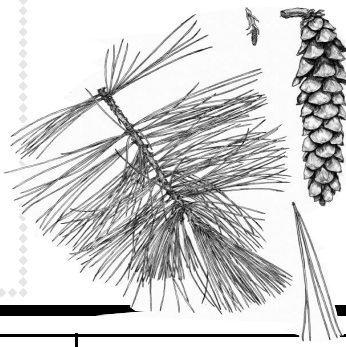


# Blue Ridge

Seasonal Newsletter of  
the Blue Ridge Outdoor  
Education Center



Fall 2006

# Blaze

## School Roster

Fall 2006

Greenfield Hebrew Academy, Westminster School, Sarah Smith Elementary, Union Grove Middle School, E.T. Booth Middle School, Village Montessori School, R.D. Head Elementary, High Point Elementary, Fair Street Elementary, David C. Barrow Elementary, Cherokee Boys Camp, Edmonds Elementary, Austin Elementary, Emmanuel College, Emory University, Oxford College, Kenesaw University, Forsyth High School, St. James, Madison County, CSIGA, Glenn Memorial, Cobb Consortium

## They Said It!

Here are some quotes from students this fall...

*"I learned that there are lots of ways to discover the world."*

*"The coolest thing I saw was the creek and wildlife."*

*"My favorite activity was Aquatic Ecology—all the insects in the water were interesting and fun."*

And teachers said...

*"The classes provide outstanding learning and knowledge."*

~Teacher, Westminster

*"Job well done! Very organized and enthusiastic program!"*

~Teacher, Sarah Smith

*"All counselors were totally dedicated, enthusiastic, and motivating. They obviously love their work, and that makes a big difference."*

~Teacher, Fair Street



← cross section of a pine needle

## Why Don't Conifers Lose Their Needles in the Fall?

by Shala Racicky

Well folks, autumn is here. Soon the days will become shorter, temperatures will cool, and, before falling to the ground, leaves of deciduous trees will turn brilliant shades of red and gold. These colors will be contrasted with the fresh green of pines and other coniferous trees. The evergreen needles will persevere through fall and accompany us into winter.

Why is it that these trees stay green through the fall and winter? Why do they keep their needles for a year or more? According to the Cherokee Creation Story, the Great Spirit awarded cedar, pine, and spruce the power to stay always green because they were the only trees able to stay awake during a seven day and seven night celebration. Other legends describe how evergreens protected small animals and were therefore rewarded with resilience against winter frost.

These stories could have a bit of truth to them. Many evergreen trees don't drop their needles as an adaptation to low nutrient levels in the soil. After a tree sheds its leaves, it must take up nutrients from the soil to grow new leaves in the spring. Evergreens get around this challenge by retaining their needles from one to as many as 40 years. So in a way, evergreens have been "awarded" with adaptations for surviving under challenging conditions.

## Thinking...

Imagine you are in a room with 3 switches connected to 3 light bulbs in another room. How can you tell which switch is connected to each bulb if you can only enter the bulb room once?

## Adopt=An=Animal

- ◆ Atha Road Elementary adopted "King George" the California (Ghost) King Snake
- ◆ Mrs. Tillman's Toccoa Elementary Class adopted "Sunflower" the New Zealand Rabbit
- ◆ Kim Wagner adopted "Dia" the Red-Eared Slider Turtle
- ◆ Nathan Daniel adopted "Panzer" the Snapping Turtle

## Soft Serve Lighting: Bulbs for Change

by Katherine Tumbleston

Compact Fluorescent Light Bulbs (CFLs) have been around for two decades, but despite their promise to change the world of energy, they have remained merely a brilliant idea rather than a practical revolution. Sauntering down the lighting aisle at your local bulb supplier, you may wonder why some bulbs look like a cone of soft serve ice cream; swirls, they are called.

Why should you switch to swirls? If each of the 100 million American homes replaced one incandescent bulb (think Edison) with one CFL, the energy saved would power a city of 1.5 million people. One bulb in each household is equivalent to taking 1.3 million cars off of the road in terms of greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere. What if each home switched entirely to swirls? You do the math.

What about your wallet? A CFL will cost around \$3 at the store, but lasts 10,000 hours, usually 10 years. A CFL uses 75% less energy than an incandescent for the same amount of light, so your monthly bill will drop a little more for each swirl switch you make.

What are you waiting for? Join the swirl revolution!

## Director's Niche

by Josh Rood

One reason I love being the director of this incredible outdoor program is the lessons I learn from nature. Most teachers have told me that they sometimes learn more from their students than their students learn from them, and it is no different here in the piedmont. If I am mindful, I will notice the cues nature is giving all living things on how to behave in the coming months. Small mammals secrete away their cache of nuts, trees reduce their production, and reptiles prepare to hunker down for their annual nap. The lesson I get from all this is the need to slow down; to give adequate rest to the systems that sustain the quality of life.

### ...Outside the Box

**Solution:** Turn the first switch on for a few minutes. Switch it off, turn on a second switch, & leave the third one off. Go into the other room. The first bulb should still be warm, the second's light will be on, & the third will be off.

~ Kathryn Gray



## THE FOX

by Lauren George

You are at the woodland's edge, sitting amid feathery crowns of goldenrod and the soft *psit!* of leaves falling to the ground. Suddenly, a flash of scarlet darts into view—a fox! It disappears, but you have caught a rare glimpse of this primarily nocturnal or crepuscular (*active at dawn and dusk*) creature. Weighing 8 to 10 pounds but appearing larger because of its thick fur, the American red fox shares much of its US range with the slightly smaller gray fox. Perhaps this particular fox is on the lookout for the mice, rabbits, insects, worms, or even fruits and plant material that make up its diet, or perhaps it is returning to a food cache along its trail where it has buried excess food. By keeping rodent populations in check, the diminutive predator is very beneficial to nearby farms.

Since fox families disperse in the fall, this fox could be striking out on its own for the first time. It will remain solitary until mating in late winter. By spring, the female fox will prepare one main den and several smaller dens in case of danger for a litter of 3-6 young. Both fox parents care for the cubs, sometimes assisted by older siblings who did not disperse the previous autumn.

As the light fades and the air grows chilled, you remember stories you have heard about foxes. Scandinavian legends attribute the northern lights to *foxfire*, and Japanese tales tell of fox spirits of infinite age and wisdom. Many stories depict these highly individual, yet cooperative animals as sneaky and cunning. In reality, foxes simply need to be shy and wary in order to survive. Stiff with cold, you start for home resolved to read more about this clever and mysterious creature.



## Why be a Vegan?

by Monique Berg

When I tell people that I am a vegan, I explain that this means I eat an entirely plant-based diet with no animal products. While this may seem a bit strange to the majority of omnivores in our culture, I would like to offer a few reasons to consider veganism.

The United Nations reports that a vegan diet can feed significantly more people than an animal-based diet, estimating that the 1992 food supply could have fed 6.3 billion people on a 100% vegetarian diet, or 3.2 billion people on a 75% vegetarian diet. It takes far less land and resources to produce plant foods than it does to produce animal foods because vast amounts of animal feed must be grown to generate a relatively small caloric value of animal products. On the other hand, plant foods are produced more efficiently because the crops go directly into feeding people and have higher nutritional value.

A plant-based diet also results in less pesticides, fertilizers, hormones, antibiotics, soil erosion, and manure. According to a 2002 report by the Sierra Club, millions of gallons of liquefied feces and urine seep into the environment from collapsed, leaking, or overflowing storage lagoons. This waste can then end up polluting our water supplies.

Eating less animal products and more nutritious fruits and vegetables isn't only good for your health, it is also good for the health of the world.

If you are considering a trip to Blue Ridge for Spring 2007, **NOW** is the time to call to reserve a date. For more information, call or e-mail:

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*You need only to sit long enough in some attractive spot in the woods that all its inhabitants may exhibit themselves to you by turns. ~Thoreau*