

TRAILBLAZER

Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council

Supporting Oregon Ridge Nature Center since 1982

Winter 2025

In This Issue:

- 2 – President's Column
- 3 – Scholarship Applications
- 4 – Winter Birds at Oregon Ridge
- 6 – Gas Powered Leaf Blowers
- 7 – Natural Science Book Club
- 8 – Programs Calendar
- 11 – Tenant House: Living History
- 12 – Spring Ephemerals
- 14 – Maple Sugaring Season
- 15 – Crafting from Nature

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President's Column

Winnie Wong Tan, Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council President



As we head closer to the end of the year, I am reflecting on all the activities and experiences of this past year and the many years before. I am filled with hope and gratitude. It's been a year of changes and the need to evolve as a Council. If you are not familiar or sure why we are called the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council (ORNCC for short), we are part of an umbrella of Recreation and Nature Councils under the Board of Recreation and Parks.

Each Council is a community non-profit organization formed decades ago to support their local park or recreation area. At Oregon Ridge, ORNCC was formed 41 years ago as an all-volunteer board to support programming and development at the Nature Center and Park. We are akin to a "Friends of..." organization or foundation.

This past year, all Councils have been formally working on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Event Agreements with the Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks (BCRP), as BCRP implements their "Reimagine Recreation and Parks" plan. From their website: "As the Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks celebrates its 75th anniversary, we are taking steps to modernize the Department with more transparent, sustainable and equitable processes and procedures through Reimagine Recreation and Parks, a long-term, community-driven roadmap based on national best practices."

For over four decades, ORNCC has actively engaged with Nature Center staff in planning, financially supporting and implementing all kinds of projects to engage and enhance visitor experiences. The funds generated from camps, events, programs and donations have always been budgeted for Oregon Ridge programming and additional projects. We have bought supplies for programs/events, bought uniform shirts for staff/volunteers, improved trails, added gardens, expanded the community garden, created an online program registration system, paid for animal care needs, added exhibits, renovated the library into a classroom, bought a Gator for staff and volunteer use, gave funding for extra staffing and supported staff professional development. With the changes that come with the "Reimagine", I think it is great that the County is now taking more fiscal responsibility of their staff and site needs. But it also caught the Council off-guard early in the year when processes changed

with very little advance notice: pavilion rentals and programming registration and fees were taken over by BCRP. As the organization that has taken a major role in assisting the Oregon Ridge staff and the park, there were frustrations as we changes were implemented while MOUs were still in discussion. It's been about nine months of MOU discussions and drafts and we are closer now to a document that can be agreed upon that reflects both missions and purposes. This effort has taken a lot of collaboration with the other Nature Councils, such as Lake Roland, Cromwell Valley and Marshy Point, in order to redraft the MOU to incorporate the missions of the Nature Councils. ORNCC plans to continue being a big supporter for the Nature Center and Park, for many decades to come. As we transition from our old funding sources, we hope to develop new events and programs and also look into a new name for our organization – "Friends of Oregon Ridge". We will share more information as we go!

John Maxwell said, "Change is inevitable. Growth is optional". I've seen lots of changes over the years at Oregon Ridge and we are choosing to grow as an organization. We are a community and we need to come together to build a future that we can all share in this space. We are not always going to agree but we can work towards a solution. I volunteer at Oregon Ridge because it's a special place with wonderful staff and volunteers. It's a place where people are welcomed to spend a day and enjoy the natural spaces they may not have. The ORNCC Board will keep on doing the work to support the Nature Center and Park and fulfill our mission: The Oregon Ridge Nature Center (Council)'s mission is to provide engaging educational and recreational opportunities in nature that will instill a sense of wonder, promote environmental stewardship and create a lasting legacy of positive choices in our own backyards, Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay.

The ORNCC Board is continuing to work on implementing the exhibit projects, the Woodland Restoration/Memorial Garden and trail improvements into the next year. I am thankful for all the volunteers and board members who give tirelessly and passionately. I am grateful for the community at large who care so deeply about what happens at our parks and who advocate for conservation and better land usage. I am looking forward to seeing what 2025 will bring but know that we must continuously work towards growth.

ORNC Council is now accepting Scholarship Applications

Molly Glassman, Maryland Master Naturalist and Scholarship Committee Co-Chair

Do you know a local high school senior whose passion for preserving and protecting nature has inspired them to pursue a college major in environment science? Are you a graduating senior in Baltimore City or Baltimore County who plans to major in nature education in college? If so, the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council scholarship committee wants to hear from you.

Over the past 30 years, the Council has awarded a total of \$274,000 in scholarships to 93 students, including \$34,500 divided among nine students in 2024. The average award is \$3,000, sent directly to the student's college to help defray expenses their freshman year.

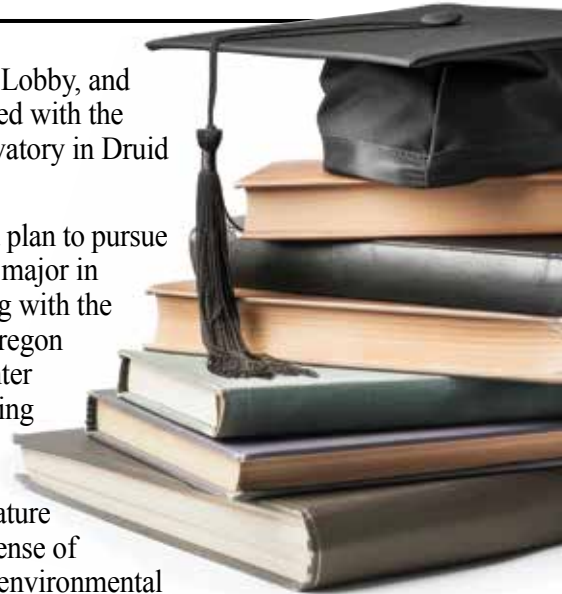
The 2025 scholarship application is now available for download www.oregonridgenaturecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/12/Scholarship-Application-25.pdf To apply, college-bound seniors from schools in Baltimore city or county need to have a GPA of 3.0 or higher. They also need to have demonstrated a high level of commitment to the environment through school and community activities.

Past scholarship recipients have volunteered as Ridge Runners at Oregon Ridge and other county parks, for example, or participated as interns at the University of Maryland's Institute of Marine and Environmental Technology or at the National Aquarium in Baltimore. One of last year's winners volunteered with the local

Citizens' Climate Lobby, and another volunteered with the Rawlings Conservatory in Druid Hill Park.

Applicants should plan to pursue an environmental major in college. in keeping with the purposes of the Oregon Ridge Nature Center "to provide engaging educational and recreational opportunities in nature that will instill a sense of wonder, promote environmental stewardship and create a lasting legacy of positive choices in our own backyards, Maryland and the Chesapeake Bay". Strong consideration will be given to applicants who plan to major in nature education or park management.

In addition to completing the application, students should send their official high school transcripts, along with two letters of recommendation and a short essay (300-500 words) about how they became interested in nature, their most rewarding environmental accomplishment so far and their future career plans.



Photos by Karen Jackson

ON THE COVER

Take a walk in our Winter Wonderland! You can find a trail map and trail updates on the homepage of our website...
www.OregonRidgeNatureCenter.org

Winter Birds at Oregon Ridge

By Karen Jackson, Maryland Master Naturalist, Trail Guide and Exhibits Co-Chair



White-throated Sparrow
"old sam peabody peabody peabody"

As a trail guide for almost 16 years, I am a frequent volunteer leading school groups visiting the Nature Center for field trips. When entering the park about an hour before the group arrives mid-morning, I usually stop before crossing the small bridge and I roll the windows down to listen for birds calling like the male White-throated Sparrow's elegant old sam peabody peabody peabody. Frequently, an Eastern Phoebe will be perched in a tree beside the spring house by the stream. One morning I recall it caught my attention as it swooped out and back catching flies. A resident Great Blue Heron also fishes near the bridge where the stream flows through two culverts emptying into a swirling pool with small creek chubs and black-lined daces tempting the large predator. Also in the same vicinity large flocks of American Robins are busy plucking earthworms from the soggy soil especially after a good rain shower.

After visitors to the park cross the stream, the Miners Trail is immediately on the right of the driveway. This wooded edge habitat hosts Downy Woodpeckers, Yellow-bellied Sapsuckers and Pileated Woodpeckers. We watched as they drilled holes in the Black Walnut trees for a sweet sip of the surging sap. White-breasted nuthatches also frequent the mixed woods area giving out a low-pitched ank, ank, ank and a rapid werwerwerwer song as they perform acrobatic moves while they climb down the trees looking for hidden seeds.

Continuing west along the trail a tall bird house marked with white "streaks" stands high over the foundation of another tenant house. Those chalky streaks are from the turkey vultures that use the rugged penthouse in the spring to lay their eggs and raise their young. Almost every time I lead a group through the meadow a kid will excitedly



Yellow-bellied Sapsucker
repeated scratchy nasal mewing



Turkey Vulture
low, guttural hiss

blurt out "Look at that treehouse!" That's when I get to tell them that the leggy house was built many years ago for the Turkey Vultures that once roosted on the second floor of the old tenant house that has succumbed to aging and vandalism. This is always a good time to tell them the story of the spring of 2018 when my husband and I photographed a Turkey Vulture sitting on her two eggs inside the house using a small silent camera mounted to an extending pole mounted on a tripod. Several hikers had reported seeing a Turkey Vulture sitting in the window of the house, so with permission we took a look with the little camera that links to a cell phone.

Following the Miner's trail to the lower meadow, Eastern Bluebirds can be spotted drinking from Oregon Branch after gorging on Oriental Bittersweet berries. My husband snapped photos of a male Bluebird as it regurgitated the berries on a very chilly afternoon hike in February by the management pond. This little pond is home to many Red-winged Blackbirds that elude hikers as they rustle low near the shallow water in the dried phragmite. I once was stalked by a raucous loud male that was protecting his mate sitting on a nest in spring.

Another good spot to find birds is at the lake that was created from the iron ore mining industry in the mid 1800's. I was on a brisk winter hike along the Orange Trail many years ago when I heard the rapid chchchch of a belted kingfisher. I found an opening in the



Eastern Bluebird
soft, low-pitched "tu-a-wee"



Belted Kingfisher
"chchchchch"

Photos by Karen Jackson (all birds) and Kathy Kadow



As we trudged through the gathering snow, we made it to the meadow where several LBJs (little brown jobs) were scampering on the icy surface eating grass seed heads. Clusters of White-throated Sparrows and Song Sparrows erupt in small groups when hikers disturb their foraging. Along the trail a pair of Eastern Towhees scratched furiously with a purpose under the branches of spicebush for insects or worms at the edge of the meadow near Oregon Branch.

Hopefully, we will get another beautiful snow that blankets the park, to create a soft, white canvas. The snow and bare trees allow hikers to easily watch these lovely creatures that make their winter home in the forest and meadows at Oregon Ridge Park. So consider on one of these cold winter day hikes and take in the sights and sounds of our feathered friends.

trees where I got a few photos of the skittish bird perched on a downed pine tree branch before it took off toward the vernal pond. The little island we trail guides call Turtle Island provides a quiet spot where the Hermit Thrushes lovely flutelike calls echo across the lake. Last February during the snowstorm we started our hike to look for birds along the short wooded corridor near the Woodland Pavilion just east of the lake where it leads to the meadow along Beaver Dam Road. As we walked by the lake, we were pleasantly surprised to spot a pair of ring-necked ducks paddling on the lake almost covered with a thin coating

of ice and snow. "Well, that's a first" I thought to myself. As we made our way down to the Miner's Trail, a male Pileated Woodpecker was first clinging to the side of a tulip tree foraging on poison ivy berries. I watched and snapped photos of him hanging upside down then twisting his long neck and sharp beak as he methodically picked the vine clean. Suddenly the sentinels of the forest showed up to alert us that a

Red-shouldered Hawk was perched nearbyby looking out over the meadow for its prey of field mice or chipmunks. Four Blue Jays mobbed overhead boldly with their loud calls to warn their feathered friends of the large predator.



Pileated Woodpecker
"wuk wuk" and powerful drumming



Red-shouldered Hawk
hoarse, screaming "kee-eeee-arr"



Sierra Club: Why are gas powered leaf blowers so bad?

Debbie Bacharach, Maryland Master Naturalist and Membership Chair

As part of its Speaker Series, on Wednesday evening, October 23, 2024, the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council hosted a representative from the Sierra Club Greater Baltimore Group to speak about the problems created by using gas-powered leaf blowers.

Marie LaPorte, the Sierra Club representative, explained that significant AIR pollution and NOISE pollution, as well as a detrimental impact on wildlife are the reasons behind the Sierra Club's efforts to limit or ban these gas blowers.

Air Pollution – According to Ms. LaPorte, a gas-powered blower with a 2-stroke engine emits almost 300 times the hydrocarbons of an F-150 Raptor pick-up truck and many times as much carbon monoxide and nitrogen oxides. The chemicals from a gas blower have been linked to a variety of serious adverse health effects such as cardiovascular disorders, cancers and asthma.

Noise Pollution – According to the Centers for Disease Control, exposure to 100 decibels for just 15 minutes per day can lead to hearing loss. The operator of a leaf blower is exposed to 100-115 decibels! Even exposure at 80-85 decibels for two hours by those nearby is enough to cause hearing damage. The unpleasant deafening sound is familiar to many of us.

Wildlife – There are also studies linking this level of noise pollution to less effective pollination services by bees and other pollinators and less successful nesting outcomes for breeding birds. Powerful gas-powered leaf blowers also physically disturb wildlife habitat.

Ms. LaPorte stated that over 200 cities, towns and counties have banned or are in the process of banning gas-powered leaf blowers, this including Washington DC, Annapolis, Baltimore City and University Park, Maryland.

Fortunately, there are environmentally friendly alternatives to care for lawns and landscapes.

Electric and battery-powered leaf blowers are available that are on par with gas-powered models and can save money over the long term.

Go old school and **use a rake.**

Leave the leaves! Shred leaves with a mower to provide a nutrient rich mulch. Or rake leaves into flower beds and leave fallen leaves in place so overwintering butterflies, moths and other beneficial insects can complete their life cycles.



Natural Science Book Club

Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council Sponsored Programs

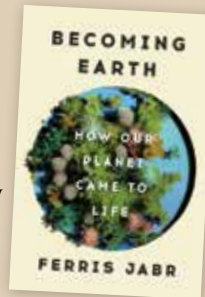
All programs require advanced registration unless otherwise noted.

Becoming Earth: How our Planet came to Life

Monday, January 27; 7 - 8 p.m.

Science writer **Ferris Jabr** reveals a radical new vision of Earth.

Becoming Earth is an exhilarating journey through the hidden workings of our planetary symphony and an invitation to reexamine our place in it. How well we play our part will determine what kind of Earth our descendants inherit for millennia to come.



The Comfort of Crows: A Backyard Year **Monday, July 21; 7 - 8 p.m.**

Margaret Renkl presents a literary devotional that follows the creatures and plants in her backyard over the course of a year. From a crow spied on New Year's Day, its resourcefulness and sense of community setting a theme for the year, to the lingering bluebirds of December, revisiting the nest box they used in spring. What develops is a portrait of joy and grief: joy in the ongoing pleasures of the natural world and grief over winters that end too soon.



Twelve Trees: The Deep Roots of Our Future **Monday, March 3; 7 - 8 p.m.**

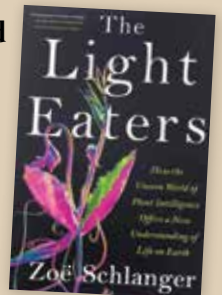
Twelve Trees by **Daniel Lewis** is a compelling global exploration of nature and survival as seen via a dozen species of trees, offering "extensive insight into the ways in which humans and trees are interconnected", revealing the challenges facing our planet and how scientists are working urgently to save the forests and our future.



The Light Eaters: How the Unseen World of Plant Intelligence Offers a New Understanding of Life on Earth **Monday, September 8; 7 - 8 p.m.**

It takes tremendous biological creativity to be a plant. Scientists have learned about their ability to communicate, recognize their kin and behave socially, hear sounds, morph their bodies to blend with surroundings, store useful memories that inform their life cycle and trick animals into behaving to their benefit.

Zoe Schlanger provides an immersion into the drama of green life and the complexity of this wild and awe-inspiring world.



The Thing with Feathers: The Surprising Lives of Birds and What They Reveal About Being Human **Monday, April 14; 7 - 8 p.m.**

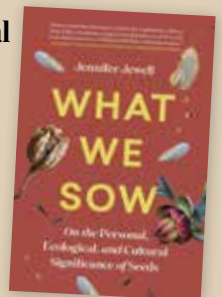
Noah Strycker provides an entertaining and profound look at the lives of birds as he illuminates their surprising world – and deep connection with humanity.

Birds are highly intelligent animals, yet their intelligence is dramatically different from ours and little is understood. As we learn more about the secrets of bird life, we unlock fascinating insights into memory, relationships, game theory and the nature of intelligence itself.



What We Sow: On the Personal, Ecological and Cultural Significance of Seeds **Monday, October 20; 7 - 8 p.m.**

Jennifer Jewell takes readers on an insightful, year-long journey exploring the outsize impact one of nature's smallest manifestations – the simple seed. She examines our skewed notions where "organic" seeds are grown and sourced, reveals how giant multinational agribusiness has refined and patented the genomes of seeds we rely on for staples and highlights the efforts of activists working to regain legal access to heirloom seeds. Readers are invited to share Jewell's personal observations as she marvels at the glory of nature.



Travels in Alaska **Monday, June 2; 7 - 8 p.m.**

John Muir ranks among America's most important and influential naturalists and nature writers. Devoted to the preservation of wilderness areas, Muir founded the Sierra Club and was active in the establishment of Yosemite National Park. *Travels in Alaska*, one of his most popular works, will delight environmentalists and nature lovers with its exuberant observations of Alaska and its inhabitants.



Details and registration at the following link:
OregonRidgeNatureCenter.WildApricot.org

FREE (donations appreciated)

*Please note: This is not an author meet and greet.
It is a social gathering to discuss the book.*

Programs

Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council Sponsored Programs

All programs require advanced registration unless otherwise noted.

ORNC Council Speaker Series – Studying Maryland’s Ice Age Peoples in Baltimore County and Beyond

Tuesday, January 21; 7 - 8:30 p.m.

Recent discoveries at a site in Reisterstown suggest that Ice Age hunter-gatherers inhabited what is now Baltimore County, crafting tools from local stone. This presentation will provide an overview of the Paleoindian Period (13,000-10,000 years ago) in Maryland based on data from the statewide Maryland Fluted Point Survey and recent excavations organized by the Maryland Historical Trust. Attendees will have the opportunity to view 13,000-year-old artifacts.

The speaker, **Zachary Singer, Ph.D.** is the State Terrestrial Archeologist at the Maryland Historical Trust. He received his BA in anthropology at University of Maryland and his MA and Ph.D. in anthropology at University of Connecticut.

Adults \$10 per person (FREE for ORNCC Members)

National Seed Swap Day Celebration

Saturday, January 25; 10 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Join us for our Annual Seed Swap Event. Plan to come with seeds (or without them) for this fun event! This event is sponsored by the ORNC Council with the generous assistance of our Baltimore County Master Gardener friends who will provide “Ask a Master Gardener” and Children’s Seed Activity Tables. Learn how to collect, prepare, store, plant and grow seeds from Master Gardeners and Master Naturalists.

Why Save and Share Seeds?

- Problems with the current supply of seeds
- Sustain biodiversity and biosecurity
- Preservation of heirloom varieties
- Promote native plant propagation
- Save money and share the love of gardening

We will have free gardening magazines, seed catalogs, books and lots of seeds for your choosing thanks to our many donors like you!

All ages FREE (donations appreciated)



Me and My Pup on the Ridge

Tuesdays, February 11 and March 11; 9:30 - 10:30 a.m.

Here’s your chance to bring your pup on a Naturalist led hike!

Friendly, leashed pups (with a waste clean-up bag) and their owners are invited to join us for a hike on the trails at Oregon Ridge.

Adults along with their pup.

\$4 per person (FREE for ORNCC Members)



Senior Stroll

Wednesdays, February 12 and 26; March 12 and 26; 9:30 - 10:30 a.m.

Join us for a walk in the woods as we explore nature’s seasonal highlights... route and difficulty level will be determined based on the needs of registered participants with options for flat meadow, paved wooded or natural surface wooded trails.

Adults \$3 per person (FREE for ORNCC Members)

Babes in Backpacks

Wednesdays, February 19 and March 19; 9:30 - 10:30 a.m.

A great opportunity for parents or caregivers to get some fresh air and exercise while enjoying nature along the trail with their little one.

Adults and children under the age of 4 (Child must be carried in a wearable carrier for the entire hike.)

\$5 per adult (FREE for ORNCC Members)

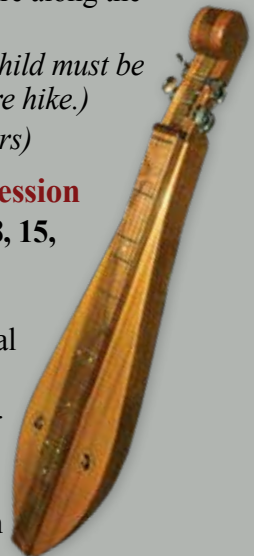
Oregon Ridge Dulcimers – Spring Session

Thursdays, April 3, 10, 17, 24; May 1, 8, 15, 22, 29; and June 5; 6:30 - 8 p.m.

An old-fashioned dulcimer meet-up and workshop. Beginners welcome, no musical experience necessary. Loaner dulcimers available on a first-come, first-serve basis.

Adults and children 16+

\$35 per person (\$25 for ORNCC Members) Price includes 10-week session



All Programs can be found at

OregonRidgeNatureCenter.WildApricot.org

Calendar

Baltimore County Department of Recreation and Parks Sponsored Programs

All programs require advanced registration unless otherwise noted.

Recurring Programs

Nurture with Nature

The third Wednesday of the Month; 11:00 - 11:30 a.m.

February 19 – Sounds of Nature

March 19 – Rain

Nature Buds

Thursdays 10 – 11 a.m.

January 16 – Winter Trees

January 23 – Foxes

January 30 – Groundhogs

February 6 – Songbirds

February 13 – Nocturnal animals

February 20 – Maple sugaring

February 27 – Antlers and horns

March 6 – Snakes

March 13 – Signs of spring

March 20 – Salamanders

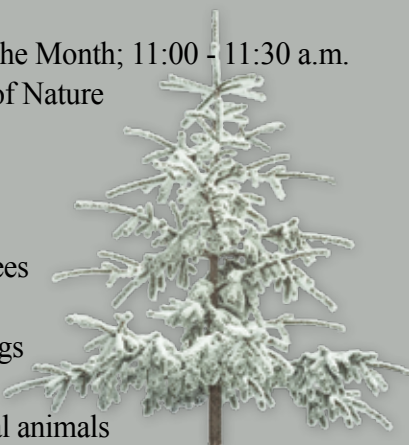
March 27 – Maryland

April 3 – Frogs

April 10 – Rabbits

April 17 – Eggs

April 24 – Hiking



Bookworm Story Time

The first Friday of the month; 11:00 - 11:45 a.m.

Morning Bird Walk

The fourth Friday of the Month; 8:00 - 9:30 a.m.

Owl Prowl

Monthly on Fridays; times vary

January 31; 6 - 7:30 p.m.

February 21; 6 - 7:30 p.m.

March 21; 7:30 - 9 p.m.

April 18; 8 - 9:30 p.m.

That's Wild!

Sundays in January; 1 - 2 p.m.

January 19 – Furbearers

January 26 – Raptors



Festivals and Special Events

Maple Sugaring

Saturday, February 15; 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.

Sunday, February 16; 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.



Astronomy Programs

Astronomy in the Park – Venus & Mars

Friday, January 17; 7 - 8:30pm

Evening Programs

Owl You Need is Love! Night Hike and Campfire

Friday, February 2; 7 - 9 p.m.

Maple Moon Hike

Saturday, February 8; 4:30 - 6 p.m.

Spring Night Hike and Campfire

Friday, March 14; 6:45 - 8:45 p.m.

Public Programs

Winter Watercolors

Saturday, January 18; 1 - 3 p.m.

Bear Hibernation

Saturday, January 25; 10 - 11 a.m.

Snowflake Safari

Saturday, February 1; 10 - 11 a.m.

World Wetlands Day

Sunday February 2; 1 - 2 p.m.

Fur and Feathers

Saturday, February 8; 10 - 11 a.m.

Make Your Own Hiking Stick

Saturday, February 22; 1 - 3 p.m.

Winter Seed Sowing

Sunday, February 23; 1 - 2:30 p.m.

Stream Searchin'

Saturday, March 1; 1 - 2 p.m.

More programs and registration link on the next page...



Program Calendar

Birds of Prey Adventure

Sunday, March 2; 1 - 2 p.m.

Wood Frogs -

Nature's Icy Quackers

Saturday, March 8; 1 - 2 p.m.

Salamander Slime Time

Saturday, March 15; 1 - 2:30 p.m.

Shamrock Scavenger Hunt

Sunday, March 16; 10 - 11 a.m.



Water – Where Does it Start at Oregon Ridge and Where Does it Go?

Saturday, March 22; 1 - 2:30 p.m.

Spring Emergents Hike

Sunday, March 23; 10 - 11 a.m.

Track - Tac - Toe

Saturday, March 29; 1 - 2 p.m.

Fight or Flight? Animal Defenses

Sunday, March 30; 1 - 2 p.m.



All BCRP sponsored programs can be found on Baltimore County's CivicRec Registration Site!

recandparks.baltimorecountymd.gov/MD/baltimore-co-md/catalog

(In the left column filter for Oregon Ridge Nature Center or select location Oregon Ridge Nature Center)

Save the Date!

Annual Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser

March 1 and 2; 8 a.m. - 12 p.m.

Celebrate the end of the Sugaring Season at the Oregon Ridge Lodge by attending the ORNC Council's Annual Pancake Breakfast Fundraiser. Enjoy a stack of hotcakes drizzled with pure maple syrup and served with grilled sausage, orange juice, milk or coffee. There will be raffles and live music, along with flower, honey, maple syrup, maple candy and nature book sales. Come out and support the ORNC Council at our biggest fundraiser of the year!



An Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council program:

"Search for the Orange-tufted Spiderhunter – My quest to see 10,000 birds"

Peter Kaestner

Tuesday evening, March 25th

On February 9, 2024 on the island of Mindanao in the Philippines, retired diplomat and Cockeysville resident Peter Kaestner became the first person in the world to spot 10,000 bird species, adding an Orange-tufted Spiderhunter to his life list. Join us to hear about his remarkable journey that has crossed decades, continents and habitats.

Details and Registration for this event coming soon.



Oregon Ridge Tenant House: Living History

Alan Penczek, Tenant House Volunteer Docent



Holidays at our 19th Century Tenant House



Decorations such as these can be made at the Oregon Ridge Nature Center as part of our Annual December Holiday Wreathmaking and Natural Ornaments program.



What Is This?

This type of household implement was common in the 19th century and became increasingly valuable as the days got colder.

Hints:

- *This is not a jug for milk or wine.*
- *Notice how the one side is flat.*
- *There is no opening at the top.*

You can find the answer on page 14!

Visit the restored Tenant House at Oregon Ridge Nature Center and learn about the site's rich mining history dating back to the 1850s!

To inquire about when the docent-staffed Tenant House will be open, contact the Oregon Ridge Nature Center Council via email at:

info@OregonRidgeNatureCenter.org

Aah Spring... Ephemerals!

Elaine Kasmer, Maryland Master Naturalist, Master Gardener and Exhibits Co-Chair



Ephemerals

are wild flowers that come up early, grow quickly, flower and set seed in the fleeting time before "canopy close" – when tree leaves enlarge and darken the sky above. These springtime treasures have multiple fascinating strategies – from skunk cabbage that can create its own heat and poke through the snow, to using ingenious ways to attract pollinators and to spread their seeds.

Myrmecochory... It's a Mouthful...

Many of these early bloomers employ ants to spread their seeds. They produce a fleshy appendage to the seed called an elaiosome, which attracts ants to carry off their seed as they might a dead caterpillar. The seeds are too large for wind dispersal, because they need more energy reserves to push through heavy leaf litter and compete with tree roots. After eating the elaiosome, ants discard the seeds – right into the ants' compost pile! The seeds get some fertilizer and the ant tunnels provide room for the roots to spread. Ant dispersed seeds must never dry out, so they often are released quickly from their pods, and can be gone within a half hour. They may be carried up to 30 feet but more usually 1-3 feet.



Blood Root (*Sanguinaria canadensis*) ...Nature's Make-up

Blood Root plants emerge with quilted notched leaves wrapped tightly around the flowering stem like a down coat. The snow white multi-petaled flowers open as the leaves unfold, but only last a few days and in a rainstorm – merely hours! The red knobby rhizome contains a crimson sap that native Americans used for face paint, but be careful; it is bitter and poisonous so animals leave them alone.



Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginiana*) ...the Candy Counter

Spring beauties have another strategy to avoid animals eating their chestnut-flavored corms. They may germinate just under the soil, but then quickly grow contractile roots that pull the corms deeper into the soil. These tiny wildflowers may mature at 12" deep – too deep to dig! The deep pink candy-stripes on their multiple blossoms are nectar guides that lead their flying pollinators to their rewards. In rainy years, the flowers may be white – to attract slugs instead.



Bellwort (*Uvularia perfoliata*)
...Cough drop

Bellworts have hanging yellow bell-shaped flowers under their single stem of oblong light green leaves. The Latin name reflects the old belief that the plants were good at treating throat disease, because the drooping flowers resembled the uvula at the back of the throat. The specific name describes the single stem which appears to pierce the wrap-around leaves.



Mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*)
...No help from bunnies!

Deeply lobed Mayapple leaves have two forms, a single umbrella and a paired set that may reach one-foot across in the mature form. At the crotch of the double stem hangs a round white flower that develops into a single lemonlike fruit. All parts of the plant are poisonous except the mature fruit, which is at just the right height for... a box turtle! The turtles eat them happily and distribute their seeds. Mayapples also spread by stiff, forking rhizomes into large colonies.



Virginia Bluebells (*Mertensia virginica*)
...Nothing but blue skies!

A colony of cloudless blue above soft green foliage, they emerge as dark purple buds with the flowers already curled inside. Buds are pink, slowly changing to clear blue to pale blue, although some remain pink or rarely white. They are a favorite of new queen bumblebees building their nests. They open sequentially over several weeks, growing a foot and a half tall, but as soon as the flowers fade, the plant yellows and disappears. Underground is a grizzled tuber, sleeping all summer and only putting out roots in fall.

Lastly!

Never try to dig or collect these plants or their seeds. They have specialized relationships with their pollinators and dispersers, and often with soil organisms as well. Seeds with elaiosomes can never dry; many require specific periods of cold and warmth. Many are slow to reproduce and deer predation reduces and threatens their numbers. Enjoy them with your camera and your guidebook! There are some specialized plant nurseries that are able to propagate responsibly, and some seed sources which can grow, collect and store seeds under their required conditions.

Native Plant Nurseries in our area...

Herring Run Nursery

6131 Hillen Road, Baltimore, MD 21239

<https://herringrunnursery.bluewaterbaltimore.org>

Kollar Nursery

5200 West Heaps Road, Pylesville, MD 21132

www.kollarnursery.com

Lauren's Garden Service

13554 Triadelphia Road, Ellicott City, MD 21042

www.laurensgardenservice.com

It's Maple Sugaring Season!

As the harsh chill of winter begins to fade and the first signs of spring emerge, we eagerly anticipate a sweet seasonal tradition: Maple Sugaring. This age-old practice provides a delightful opportunity for families and friends to gather and celebrate the sugar-making process.

Maple Sugaring refers to the process of collecting sap from sugar maple trees and transforming it into maple syrup. While Maryland may not be the first place that comes to mind when you think of maple syrup production, our state is home to its share of sugar maple trees and from February thru mid-March the below freezing nights followed by warm days is ideal for Maple Sugaring. This fluctuation in temperature is crucial, as it is what causes the sap to flow. To tap a tree, sugar makers drill a small hole into the trunk and insert a spile, (a metal or plastic spout), allowing the sap to flow into buckets or tubing.

Once collected, sap is transported to a sugar house, where it is boiled to evaporate the water content. Surprisingly, it takes about 40 gallons of sap to produce just one gallon of pure maple syrup! This process not only captivates the senses with the aroma of boiling sap but also showcases the craftsmanship that goes into producing high-quality syrup.

Embracing the tradition of Maple Sugaring also allows individuals to connect with nature and appreciate the environment. It serves as a reminder of the importance of sustainable practices, as the trees can be tapped year after year without harm if done responsibly. Maple Sugaring also encourages a sense of stewardship towards forests.

So, if you're looking for a sweet and educational outing, consider exploring Maple Sugaring in Maryland? You'll leave with a newfound appreciation for this age-old tradition and perhaps a few bottles of syrup. There's nothing like drizzling fresh maple syrup over pancakes, especially when you know the story behind every drop!

***A Baltimore County Recreation and Parks Program
Maple Sugaring at Oregon Ridge
February 15 and 16; 10 a.m. - 4 p.m.***

Registration and details at the following link...

<https://tinyurl.com/ORNCMapleSugaring> *(In the left column select location Oregon Ridge Nature Center)*

The ORNC Council will be there as a vendor selling Syrup, Candy, Cotton Candy, Books, Honey and Hot Beverages. Some council members will also volunteer to assist BCRP.

Oregon Ridge Tenant House: Living History

(continued from page 11)

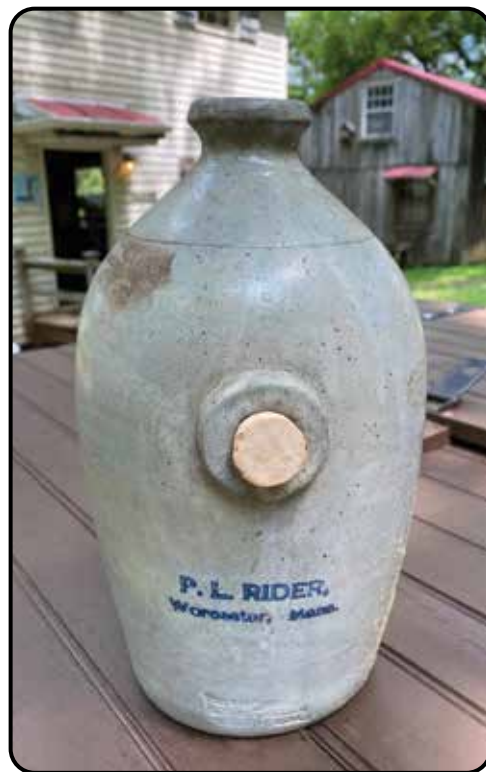
Answer: This is a ceramic foot warmer.

A foot warmer is the 19th century equivalent of a hot water bottle. You would place your feet on the warmer, and then place a blanket over your feet. The warmer could also be placed under bed covers to help you keep warm during the night. While the warmer in the Tenant House would have held hot water, some could hold charcoal.

"You'd like a hot water bottle, wouldn't you my sweets?" Robert Donat says to Madeleine Carroll in Alfred Hitchcock's 1935 film "The 39 Steps."



Ceramic "hot water bottles," like the one in the film and in the Tenant House, remained in use before being replaced by rubber bottles.



Crafting from Nature

Brian Nelson, ORNC Council Executive Board, Director-at-Large

Crafting a serving tray from a tree cookie* is a fun and rewarding project that blends rustic charm with functionality. Start by selecting a tree cookie that's sturdy, level and free of major cracks. Hardwoods are ideal for this, as they're both durable and visually stunning. For a DIY project purchase a cookie from a mill where it has already been dried and planed on both sides.

Once you've got your tree cookie ready, it's time to sand it down. Work your way up through 120, 180, 220 grit sandpapers. Sanding can be done by hand or if you have one, a power sander will save you time. Don't skip grits and don't forget the edges, I recommend removing the bark for most projects, this can be done with a chisel and a wire brush. To keep the bark on requires extra steps.

To protect your work and bring out the natural beauty of the wood, apply a finish. I recommend a food safe finish such as Odie's Oil or a butcher block finish. Either way, follow the drying instructions carefully for the best results. Using stains is common, however I prefer not to from both a food safe standpoint and not using a stain allows the natural beauty of the wood to show through.

Using a tree cookie to create a serving tray isn't just about making something functional – it's about crafting a piece of art. These trays are perfect for serving guests, decorating your home, or even giving as a thoughtful, handmade gift. Plus, there's something deeply satisfying about taking raw, natural materials and turning them into something beautiful and useful.

So, grab your tools, embrace the process, and enjoy the end result – a stunning, handcrafted serving tray that's as unique as the tree it came from.

Materials you'll Need:

- A tree cookie
(about 1-2 inches thick and large enough for a tray)
- Sandpaper
- Wood finish
- Soft cloth or paintbrush for applying finish.

*A "tree cookie" is a cross-section of a tree trunk. Tree cookies are typically about 1/4 to 1/2 inch thick.



Photos by Brian Nelson



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

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Make checks payable to: ORNC Council, Inc., 13555 Beaver Dam Road, Cockeysville, MD 21030

You can also join, renew or donate online at

www.oregonridgenaturecenter.org/join-donate-volunteer/

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