

Blue Ridge

Seasonal newsletter of the
Blue Ridge Outdoor
Education Center
Spring 2005

Blaze

School Roster

Spring 2005 schools include:

Piedmont College, Oak Grove Elementary, Booth Middle School, St. Andrews, Creekview Elementary, Paideia School, Ridgeview Middle School, Walker School, Oxford College, Pinewood Academy, Girl Scout Troop 155, Madison County High School, Greenfield Hebrew Academy, Cub Scouts Troop 77, American Heritage Academy, Lafayette Christian School, Tattall High School, Sewell Middle School, Glenwood Academy, Morningside Elementary, Ben Hill Middle School, Bulloch Academy, and

They Said It!

Here are some quotes from students this spring...

"I really liked the view of the mountains and ground below me on the [Appalachian Geography] hike."

"My favorite activity was High Ropes because I really challenged myself and am proud of my accomplishments."

"Teambuilding was the best because we had a great instructor and we worked together to complete really fun challenges."

"My favorite class was Aquatic Ecology because we got to explore Toccoa Creek for creatures."

"I learned that Toccoa means 'beautiful' [in Cherokee]."

And teachers said...

"I loved Forest Ecology! It fits so neatly into our science program at school. It is a great addition to my life science curriculum."
—Teacher, Walker School

"I liked how students were challenged to 'become one with the night'."
—Teacher, Paideia School

"The staff did a great job teaching, but also stood back and let the kids work together. It was great!"
—Teacher, American Heritage Academy

spring thing

blooming daffodils
blue skies
gently flying butterflies
flowing stream
white marshmallow clouds
rushing waterfall
majestic trees and forest
spring thing
-ben bell

Frogs of Spring

Kim Wagner

Spring in Georgia brings a chorus of songs from many types of native frogs. Frogs are massing at ponds, lakes, and even puddles to find each other and lay their eggs. Male wood frogs are the first to emerge from their winter hiding spots under logs, stumps, and leaf litter. They find their way to short-lived pools to lay their eggs in large groups. The first wood frogs to arrive get the best spots in the middle of the pools. Their eggs will be protected from cool air temperatures and will be the most likely to survive.

As the wood frog slips back into the forest in March and April, spring peepers start to appear. They are joined by cricket frogs, chorus frogs, and pickerel frogs. Bullfrogs also begin their song in spring but will call all summer long.

The male gray tree frog will defend two square feet of territory in April, calling females to his temporary home with his loud trill until late July. The longer mating season of the gray tree frog allows the female to choose which song appeals to her most. Female gray tree frogs prefer louder calls so males tend to pick perches near the surface of still water. The water helps to amplify their song.

Whether frogs have a short time to find each other, like the wood frog, or all summer long, like the gray tree frog, now is the beginning of their search. Be sure and enjoy this outdoor concert!

More Than Just a T-Shirt Slogan

Adrienne Murray

Each morning, anticipating a day of exploring spring's surprises, I put on a crisp white staff T-shirt. The front reads Blue Ridge Outdoor Education Center, while the back has a myriad of assorted bugs, mushrooms and leaves. Beneath the drawing is a quote from Edward O. Wilson, a notable scientist renowned for his work on ants and insect behavior; it reads: "Little things rule the world." Lately I've been contemplating how accurate Wilson's words really are. Here are two examples:

Most students have never thought about the life cycle of a fly buzzing around a picnic table or a dragonfly at the pond, but during Aquatic Ecology class, when students find different macro-invertebrates in Toccoa Creek, the complexity of these creatures—their tiny moving gills or undeveloped wing pads—can be astounding. These stonefly and mayfly nymphs will spend up to two years in this aquatic stage, then live as adult flies for only days. Such dramatic changes taking place in organisms smaller than our thumbnails!

Later on a Forest Ecology walk when students first conduct a transect of the forest floor, they often dismiss the area as a boring pile of dead leaves and sticks. As students brush back the leaf litter, they are often surprised to find dozens of small plants, topsoil teeming with insect activity, and fungal mycelium hard at work decomposing debris.

Here at Blue Ridge, I love sharing my enthusiasm for the detail and complexity of Nature's littlest things, those easily overlooked. Remembering that "little things rule the world" helps us appreciate that every organism plays a vital role in our larger ecosystems.

Director's Niche. John DiDiego

Many of the buds of fall have swollen and burst into greens and white and red. For those doubters of winter, who feared that the world would never again be warm and green, the relief must be tremendous. I look out my window at the branch of a young ash tree, maybe as thick as my thumb... what was a seemingly lifeless gray limb all winter now has seventy new leaves, and since each of them is a compound leaf with approximately seven leaflets each, that's in the neighborhood of five hundred pale green ovals; and, since that branch is one of about thirty-five like-sized branches on the tree, it is clear that nature doesn't just give us a hint of relief, but overwhelming relief from the gray doubt that hangs on us all.

In my sixth year as director, I have come to realize that doubt and death are ever present in nature, but they never win. Green shoots appear on barren ground... colorful mushrooms devour dead logs, and yes, ash leaves explode from gray winter twigs. This amazes and reassures me every week of the year. When students spend a few days here, I hope they get at least a pinch of that amazement and wonder to take with them. Because no matter where life takes THEM, nature works constantly and the wonders never cease.

I'm especially aware these days, because of my three month old, who heard his first whippoorwill calling and American Toad trilling this month. My hopes for him are my hopes for all the students who come this way – when seasons change, or those feelings of doubt creep up, they have within them a sense of wonder and gratitude for the gift of Nature, which is always a sure remedy.

The Buzz on Large Carpenter Bees

Nate Daniel

On any given sunny day this season you're likely to step outside to the sight of a newly flowering tree or wild flower. These showy exhibits are a welcome sight for many hungry insects including large carpenter bees.

The large carpenter bee is a common sight around Georgia this time of year, but is often mistaken for its cousin, the bumble bee. Unlike the bumble bee which has a yellow and black abdomen, the large carpenter bee's abdomen is completely black. Large carpenter bees have erratic flight patterns which often appear to be aggressive. Luckily, this is usually the male of the species hovering around, and they have no stinger.

With so many large carpenter bees careening around these days you may be wondering if you are seeing the same ones. In other words, is your back porch one particular bee's territory or is that bee listlessly bashing into your neighbor's windows as well?

Here is a fun little experiment you can do at home to find out. Using a net or a bucket or some other device, carefully capture a large carpenter bee. Being sure not to harm the bee, transfer it to a small Tupperware container and place it in your freezer for three to four minutes. This will slow the bee down to a motionless or near-motionless state. At this point you will be able to safely handle your new friend. Using white out, carefully paint a "1" on the black section of the abdomen. Take your bee out into the sun and watch as it warms up. Notice which parts begin moving first. This is also a good time to get a good close-up look using a magnifying glass. After about a minute bee #1 will be on its merry way. Repeat this process using succeeding numerals (2,3,4, etc.). Graphing the times and locations of your later bee sightings is a fun way to see which bees live in your area. In the course of an afternoon you and your family will have become amateur entomologists!

Spring Erosion

Jon K. Doxey

Here at Blue Ridge, spring time is our heaviest rain season. During this time the peaks can receive at least 100 inches of rain and in the valley 70 inches. All of this rain water creates massive amounts of erosion. This process shapes the rock (parent material) and creates formations such as Flatrock here at Camp Mikell and Tallulah Gorge nearby. In addition to the erosion, large amounts of sediment are transported and deposited down in the valley below. This process of erosion and deposition is how soil is formed. When you think about it, soil is weathered rock worn down to form the different layers of soil. These layers are very important to plant life and the animals that live in the mountains.

If you are considering a trip to Blue Ridge for the upcoming school year, **NOW** is the time to call to reserve a date. For a free informational CD, call or e-mail:

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