

Nature Niche

Nature By The Yard – Fostering a Natural Sense of Wonder

Spring, 2010

Volume 7, Issue 1
Calendar of Events
Please call the hosting organization for reservation information.

Fri. Mar. 12. 4:45-5:45pm. **Nature Inside Out**-Using fiction picture books as a springboard for nature discovery. PAEE Conference. Bluebell, Pa. Visit the conference website for information. <http://pae.net>

Fri. Mar. 19 10-11am **Toddler Walk**. Kids ages 18-36 months with adult. Buttinger Nature Center. Pennington, NJ (609) 737-7592. Fee.

Sun. Mar. 28 3:30-5pm **Animals From Eggs/Natural Egg Dyeing**. Families. Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve, New Hope, Pa. 215.862.2924. Fee.

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Nature Fun in the Sun

As the snow lightly covers my yard yet again, I'm thinking of... summer camp! Sounds strange, but early spring is when most parents have to start planning their kids' summer. It's a fact of life that many of us work full or part time and our children need activity, structure and supervision when they're not in school. So parents flock to camp expos, talk to other parents about what *their* kids are doing and interrogate *our* kids to see what kind of camp they want to attend. **I** went to Moss Day Camp when I was a kid. Honestly, I don't

remember if it was full day or half, if we went swimming or not, or for how long I went. What I do remember is exploring every day and getting dirty. I loved it!

In our quest to schedule our kids to the max, many of us lose sight of what kids not only like to do, but what they need to do as well.

Kids need a play date with nature. I'm talking about fun, challenging, unadulterated discovery of themselves and what surrounds them. So, here are Pam's picks for summer nature camps.

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Harbinger of Spring?

Early each spring, someone invariably informs me spring must be here because the robins are back. Though I too see the robins as a sign of spring, it is a myth that they migrate. They are actually here all winter long, but move from open areas to the woodlands where food and shelter are more readily available.

In the fall, after feasting on as many insects and seeds as possible, robins retreat to the forests in large flocks, searching for berries. It is there that they will remain through the winter, feeding on

what ever fruits they can find.

I once witnessed a huge flock of robins strip an ornamental cherry tree of nearly all its fruits.

In the early spring, when worms and grubs are easily removed from the saturated soil, the robins return to our lawns and gorge themselves on the much needed fat and protein.

I love to watch them run with their skinny legs flitting so fast, they look blurred. Then, suddenly they stop, cock their head, appear to listen and jump, beak down. It looks to me like

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Mon. Mar. 29 3:30-4:30pm. **Animals From Eggs.** Kids 5-adult. Princeton Public Library. 609.924.9529. Free.

Sat. Apr. 17 7-8:30pm. **Moonlight Walk Families.** Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve. New Hope, Pa. 215.862.2924. Fee

Tues. Apr. 20 10-11am **Toddler Walk.** Kids ages 18-36 months with adult. Buttinger Nature Center. Pennington, NJ (609) 737-7592. Fee.

Mon. May 17 10-11am **Toddler Walk.** Kids ages 18-36 months with adult. Buttinger Nature Center. Pennington, NJ (609) 737-7592. Fee.

A fun book for toddlers and preschoolers is "Round Robin" by Jack Kent.

If you just can't wait for spring to really show itself, try cutting a few branches from Flowering Dogwood, Forsythia or Cherry, put them in a vase of water and bring them inside. In just a couple of weeks, you'll have blooms and leaves decorating you home and centering your mind!

We're on the Web

<http://naturebytheyard.com>

Camp (continued)

Full disclosure, I'm running two camps myself that I'm shamelessly marketing as well, but I've listed others that I have had direct experience with and I know are fantastic.

Nature By The Yard, Nature In Your Neighborhood Camp for 2-4 graders. July 13-16. 1-3pm Edgewood Elementary School **Nature in Detail** 9-12 year olds, August 16-20. 9-12 noon at Five Mile Woods. Contact me for more information. (609) 610-6292

Fernbrook Farms

<www.fernbrookeducation.org> Kids 6-12 and 12-14. All summer.

Chesterfield, NJ (609) 298-4028 **Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association**

<www.thewatershed.org> All summer. Kids entering first-ninth grade. (609) 737-7592

Let your kids have fun getting dirty this summer. They'll learn about themselves as well as the world that they're part of.

If you don't live in the NJ/ PA. area, check with your local Audubon Society, nature center or Chamber of Commerce for nature camps near you. Or, there's always the camp expos.

Robins (continued)

they are channeling the worms. Since they almost always come up with a fat juicy one, I'm inclined to think I'm right.

American robins, like bluebirds are in the thrush family. Other members of this group that can be found around here, include wood thrush, hermit thrush, Swainson's thrush and several others. Member of the thrush family have a speckled breast for part of their life. As juveniles, bluebirds and robins are speckled, but lose those

markings as adults. The other thrushes I mentioned are speckled as adults, but not as juveniles.

So, American robins may not be the early migrators dragging the promise of warmer weather behind them, but you can still think of them as those harbingers of spring. They remain a symbol of hope for me, knowing the ground is thawed enough to pull a fat worm out of the mud.

About Our Organization...

Nature By The Yard was started in January, 2001. We offer fun, hands-on nature education programs for schools, scouts, camps, libraries, birthday parties, garden clubs, nature centers, wildflower preserves and other organized groups. We also provide

workshops for teachers on using the schoolyard as a classroom tool as well as offer advice and expertise on designing school yard habitats. For details on our services, visit <http://naturebytheyard.com> or call Pam at (609) 610-6292.