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Nature News



THE JEROME "BUDDIE" FORD NATURE CENTER'S
SEASONAL NEWSLETTER



Nature's Little Oddities

Have you ever wondered about what lives beneath the decaying logs or leaf litter of Dora Kelley Nature Park? There is a hidden world of odd and little known creatures that inhabit these places. Though seldom seen, these creatures are every bit as important to the forest as the more familiar fauna we commonly see. For they are the forest's caretakers who help recycle decaying plant and animal matter back into the soil, releasing nutrients for trees, shrubs, and plants to grow and continue the cycle of life. Let's meet a few of these little oddities...

First, we have the earwig. These nocturnal insects inhabit both the forest and the damp basements of homes that border the park. Although harmless, earwigs can exude a foul-smelling liquid with a tar-

like odor from their abdomen to discourage predators. About 2,000 species are found worldwide. They are easily recognized by their abdomen's pincer-like appendage, or "cerci," and stunted leathery forewings that cover another pair of folded wings for flying.

Earwigs are omnivores, feeding on both live and dead plants, as well as other insects. Female earwigs have a maternal instinct and will defend their eggs from predators. They also clean their eggs to protect them from fungi and assist in the hatching of their young, which emerge as ghostly-white



Gail Hampshire

A female earwig guarding her clutch of eggs

nymphs. Their name derives from the Old English word *eare*, which means "ear," and *wicga*, meaning "insect." Many myths surround the earwig. One myth suggests these insects crawl into the ears of sleeping humans to lay their eggs. This myth is untrue, but has given earwigs an undeserved bad reputation.

(Nature's Little Oddities Cont'd)

Woodlice are another of nature's oddities inhabiting Dora Kelley Nature Park. Regardless of what they are called, "pillbugs," "sow bugs" and "roly-polies" are all woodlice. They are not insects, but rather arthropods belonging to the subphylum *Crustacea*. These terrestrial crustaceans are closely related to crayfish and shrimp. They breathe through gill-like structures located on their hind legs, which requires them to live in moist environments. Woodlice are covered by a fairly hard exoskeleton. Those belonging to the genus *Armadillidium* can curl into a tight ball when threatened. Feeding upon decomposing plant matter, woodlice are also beneficial, producing compost and aerating the soil of the forest floor. They range in color from gray to brown and molt four or five times during their two year lifespan. Female woodlice possess overlapping thoracic plates on their underside that form a brood pouch, called a marsupium. The marsupium may contain up to 200 eggs and must remain filled with water until the young hatch. Young woodlice will spend the first few days of life in these pouches before crawling away to begin life on their own.

With their tiny, undulating legs, millipedes may appear like one of Dora Kelley Nature Park's scarier little oddities. Indeed, they are often confused with their poisonous cousin, the centipede. But, these arthropods are simply another harmless decomposer of the park's forest floor. Although they don't actually have a thousand legs, the millipede's name comes from the Latin words *mil*, meaning "thousand," and *ped*, meaning "feet." The legs on a millipede's body vary in number. Most segments of their body possess two pairs of legs. The first and last segments, however, always lack legs. Though slow moving, millipedes are excellent burrowers. When threatened, they will coil their armored body into a tight spiral. Like earwigs, millipedes also exude a foul-smelling liquid to repel predators. Fossil evidence suggests that millipedes were the earliest animals to breathe air and make the move from water to land.

All three of the lesser known oddities described in this article are common to Dora Kelley Nature Park. But, there is no need to search high and low for them in the park. For, several live examples of these industrious denizens of the forest floor can be found in an exhibit at the nature center, where they are waiting to meet you!



Woodlice are one of the more common little oddities found in Dora Kelley Nature Park.



Lennart Tange

One of the local species of millipede found in the Nature Park.

SUMMER NATURE CAMPS 2013!



New Exhibits at Jerome “Buddie” Ford Nature Center.



The exhibit “Birds of Alexandria” (*above*) just finished touring Alexandria’s Recreation Centers, where it provided an outreach of environmental education to children throughout Alexandria. The exhibit includes curiosities and interesting facts on the life cycles, songs, and adaptations of local and exotic bird species.

Two new digital displays (*right*) were also recently installed at the nature center to share videos and photos of Dora Kelley Nature Park’s wildlife, including video of the park’s nocturnal animals.





**JOIN OUR FALL
CLEANUPS!**

Saturdays 10 am - 12 pm
September 14th,
October 12th,
November 9th,
and December 14th

Thank You, Park Volunteers!

This summer proved to be a highly productive season for our dedicated park volunteers and community service workers. Through their hard work, over 13,000 square feet of invasive English ivy (*Hedera helix*) was removed from Dora Kelley Nature Park. Removing ivy from the forest understory allows native plants to thrive. In addition to invasive plant removal, Nature Center volunteers continued to assist with the care and feeding of exhibit animals. Their efforts help ensure that all of these creatures remain healthy and happy. Thank you again to all the volunteers who help make our park and nature center amazing!



For more information about park cleanups or other volunteer opportunities, contact:

John Burke
Volunteer Coordinator
John.burke@alexandriava.gov
703.746.5525

Nature Programs

Little Adventures (ages 3-5 years)

Ages 3-5. Children and their parents are invited to explore the world of nature through a series of programs developed just for them. We'll play games, do crafts, hike through the forest, and much more! Siblings welcome. One \$20 fee covers the cost of all four sessions.

Fridays 10:30-11:30am

September 20, October 18, November 15, December 20

Activity #: 111201-01



September – October

Family Fishing

Ages 6-12. Catch the big one while learning about some of our native fish species in Holmes Run! Fishing poles and tackle provided upon request. Registration fee required for each child and all children must be accompanied by at least one adult. Catch and release only.

Activity #111202-01

September 7, 10-11:30am \$4

Stuck on Senses

Ages 3-5. How can we use our five senses in the natural environment? This class for preschoolers helps children learn about their senses through the use of natural materials. Lots of fun!

Activity #111203-01

September 14, 10-11:30am \$4

Rocks and Fossils

Ages 6-12. Travel back in time while searching the ancient gravels of Holmes Run for rocks and fossil specimens that date back several hundred million years! Fun for children and parents.

Activity #111204-01

September 21, 10-11:30am \$4

Mighty Migrations

Ages 6-10. Flying south for the winter? Together, we will explore the amazing journeys some animals take in order to survive. Participants will also learn about the ones that migrate through Alexandria.

Activity #111205-01

October 5, 10-11:30am \$4

Batmania

Ages 4-8. Are bats blind? Do they make nests in your hair? Get the straight facts in this fascinating program on the world of bats. Program features a short presentation on bats, bat craft, and related activities.

Activity #111206-01

Please note that there are three ways to register for a nature program:

- **Online** www.alexandriava.gov/recreation
- **Mail-in** completed registration form to the Lee Center at 1108 Jefferson Street, Alexandria, VA 22314.
- **Drop-off** completed registration form at the Nature Center with a check (cash not accepted).

Nature Programs

November – December

Fall Foliage Hike

Ages 18 or older. Adults are invited to explore the beautiful colors of fall in this hike through Dora Kelley Nature Park. Program features a presentation on tree identification by Virginia Plant Ecologist Rod Simmons.

Activity #111207-01
November 2, 10:30am-1pm. Free

Owl Prowl

Ages 6-12. What's so amazing about owls? Children will have fun learning about these nocturnal birds while dissecting owl pellets. An owl "hooting" contest with prizes is also featured.

Activity# 111211
December 14, 10:30am-12pm \$4

Animal Mothers

Ages 5-8. Bring your little ones to learn about some of the special relationships between baby animals and their mothers in the wild. We will look at baby animals with feathers, fins, and fur.

Activity # 111208-01
November 9, 2-3:30pm \$4

Nature Prepares for Winter

Ages 5-8. How do plants and animals survive the cold weather? Learn what they do and where they go. If weather permits, a walk in the woods will follow!

Activity #111213
December 21, 2-3:30pm \$4

Amazing Adaptations

Ages 6-10. Crawling, flying and camouflage for hiding! Join us as we look at how some animals have developed amazing adaptations to survive even the harshest climates and most urbanized environments.

Activity #111209-01
November 16, 2-3:30pm \$4

Alexandria's Prehistoric Peoples

Ages 6-12. For thousands of years, Alexandria was home to a diversity of prehistoric cultures. Learn about their ways of life and how they survived in the local woodlands. Craft session featured.

Activity #111209-01
November 23, 10-11:30am \$4



Nature Center Services

Nature Outreach Programs

Jerome "Buddie" Ford Nature Center offers a variety of outreach programs for schools, community groups, clubs, and other organizations. This includes programs on the natural and cultural history of Alexandria, featuring live animals from the Nature Center.

Scout Programs

Bring your troop to earn a badge! The fee is \$30 per program for up to 15 children (\$2 for each additional child).

Field Trips

Ask us about our SOL programs for field trips.

Birthday Parties

The Nature Center offers birthday parties for children ages 3 to 12 featuring outdoor hikes, live animals, crafts, and a private room. Fee is \$165 for parties of up to 12 children. Registration required.

Facility Rentals

The Nature Center has rooms available to rent for meetings. Call 703.746.5525 for more information.

Community Service Events

Have your class, group, or club volunteer to help protect Dora Kelley Nature Park.



Jerome "Buddie" Ford Nature Center

5750 Sanger Ave

Alexandria, VA 22311

Phone : 703.746.5525

Hours: Wednesday-Saturday 10am-5pm

Sunday 1pm-5pm (April 1-Nov 30)

Center Director: Mark S. Kelly

Naturalist: Jane Yeingst

Volunteer Coordinator/Naturalist: John Burke

Custodian: Juan Aguilar

The City of Alexandria complies with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

To request reasonable accommodation, or an alternative format, please call:

703.746.5525

or email

mark.kelly@alexandriava.gov