



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



#### QUITE OPOSSUMBLY THE MOST MISUNDERSTOOD MAMMAL

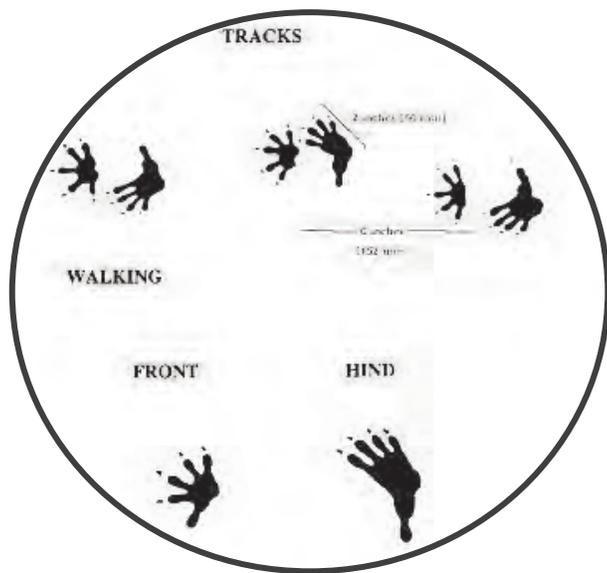
The Virginia opossum (*Didelphis virginiana*), commonly known as the North American opossum, is the only marsupial indigenous to North America. This marsupial is one of the earth's oldest surviving mammals, dating as far back as 75,000 years ago to the time of the dinosaurs.

Opossums have very unique and distinctive features. They are roughly the size of a housecat, with a white face,

pointed nose, thin black ears, and a rat-like prehensile tail. There are several popular myths connected to this primarily nocturnal creature. For example: it is believed that opossums hang onto tree branches by their tails. This is actually false. While they do have strong prehensile tails that serve as an "extra hand", adult opossums cannot actually hang by their tails. The lighter weight juveniles can support their bodies by hanging with their tails but this is not a normal activity carried on by these animals. Contrary to another myth that while travelling, youngsters hang by their tails while hanging from their mother's tail, instead, they actually cling tightly onto their mother's back by grabbing her hair. Opossums can use their tails to carry nesting materials when climbing trees, allowing their feet to be free for



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climbing. Moreover, opossums can multitask—holding onto branches using their hind feet while eating with their hands at the same time. This is made possible due to their opposable thumbs on their hind feet, just like human thumbs!

It is often said that when threatened, opossums will pretend to be dead. This is a myth too. When an opossum feels that they are in danger, they first hiss and show their teeth— all fifty of them. If that doesn't deter the predator, they will try to run away or climb a tree. Finally, as a last resort, the opossum falls into a catatonic-like state, where it will collapse to the ground as their body goes limp and their eyes stare wide open. Unfortunately, opossums are not the brightest of the creatures, and this little act of “playing dead” is not much of an act. In fact, it is a genetic involuntary action and not a conscious one in any way. Although “playing possum” may save opossums from being eaten by predators, it certainly does not help to protect them from passing automobiles. Since opossums aren't very picky eaters (they will eat just about anything— fruits, nuts, mice, snakes, frogs, birds,

and carrion) and pay little attention to where they eat their meal, they often become road kill themselves. This might explain why opossums have a very short life span in the wild. Surprisingly, even when kept in captivity, these creatures will only live two or three years at most. Why? This remains a mystery.

As with all marsupials, female opossums carry their young in a pouch. One fascinating fact is that this mammal has a gestation period of less than two weeks! Following birth, the young will stay attached to the mother's teat to feed for several weeks. After about three months, the youngsters often remain together for a short period of time before they continue on their journey into your neighborhood or into the woods.



#### Did you know?

- ◆ Newly born opossums are so small, that you could fit the whole litter of 14 on a single table spoon!
- ◆ “Playing dead” may last for less than a minute, or up to six hours!
- ◆ Opossums are most active in the spring and summer, but they do not hibernate over winter.

# Smartphone users, scan this QR code to begin the Dora Kelley Nature Park's Active Trail Map!

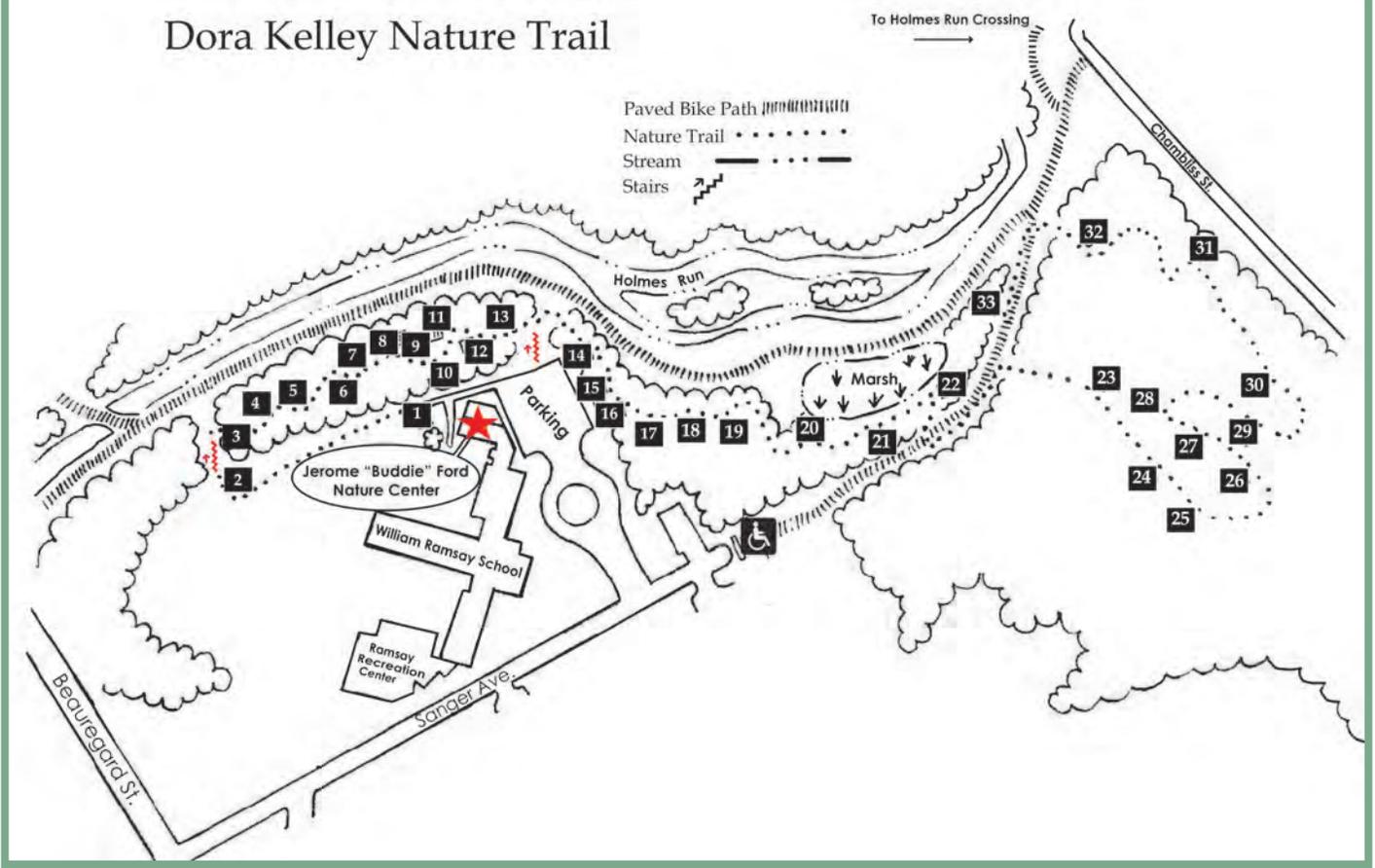


Scan the code or go to  
<http://goo.gl/yyllg2>

Join our Oncell Quest mobile Trail map to learn more about Dora Kelley Nature Park and answer questions while you tour our Park!



## Dora Kelley Nature Trail



# Nature Programs

## Full Day Nature Camps

Full-day nature camp activities will be offered this summer by the Jerome "Buddie" Ford Nature Center. Parents may drop off their children at the Nature Center between 8:30-9:00AM. Pick-up will be from 3:00-3:30PM. Snacks and field trips included in registration fee.

### 1st and 2nd Grade

Ages 6-8

M-F 9:00am-3:00pm

July 21<sup>st</sup> - July 25<sup>th</sup>

Activity #: 140463-03

\$265

### 3rd and 4th Grade

Ages 8-10

M-F 9:00am-3:00pm

August 4<sup>th</sup> - August 8<sup>th</sup>

Activity #: 140464-03

\$265



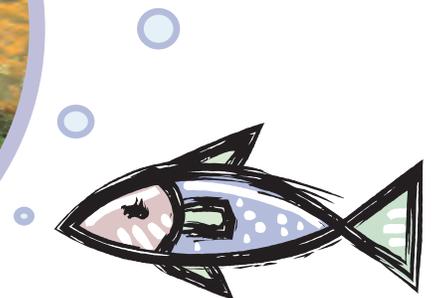
*These camps are now full. Call the Nature Center at 703-746-5525 for more information.*

## COMING THIS FALL...

Registration begins:

August 13<sup>th</sup> for residents.

August 15<sup>th</sup> for non-residents.



# Nature Programs

## September & October

### Amazing Amphibians

Ages **6-10**. Come to the Nature Center and explore the wonderful world of amphibians. See live frogs, toads, and salamanders close up. Craft session featured. **\$5**

*Saturday, September 6th 10-11:30am*

Activity #: 269801-01

### Family Fishing

Ages **6-12**. Catch the big one while learning about some 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 an adult. Catch and release only. **\$5**

*Saturday, September 13th 10am-12pm*

Activity #: 269802-01

### Mammals

Ages **5-8**. Investigate the lives of mammals in Dora Kelley Nature Park and uncover what foods they prefer to eat. Learn to classify mammals as herbivores, carnivores, or omnivores by examining their skulls. **\$5**

*Saturday, September 27th 2-3:30pm*

Activity #: 269803-01

### Birding for Beginners

Ages **6-10**. Bird watching can be fun! This hobby is growing in popularity. Learn to recognize many of our native birds as well as their songs. The class will meet at the Nature Center and then hike in Dora Kelley Nature Park. Binoculars will be provided to get a closer look at the birds. Then, make a treat to take with you, so you can attract feathered friends to your backyard. Registration fee required for each child, and all children must be accompanied by at least one adult. **\$5**

*Saturday, October 4th 10:00am - 11:30am*

Activity #: 269804-01

### 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. **\$5**

*Saturday, October 25th 2-3:30pm*

Activity #: 269805-01



# 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. Fee covers cost of all four sessions. \$20

*Fridays 10:30am - 11:30am*

*September 5<sup>th</sup>, October 3<sup>rd</sup>, November 7<sup>th</sup>, December 5<sup>th</sup>*

Activity #: 269800-01



## November & December

### Stories in Nature: "Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf"

Ages 4-7. Children are invited to listen to the story, "Red Leaf, Yellow Leaf", and learn about different kinds of leaves and how they change color. A colorful art and craft session follows. \$5

*Saturday, November 8<sup>th</sup> 10-11:30am*

Activity #: 269807-01

### 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! \$5

*Saturday, November 15<sup>th</sup> 2-3:30pm*

Activity #: 269808-01

### Owl Prowl

Ages 5-8. What's so amazing about owls? Children will have fun learning about these nocturnal birds while dissecting owl pellets. Then, they'll meet the Nature Center's owl! \$5

*Saturday, December 6<sup>th</sup> 10-11:30am*

Activity #: 269809-01

Nature News 6

### Terrariums

Ages 6-12. A terrarium is an enclosed ecosystem inside a glass container. Learn about the history of this fascinating Victorian tradition. After, make your own terrarium. All supplies are provided. This can be a perfect gift for someone special or just take it home with you to care for and watch it grow. \$12

*Saturday, December 13<sup>th</sup> 2-3:30pm*

Activity #: 269810-01

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



**Web**

- Visit [alexandriava.gov/Recreation](http://alexandriava.gov/Recreation)
- For log in information, call 703.746.5414 or e-mail [register@arpcva.com](mailto:register@arpcva.com)



**Mail-in**

- Mail completed Registration Form to the Lee Center at 1108 Jefferson Street, Alexandria, VA 22314. Make checks payable to "City of Alexandria."



**Drop-off**

- Drop off completed Registration Form at the Lee Center with a check made payable to "City of Alexandria." (cash not accepted).

### Fall Foliage Hike

Ages 18 & Up. 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.

This is a free program, and all participants must be registered to attend.

Maximum 25 people.

Saturday November 1<sup>st</sup>

10:30am-1:00pm

Activity #: 269806-01



### Protecting Dora Kelley Nature Park



For information about park cleanups or other volunteer opportunities, contact us by email at

Majd.Jarrar@alexandriava.gov

### Thank you, Park Volunteers!



The annual "Spring in Alexandria" brought many volunteers to Dora Kelley Nature Park throughout the month of May!

On May 7<sup>th</sup>, a group from the American Counseling Association helped to wood chip the trails and reset the cobblestones along the paths. Their hard work has now made the walking trails very inviting for visitors.

On May 8<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, volunteers from Keller Williams Realty removed invasive Garlic Mustard plants throughout the park with Natural Lands Management Technician, Scott Graham. A second group of volunteers removed plants from the park easement across from Beauregard Street.

We would like to thank all our volunteers for their help with maintaining Dora Kelley Nature Park.

- Nature Center Staff



Volunteers from Keller Williams Realty



Volunteers from the American Counseling Association

We need your help to combat the spread of invasive plants, including English ivy, garlic mustard, and Japanese honeysuckle.

So, take aim at these foes and stop the invasion!

20 years Saving Nearby Nature<sup>®</sup>  
**NVCT**  
Northern Virginia Conservation Trust

Join the Northern Virginia Conservation Trust at their monthly invasive removal at Dora Kelley Nature Park.

Saturday, August 9th

10 am - 12 noon

**Where:** Dora Kelley Nature Park  
5750 Sanger Ave., Alexandria, VA

**What:** Remove invasive plants from the park.

**Why:** To improve wildlife habitats in the park.

**Details:** Wear sturdy shoes you don't mind getting dirty, long pants, long sleeves, gloves (if you have them), a hat, sunscreen, and bug spray. Bring a water bottle and any interested family or friends! Meet us at the "Buddie" Ford Nature Center and we will walk to the worksite together.

To get the latest event updates, join NVCT's Meet-up group at Meetup.com

**HAVE QUESTIONS?**

Contact Shannon O'Neil, 703-354-5093  
or email [soneil@nvct.org](mailto:soneil@nvct.org)





## Farewell, Mark Kelly!

“After 24 years of dedicated service to the City of Alexandria, Mark Kelly has retired as Director of the Jerome “Buddie” Ford Nature Center. During his tenure, Mark developed a broad spectrum of interpretive programming, oversaw the renovation of the Nature Center facility, and cultivated a reputation for the Nature Center as a well-run and highly respected environmental educational organization. Mark is sure to stay involved in the education and environmental fields, and we wish him well as he enjoys his active retirement. We look forward to recruiting him as a volunteer!”

Robert Taylor

Division Chief, Natural Resources

Mark extends his heartfelt thanks to all the “Friends of Dora Kelley Nature Park” volunteers and community service workers for their valiant conservation efforts through the years and encourage their continued support of the naturalist staff in their mission to provide quality nature-based interpretive programming, services, and volunteer opportunities in the years to come.



# NATURE CHALLENGE

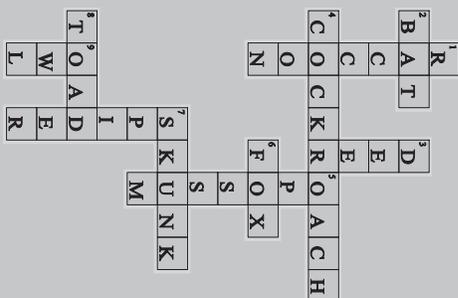
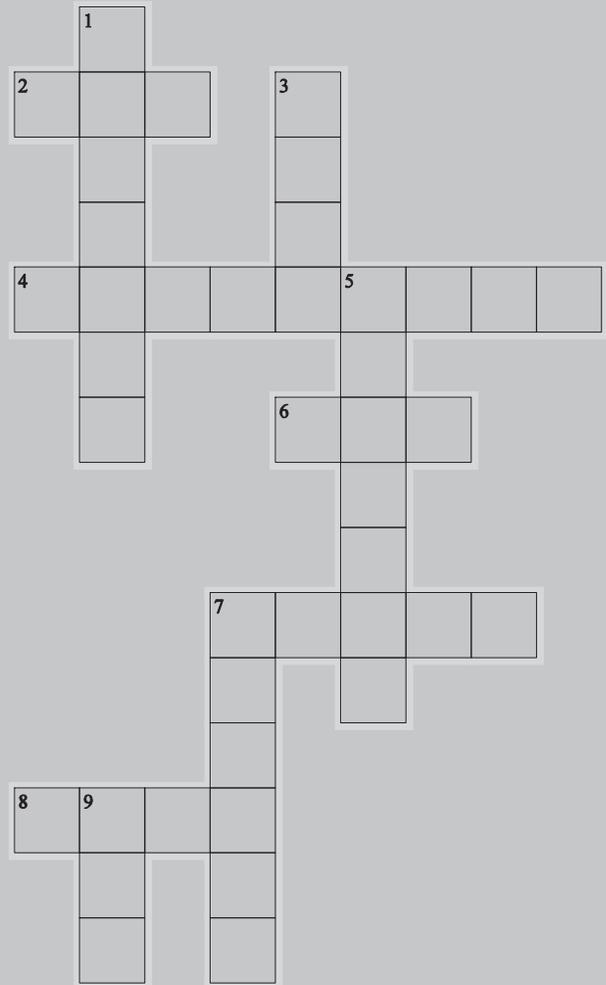
## CROSSWORD PUZZLE

### Across

2. This mammal has webbed wings, sleeps hanging upside down, and feeds on insects.
4. This insect has a long-flattened body, moves quickly, and is usually seen at night.
6. This canine has a thick red coat, pointed nose, and is very sly.
7. These mammals are known for their black and white stripes and for emitting a strong odor.
8. This amphibian spends the early part of their lives living in water as eggs and tadpoles. Later in life, they live on land. Most have warty dry skin!

### Down

1. This animal looks like it's wearing a mask and has a black and white ringed tail.
3. This large mammal has a brown/tan coat and white tail. The males have antlers.
5. This mammal 'plays dead' when it feels threatened or scared. There is an article written about them in this newsletter!
7. Also known as an arachnid, this creature has 8 legs and often spins a web to catch its meals.
9. This bird can rotate its head 270 degrees when searching their surroundings. During the night, you may hear them hoot.



# 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 \$50 per program for up to 15 children (\$3 for each additional child).

## ***Field Trips***

Our interpretive programs are designed to assist teachers in meeting Virginia’s SOL requirements. For more information, please call the Nature Center.

## ***Facility Rentals***

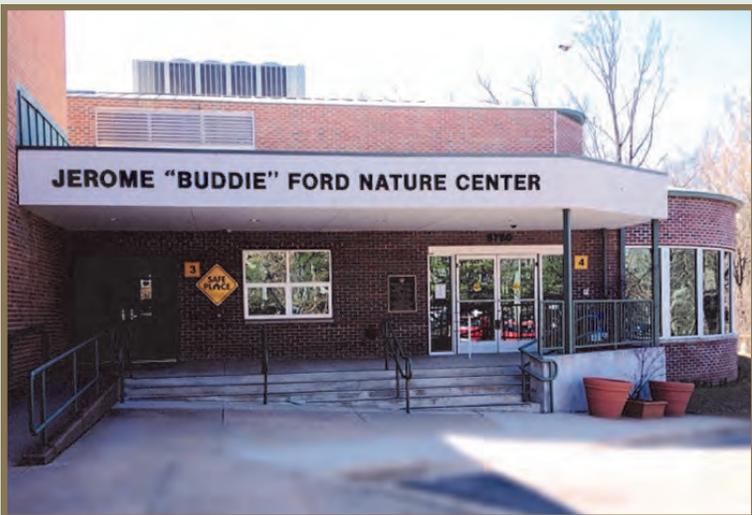
The Nature Center’s activity room is available for use and rental by community groups and organizations. Please call **703.746.5525** for more information.

## ***Community Service Events***

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

## ***Birthday Parties***

The Nature Center offers birthday parties for children ages 4 to 12. Each 90 minute birthday party features live animals, a nature-oriented activity, and use of a private room. Fee is \$165 for a party of up to 12 children. Prior registration and payment required.



**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)

**Acting Director/Naturalist:** Jane Yeingst

**Program Coordinator/Newsletter Editor:** Majd Jarrar

**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**

**Majd.Jarrar@alexandriava.gov**