, seen at the water's edge slowly stalking and swiftly striking prey.

Aside from an occasional insect or fish snack, the goose is a herbivore — dabbling in the shallows for aquatic plants, foraging in fields for grasses and grains, especially corn, and munching on suburban lawns. The heron is a carnivorous hunter, using its long sharp beak to spear fish and also grab amphibians, reptiles, small mammals, insects and even birds.

The female goose usually builds her nest on the ground near the water, using grass, leaves and feathers. Female herons like to build their nests in tall trees or shrubs, using branches, twigs and other materials, typically brought by their mates.

Most people enjoy the honking of geese on the wing. Not so much the call of the heron, which sounds harsh and unpleasant.

Historically, geese have migrated north in the spring for breeding and south in the fall, but the proliferation of lawns has enabled many of them to remain in our area year-round. Though some herons retreat from their northernmost breeding areas in winter, most are year-round residents in our region.



Fun Facts—Did You Know?

By Molly Glassman, Maryland Master Naturalist

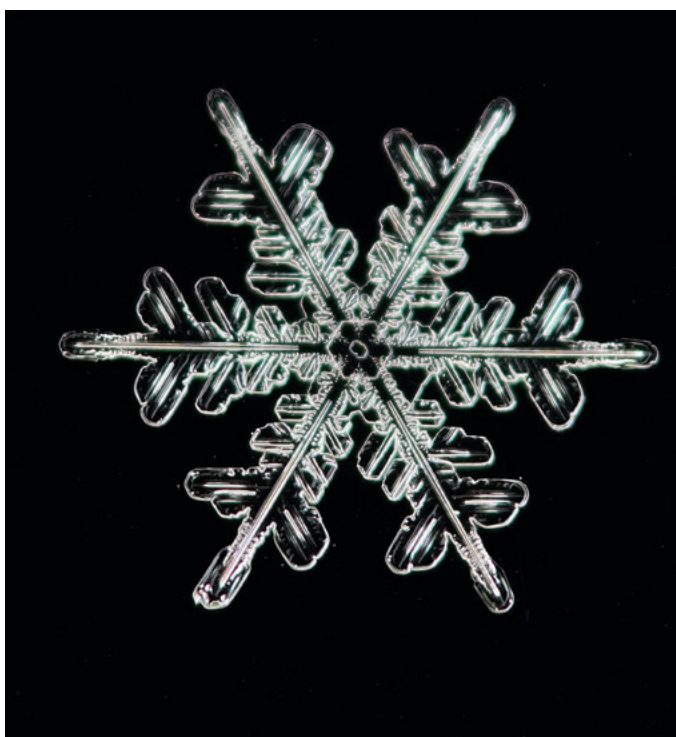
When planning for a winter hike, clouds can help predict if the weather will be promising or problematic.

The Cloud Appreciation Society lists dozens of different cloud types, but here's a quick look at four main ones.

- **Stratus** are gray blankets that stretch low across the sky, signaling light rain or snow might be coming.
- **Cumulus** are fluffy cotton puffs that rise from low to high altitude, predicting good weather.
- **Cirrus** are thin, feathery streaks of ice crystals high across the sky, forecasting a warm or cold front is on the way.
- **Cumulonimbus** are tall and heavy with dark, flat bottoms, warning of thunderstorms.



Cirrus clouds sweep above cumulus ones.

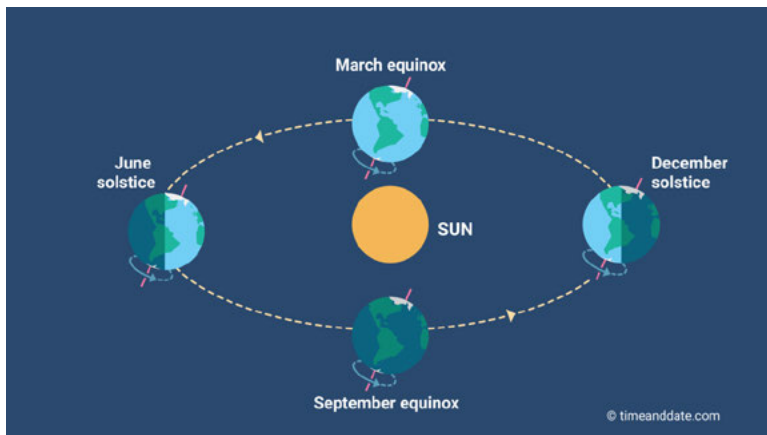


How is different winter precipitation formed?

When it rains, tiny water droplets in a cloud bump together, becoming heavy enough to fall.

If the rain travels through a layer of freezing air before reaching the ground, the drops turn to pieces of sleet or freezing rain.

When the atmosphere is very cold, water vapor in the cloud freezes into tiny ice crystals, creating snow. All snowflakes are six-sided, but the crystals vary depending on the temperature and humidity within the cloud as they are formed.



One way to lessen the dreariness of winter's short daylight hours is to look forward to the Spring Equinox. Also called the Vernal (or green) Equinox, it signals the start of spring here in the Northern Hemisphere.

This year on **March 20**, the hours of daylight and darkness will be equal because the sun shines directly on the equator. At Oregon Ridge, sunrise should be at about 7:15 a.m. and sunset is expected at 7:15 p.m.

After that, the days grow longer because the axis of the Earth tilts closer to the sun leading up to the Summer Solstice on **June 21**. It will be our longest day of the year here, with sunrise at about 5:30 a.m. and sunset at 8:30 p.m. Now THAT's something to look forward to!



The full moon has always inspired humans. This year, **January 17** brings the Wolf Moon, known in cultures from Gaelic to Japanese and many Native American tribes. Why? It's when the wolves' breeding season begins and the noise of howling increases.

February 16 will be the Full Snow Moon, and in China and other Asian countries it's a highlight of Lunar New Year festivities.

The Full Worm Moon comes

March 18. Native Americans in the South welcomed the emergence of earthworms as the ground warmed.

Because spring flowers are blooming in the Northern Hemisphere, **April 16** marks the Full Pink Moon. Also, the Abenaki people of New England called it the Sugar Maker Moon because they would be tapping maple trees for syrup.

Kids' Corner

Wind Chimes

By Molly Glassman, Maryland Master Naturalist

Late winter and early spring can bring windy days that warn of changing weather. Wind chimes have always been a way to forecast if a storm is coming. On a clear day, the sun's rays heat up the air. That causes the air near the ground to rise, and cooler air rushes in to take its place. Those differences in air pressure cause wind. Wind may be invisible, but when it makes wind chimes move, you can predict that the weather is about to change. Here is a way to make wind chimes, adapted from several sources.



Materials:

- 1 canning jar screw-on lid – wide mouth is best
- 5 aluminum can lids
- Hammer and nail (if needed)
- String, twine or crafting thread – braided fly-fishing line withstands weather the best
- Pinecones, acorn caps, seed pods, bark or other items from nature



Directions:

1. Take a nature hike to hunt for objects on the ground. Small pinecones, acorn caps, seed pods or pieces of bark all work well.
2. Cut three pieces of string about 12 inches long. Tie each of them to the canning jar screw-on lid, evenly spaced. Take the loose ends and tie them together in a strong knot. This will be how you hang the wind chimes in a tree or on a porch.



3.

Cut five more pieces of string about 12 inches long. Now it's time to tie those strings to the can lids.

Handle carefully – the edges can be sharp!

4.

If they are lids with a lift-off tab, just bend the tab back and attach the string. If they are solid, ask an adult's help to use a nail and hammer and punch a hole.



5.

Tie the other end of those five strings to the screw-on lid, spacing them evenly apart.

6.

Cut three or five pieces of string about 10 inches long. Tie one end to a nature object and the other end to the screw-on lid.

7.

Evenly space the three or five nature objects on the screw-on lid between the hanging can lids. These are for decoration, and the strings are shorter so they won't interfere with the lids chiming together.



8.

Hang your chimes from a hook or a tree branch
and ... **enjoy !**

ORNC Honey Harvest 2021

By Nancy Berger, Honey Harvest Chair



This year's Honey Harvest was another great success with over 650 visitors! The star of Honey Harvest was Jennifer Hinkel, designated "Queen" of the American Beekeeping Federation for this year. Jennifer travels throughout the United States going to large and small festivals sharing her extensive knowledge.

A big thank you to our demonstrators. Bees by the Bay had a grand display of honey and all kinds of honey products. Rachel Maiga and her daughter made little girls even more beautiful with their hair bows. Sandy from Mission of Hope had lovely baskets from Kenya. Simply Whimsical and Grandma Lisa's Garden were delightful. Steve Disantostefano demonstrated how a piece of wood could be transformed into a beautiful walking stick. We all enjoyed mead from Charm City Meadworks.

I also want to THANK Jessica Jeannetta for overseeing every detail of the event. Betsy Kadow was second in charge. Her education stations were well enjoyed by both young and old. Pam Ward supervised the crafts and pumpkin painting. Ann and Noot Canoles kept track of the accounting issues. Kathy Kadow took care of the nuts and bolts and made sure advanced registration went smoothly for attendees. Bernie Kadow's bee hives were a crucial addition to the success of the event. He volunteers his time and hives to the center and hosts a great education experience for all. Bernie, along with the Honey Queen, led the hive demonstrations for the event.

Once again, a very successful program produced by ORNC!

Newsletter Committee Members: Judy Breitenbach, Ralph Brown, Pat Clagett, Bob Cooke, Molly Glassman, Elaine Kasmer, and Eszter Spi
Contributors to this issue: Nancy Berger, Karen Jackson, Jessica Jeannetta, Kathy Kadow, and Jeanne Pinto, and Cole Snyder

ORNC Speaker Series

Jeanne Pinto, Coordinator

Advanced registration required: <https://oregonridgenaturecenter.wildapricot.org>

How to Act on Climate Without Leaving Home: Transition to a Plant-Based Diet and Put a Lid on Food Waste

Dr. Sara Via, Professor & Climate Extension Specialist
March 21st, 2022 - 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
via ZOOM

Moving toward a plant-based diet and reducing residential food waste are two of the most effective climate actions an individual can take. The average American diet is not only a major source of climate-changing emissions, it is also one of the biggest causes of preventable disease. Dr. Sara Via will speak to dietary changes one can make which are healthier and more climate friendly. She will also address food waste and its negative effect on the land, energy, and resources used to grow that food as well as methane production from landfill waste.

Dr. Sara Via is a biologist and speaker on climate change and its impact on ecosystems, biodiversity, suburban landscapes, gardens, health, and agriculture. Before coming to the University of Maryland in 1997, Sara held faculty positions at the University of Iowa and Cornell University where she did research and teaching in genetics and ecology. She began her work on climate change through University of Maryland Extension in 2015. Videos of her Climate and Sustainability webinars and other climate-related resources can be found on her website at www.climatecorner.org.

Lawn Alternatives, A Mid-Atlantic Experience

Sara Yosua, Maryland Master Gardener and Maryland Master Naturalist
April 25th, 2022 - 7 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.
via ZOOM

Lawn Alternatives, A Mid-Atlantic Experience presentation will address the reasons for replacing turf grass lawns, strategies for reducing the negative impact of lawn maintenance, and alternatives for areas where turf grass has been removed. As techniques for replacing mowed areas are discussed, examples are presented of strategies that have been used to reduce about 50% of those areas.

Sara Yosua became a University of Maryland Baltimore County Master Gardener in 2014 after retiring from a career in computer networking. She devotes her time and energy to outreach programs that explain the importance of healthy, sustainable, functioning ecosystems on our properties. Programs she has designed to educate the public include talks on pollinators, monarch butterflies, native bees, bee nest houses, and alternatives to turf grass lawns. As a University of Maryland Master Naturalist with Oregon Ridge Nature Center since 2015, Sara has been instrumental in many projects to bring awareness of native bees to our youth, including constructing bee habitat displays, building bee nest structures, and setting up pollinator gardens.

The Newsletter Committee is always looking for additional members to join the team and individuals interested in contributing an article related to ORNC's mission and goals. If interested, please contact us at info@oregonridgenaturecenter.org.

♦The newsletter committee reserves the right to edit all submissions.♦



Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council
13555 Beaver Dam Road
Cockeysville, MD 21030
www.OregonRidgeNatureCenter.org

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Timonium, MD
Permit 296



DEPARTMENT OF
RECREATION AND PARKS

Renew Now and Sign up a Friend, too!

Many branches make a strong tree. Many members make a strong Council. Use this membership form to renew and give a copy to a friend. You can also join or renew online. Please visit:

<http://OregonRidgeNatureCenter.org/JoinDonate.html>

Name _____ Phone _____

Address _____ City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Email _____

☐ \$15 Individual/Senior ☐ \$30 Family ☐ \$75 Supporting ☐ \$250 Sustaining ☐ \$500 Lifetime

☐ Extra Donation \$ _____

I would like to receive communications from Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council by ☐ Email only

☐ Paper copy via US Mail as well

Make checks payable to:

ORNC Council, Inc., 13555 Beaver Dam Road, Cockeysville, MD 21030

Stay in touch!

info@oregonridgenaturecenter.org; (410-887-1815)

