



Spring 2011



River Rambler

Little River Regional Park and Natural Area

Volume 5, Issue 2

Bluebirds Abound at the Park



Spring is nesting time for the birds and we know that they have been quite busy here at the park. Volunteers and park staff make regular checks of the nest boxes along the birding trail. They look at the condition of the box, check for pests like ants and wasps and also for avian activity like birds flying in or out of the box and whether it contains any nesting material. The last check showed that of the 20 nest boxes at the park, 10 contained new nests. Of

those, five of the nests contained eggs. From watching the boxes and the color of the eggs, we know that most of them are Eastern Bluebirds. One box contains eggs that may be either a Chickadee or Tufted Titmouse. If all were to successfully fledge, over 20 new birds could call the park home.

We also keep tabs on nesting activity of other species that may not be using the boxes provided. Nests have been discovered in the dense cover of the cedars, among the vines in the butterfly garden and even along the river corridor. Though not as easy to check as the nest boxes, these sites are still important in the information they provide about habitat preference, food availability and affects of human activity on nesting patterns.

Birders or others interested in observing the nestlings are encouraged to adopt one of the nests. Information gathered is added to NestWatch, the citizen science project run through the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Data is used to track the survival and reproductive success of a wide range of bird species.

Remember, observing nests should never interfere with the well being of the birds, their eggs or nestlings. Adult birds could abandon their eggs or nestlings if they are disrupted too often or feel threatened.

Call the park office for more information on adopting a nest box: 919-732-5505.

Trailheads Hand Over Big Check



David Elam, Michelle Pesavento, Mike DiFabio and Layna Mosley

Big love for the park came in the form of a big check from the Trailheads. The 6th Annual Little River Trail Run in January saw a record number of participants and generated a generous donation to the park. A \$5,000 check was presented to park staff at the Open Eye Café on February 19th. The Trailheads were also able to donate \$500 to TORC (Triangle Off Road Cyclists), the volunteer group who built and help maintain the single-track mountain bike trails.

Park staff would like to thank the Trailheads for their continued support of the park and for organizing such a great event.

Species Spotlight

Spring Peeper – *(Pseudacris crucifer)*



As the name implies, these amphibians are most often heard in the spring making loud peeping noises similar to young chicks. They are one of the first frogs to begin calling when the weather warms in March or even February. Spring peepers usually call from the edges of the water where they breed, hiding near the base of plants or grasses.

In our area, Spring Peepers breed most frequently from November through April, usually during warm, rainy nights. Females will lay about 900 eggs per clutch, hiding them under leaves or debris in the water. It takes about eight weeks for the tadpoles to transform in frogs after hatching from their eggs. Male peepers will usually begin their *(continued on page 3)*

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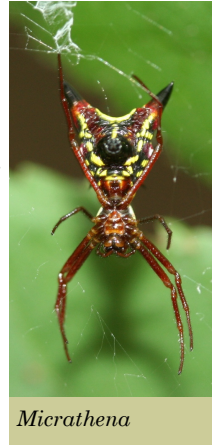
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Ask the Biker Guy



Can you do something about the spiders?

Today's question came to me recently from a regular mountain biker here at the park. He asked simply, "What can you guys do about the spiders across the trail?" I immediately agreed that spider webs across the trail can be annoying for all trail users in the park. We talked about all sorts of contraptions that riders have had attached to their bikes to catch the webs before they covered their faces and heads like plastic wrap. Some were pretty funny and creative. This got me thinking on how to answer this question and my first response was simply "That's nature". I quickly realized it might be important for bikers to be more knowledgeable about the areas where they ride and



Micrathena

that these spiders across the trail can be found all across the state of North Carolina and on all the trails. I began to tell him as much as I could about the two common types of spiders mostly being caught in your ear, nose, teeth and everywhere else for that matter.

Arrow-shaped *Micrathena* and Spinyback Orb Weaver spiders are forest spiders weaving rounded spider webs spanning vertically across open wooded areas. They are small spiders measuring up to 3/8 of an inch. *Micrathena* spiders are triangular in shape with black and white and yellow – reddish coloring. Spiny Orb Weavers are similar, but more crab shaped and more yellow, red, and orange coloring. Little River Park trails are ideal open area corridors for these spiders to thrive. These spiders will set their webs and mostly perch in the center waiting patiently for something to fly or fall into it web. Spider 'season' really takes affect mid-spring deep into the fall season. Unfortunately for these small spiders, I don't think they were expecting to catch a, let's say, 200-300 lb. mountain biker. We all know spider webs are tough stuff, which is why they stick to the face so well, but it is no match for the biker. However, they will quickly rebuild their webs and come back with a new vigor to finally halt a biker in his or her tracks. I am sure there have been times out on our trails where a rider needed to stop at some point to brush away all the spider webs that have been accumulated.



Spinyback Orb Weaver

From personal experience I can tell you that these spiders can bite and leave an itchy welt, usually in the most annoying areas. For me it is right on the back of my neck just in the right position so my shirt collar can rub and annoy it all day long.

Well after a good discussion we both agreed there is really nothing that can be done to keep spiders off the trail. After all we are riding in their home, aren't we? So the only real answer

that I could give this gentleman was some good counsel: Why not wait for another biker to go out on the trail before you to 'pave the way'. This way you can enjoy the trails in spider free bliss as long as someone is in front.

Talk to you next time and keep an eye out for some new trail maps available soon.

Little River Under the Stars

On April 29th the park will hopefully be seeing stars. In the sky, that is. Morehead Planetarium will be hosting another stargazing program at Little River from 8-10pm. Take a peak through some high powered telescopes and enjoy a brief sky tour.

This program is free and open to all ages. Call the park after 5pm on Friday to check on cloud/rain conditions: 919-732-5505.

Lost & Found

Have you lost or left something at the park?

- ♣ Jack-ets/sweatshirts
- ♣ Dog Leash
- ♣ Sunglasses



Check with the Park Office.

LRRP Online

✉ Join the park mailing list to get updates on park happenings:

littleriverpark@co.orange.nc.us



Check out our webpage:

http://www.co.orange.nc.us/deapr/parks/little_river_regional_park.asp



Find us on Facebook:

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Rougemont-NC/Little-River-Regional-Park/61512070179>

LRRP Stats

The Little River Regional Park staff take daily recordings of vehicle traffic, rain fall and visitor estimates.						Month					
						Jan	Feb	Mar	2008	2009	2010
Month						Rain Totals					
Vehicle Count						1.494 in.	2.839 in.	5.383 in.	50.03 in.	56.63 in.	46.879 in.
Month						Vistor Estimate					
Jan	Feb	Mar	2008	2009	2010	2623.5	2788.5	2611.5	29,683.5	31,711.5	34,063.5

Species Spotlight, cont'd

mating calls around dusk and continue into the early morning hours. Their calls can be heard from as far away as two miles, depending on the number of peepers in the area. A Spring Peeper can live up to 3 years in the wild.

P. crucifer can be tan, olive, grey or brownish in color with a dark cross resembling an "X" on their backs. They grow to be about 1 to 1 1/2 inches in length.

Peepers can be found throughout most of North Carolina and in areas of the United States east of the Mississippi. They live mainly in forests and woodlands near temporary or semi-permanent wetlands such as marshes, swamps, vernal pools and ponds.

These little frogs emerge at night to feed on small invertebrates like spiders, ants, flies and beetles. They hunt mainly in low vegetation not climbing very high in trees. Tadpoles feed on algae and dead bugs that fall into the water. Adult frogs may be eaten by larger frogs, turtles, snakes, and skunks. Tadpoles are frequently food for diving beetles, birds and other frogs.

Spring Peepers are a common and widespread species of frog and have no special conservation status in most areas. However, human activities that alter their wetland habitat may be impacting their breeding cycle and resulting in a decrease in their population.



Recycling 1-2-3



Orange County offers many ways for its residents to recycle. Curbside recycling is available in many areas even outside of the town limits.

For those in rural areas where recyclables are not picked-up, residents can drop off their recycling at several locations:

Orange County Solid Waste Convenience Centers not only provide a place to throw everyday household trash, they also have bins for:

- ✓ Glass bottles and jars
- ✓ All plastic bottles
- ✓ Metal/Aluminum and Aerosol Spray cans
- ✓ Aluminum Foil
- ✓ Newspapers and Phonebooks
- ✓ Magazines and Mixed Paper
- ✓ Corrugated Cardboard and Brown Paper Bags

Now, look for the purple bins to recycle "Rigid" Plastics #2 and #5, like yogurt containers, stadium cups and plastic buckets!

They also offer **24-hour Drop-Off Sites** where you can bring any of the above recyclables but No Trash, Please!

For a map of sites that accept recycling or more information, go to Orange County's Solid Waste webpage: <http://www.co.orange.nc.us/recycling/index.asp>.

Recycling not only reduces the waste going into landfills but helps reduce pollution, conserve natural resources, saves energy and provides U.S. manufacturing jobs.

Crunching the GBBC Numbers



Participants in the 2011 Great Backyard Bird Count had some interesting things to report this year. Over 92,000 checklists were submitted. All told, over 590 different bird species were identified and 11.4 million birds observed.

Among some of the more notable findings were an increase in reports of Evening Grosbeaks, a species whose overall numbers have decreased over the last 20 years. Also, the American Crow has moved up in the list to the seventh most numerous species. Crow populations took a hit when the West Nile virus appeared in North American in 1999. Results of the counts over the next few years will show whether the species is on the rebound or if this was just a one-year fluctuation.

The European Starling was the most numerous counted bird this year with the American Robin being the second. GBBC participants counted over 1,044, 300 Robins this year.

In North Carolina, birders reported over 181 different species for a total of 322, 416 birds. The Northern Gannet, a shore bird, was the most counted bird in the state. The Common Grackle was second and Red-winged Blackbird third. The Northern Cardinal was again the most wide-ranging species appearing on over 3,400 checklists.

At the park, 12 different species were reported by participants. The White-throated Sparrow was the most numerous and the Chipping Sparrow and Northern Cardinal rounding out second and third.

Mark your calendars for next year's count: February 17-20, 2012.

Kids Corner: Break the Code

Write the letter that matches the answer to the math problem in the boxes below.

A	B	D	E	F	I	H	R	S	T	V
7	1	4	9	10	2	6	3	5	11	8

$$\begin{array}{r} 2 \\ -1 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 6 \\ -4 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 8 \\ -5 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 2 \\ +2 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 7 \\ -2 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

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$$\begin{array}{r} 3 \\ +3 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 5 \\ +2 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 10 \\ -2 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 5 \\ +4 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

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$$\begin{array}{r} 6 \\ +4 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 8 \\ +1 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 9 \\ -2 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 7 \\ +4 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 5 \\ +1 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 6 \\ +3 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 8 \\ -5 \\ \hline \end{array} \quad \begin{array}{r} 4 \\ +1 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

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Program Pictures



Tiny Trekkers: Tiny Tadpoles



Discovery Club: Bird Box Building



Tiny Trekkers: Fur, Feathers, Skins & Scales

Little River Regional Park Program Calendar

May

Park Hours: 8:00 am - 8:00 pm

- 2 & 3 Things with Wings, Tiny Trekkers, ages 2 - 4 (accompanied by an adult). 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. Cost: \$2.00 per participant.
- 21 Black Light Bugs, Discovery Club, ages 5 & up (accompanied by an adult). 8:00 - 10:00 p.m. Cost \$5.00 per family.

June

Park Hours: 8:00 am - 8:00 pm

- 6 & 7 Caterpillar Crawl, Tiny Trekkers, ages 2-4, 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. Cost \$2.00 per participant.
- 18 Ladybug Release, Discovery Club, ages 5 & up (accompanied by an adult). 10am - 12pm Cost: \$5.00 per family.

July

Park Hours: 8:00 am - 8:00 pm

- 11 & 12 Buzzy Bees, Tiny Trekkers, ages 2 - 4 (accompanied by an adult). 10:00 - 11:00 a.m. Cost: \$2.00 per participant.
- 23 Map & Compass 101, Discovery Club, ages 5 & up (accompanied by an adult). 10am - 12pm. Cost \$5.00 per family.