

Friends of Forest Hill Park



Summer 2023

Be Kind to Your Neighborhood Opossum

Pat Wood

The scientific name for the opossum is *Didelphia virginiana*. “Didelphia” is Greek, meaning two wombs and “Virginiana” is modern Latin meaning “of Virginia,” the state where opossums were first discovered.

Opossums are marsupials; they carry their young in a pouch on their stomach. The Virginia opossum is the only marsupial native to North America and is a bit of a celebrity. One of the ship captains who sailed with Christopher Columbus to the New World took an opossum home to Spain where he presented it to the King and Queen at court. Captain John Smith is credited with naming the opossum during his visit to America during 1608. “Aposoum” means “white beast” in the Algonquin Native American language.



The baby opossums tails on either side of momma’s mouth look like a handlebar moustache.

They have adapted quickly during the last 100 years expanding their habitat to include cold northern climates like New England rather than sunnier places such as Mexico. Unlike other nocturnal animals, opossums move around a lot, sometimes up to a 15-mile radius in a two-week period.



Baby opossums, called “joeys,” are our friends, not our foes.

Baby opossums, called “joeys,” at birth are about $\frac{1}{2}$ the size of a honey bee. The joeys must leave the ground where they are born and move up into their mother’s pouch where they will latch onto a nipple for up to 70 days. Over half of newborn opossums will not survive moving from the ground to their mother’s pouch. When the little opossums learn to find their own food, they leave the pouch to begin their life span of up to four years and grow to weigh as much as twelve pounds.

The opossum’s menu is diverse. They will eat insects – up to 5,000 ticks per year - and snakes and garbage and, often, dead things. They have 50 teeth, more than any other North American mammal. Their eating habits help rid their habitats of disease by keeping communities cleaner and healthier.

Opossums play dead when they feel threatened. While playing dead, they secrete a bad odor and foam at the mouth to enhance their “dead” act, which can continue for as long as four hours. Opossums are not very susceptible to rabies, possibly due to their cooler body temperatures. They are rarely violent, although they will hiss and snarl to ward off predators.

Opossums are first-rate creatures to have in your neighborhood. They’re docile, not likely to threaten pets, disease-free and help control pest populations. If you let them hang around, they will clean up ticks, venomous snakes and more. Opossums are one of the best wildlife visitors you can have.

Sources: *Farmers’ Almanac*; *factretriever.com*

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**Forty (Five Gallon) Bottles of the
Purest Spring Water FREE**

To influential parties we offer the following contract: In order to further introduce the famous "RADIUM SPRINGS WATERS" property at Forest Hill Park, we will sell to you **ONE SHARE** of stock in the Radium Spring Company; stock full paid and non-assessable; non-taxable; for \$10 par value, and give to you as a **BONUS**, delivered anywhere in the city, **FREE** of all costs, forty (40) five gallon bottles of this famous water. So long as you are a stockholder, the company contracts to deliver to you this water at five gallons (5) for twenty-five cents (25c). By analysis this water is proven to be one of the very purest waters obtainable in a natural state. It is absolutely free of any organic or vegetable matter, whatsoever, and has but one and a half grains of dissolvable mineral matter to the United States gallon. Eliminating this it is **ABSOLUTELY** pure—H₂O. This water is highly "radio active," making it one of the greatest of natural mineral water tonics. As lightning purifies the elements so does "radium" purify the human system; yet its action is so gentle, the user of this water is wholly unconscious of its action, except as to the general benefit. This contract is limited to one hundred and fifty parties. So soon as this number is secured the water will be offered for sale only at the popular price for high-class waters—fifty cents for five gallons, delivered; so if interested drop a line to 203 Professional Building.

RADIUM SPRINGS CO., Inc.
Richmond, Virginia

R. T. LIPSCOMBE, - - - - - Manager

Radio-Active Water in Forest Hill Park

The July 15, 1913 issue of the *Richmond Virginian* newspaper advertised the “purest spring water” from Forest Hill Park available in five-gallon bottles. This ad preceded the ability to pump water into individual homes and, no doubt, garnered a lot of attention. In the early 20th century, there weren’t many residences in the Forest Hill area. The avenue itself featured only a few large estates, so the ad was directed, for the most part, toward the Manchester population and other portions of Richmond.

The solicitor offered 40 five gallon bottles “free” to interested parties, the only condition being that the interested party had to purchase one share of stock in the Radium Spring Company for \$10. Subsequently, each stockholder was entitled to purchase five gallons of the spring water for 25 cents.

According to the ad, this spring water was “absolutely pure” and “highly radioactive.” It further claimed that “as lightning purifies the elements, so does radium purify the human system.” Only the first 150 purchasers would be allowed to purchase the radioactive water at 5 cents per gallon. Thereafter, the price would increase to that of “high-class water” – 10 cents per gallon.

There is an old saying that comes to mind: “If you believe that, I have a bridge to sell you.” It is possible that the radioactive spring is known today as the spring north of the Stone House. The 1913 wordsmiths were talented, but they didn’t explain how the water became radioactive or mention specific benefits to consumers. Still, they probably made money selling the water as they experienced perfect training to become medicine show purveyors.

For all of my almost forty years in the neighborhood, I have loved walking in Forest Hill Park. The park is always full of nature's marvels, from Eastern River Cooters laying their eggs on the edge of the woods to graceful herons gliding in from the river to fish in the lake. So when a neighbor told me about an unusual duck she had seen on the lake I had to check it out. On a sunny February day I was lucky enough to spot a pair of ducks paddling around the pond, quickly diving and coming up some distance from where they started.

Their constant diving made identification difficult, but the crest on the adult male's head was the key. It was a pair of Hooded Merganser, *Lophodytes cucullatas*, a small, migratory North American duck that frequents shallow freshwater ponds and rivers. Although they can be seen in Virginia year-round their most common habitat is forested areas of the Great Lakes. They make shallow dives, but can stay under water from 30 seconds up to two minutes.

They feed mostly on fish, but also eat crayfish, aquatic insects and plants. Diving underwater to catch their prey by sight means their underwater vision must be sharp. Strong eye muscles enhance vision so they can see clearly underwater. An extra transparent eyelid protects the eyes while they are submerged.

The female has a gray body with a beautiful cinnamon colored crest. The breeding male has chestnut sides with black on the back. The front and head have a distinctive black and white pattern. When courting the male can expand his crest, going from a thin white stripe to a large white patch. This gives the head an oversized look. A slender sharp bill that curves under at the tip aids in catching fish, the mainstay of their diet.



Mergansers nest in the cavities of living or dead trees, sometimes laying their eggs in the nests of other cavity dwelling birds. Nests are usually near water, but can be as much as a half mile away. Females can lay up to 13 eggs that take from 26 to 41 days to hatch. Once hatched the ducklings are out of the nest within 24 hours, leaping from nest to ground while the mother waits nearby to show them the way to their first meal. Within hours of hatching the ducklings can dive and feed themselves, dining mostly on aquatic plants. The female hangs around for a few more weeks to protect the young, but by the time the ducklings hatch the male has already flown the coop.

What's the Matter with Dumping Yard Waste in the Park- It Decomposes, Right?

It's very tempting to dump yard waste in the park, especially if your street borders a park. It seems like it would be good for the environment, since yard waste includes grass clippings, leaves, tree and shrub cuttings or sometimes entire trees or shrubs. But what seems harmless and earth friendly could be doing more harm than good.

Did you know that besides being illegal and unsightly, there are a few good reasons not to dump yard waste in our parks.

1. Dumping yard waste spreads invasive plants by introducing seeds that germinate and plant segments that re-root. The invasive plants push out native plants altering the habitat wildlife needs to survive. Large piles of dumped yard waste will smother and kill everything underneath. The bare spots left after the waste has decomposed are now open for invasive plants to move in. Invasive plants in our parks came from our yards, spread by birds, wind and us.
2. Yard waste can contain pesticides, herbicides, fertilizers and disease causing bacteria, specifically E.coli, if pet waste is included**. These should never be part of wildlife's diet. Everyone lives in a watershed and a heavy rain can wash pollutants into streams, ponds, the James River and then the Chesapeake Bay.
3. Yard waste can destroy habitat by taking up the space that some wildlife use for their homes or it can smother and kill the living things underneath.

How can you help?

Mulch grass clippings and leaves to use in your yard - they are a great source of organic matter.

If you don't mulch - find a neighbor who will compost them.

If you choose to bag yard waste, invasive plants should be discarded in closed bags.

If you use a yard service, ask them where they discard the waste. Some less than reputable services dump waste in city parks*.

Remove invasive in your yard and grow more native plants.

Resources:

State Law reference— Similar provisions, Code of Virginia, § 18.2-147

The City of Richmond Leaf Collection program has ended for the 2022-2023 season, but the website has useful information. <https://www.rva.gov/public-works/leaf-collection>

Virginia Cooperative Extension publication www.ext.vt.edu

Publication 426-703 Making Compost from Yard Waste

*Invasive Plant ID <https://bugwoodcloud.org/imageSites/pdf/midatlantic-web.pdf>

**Please discard your pets poop bags in trash cans. Leaving the bags on the ground to biodegrade defeats the purpose of cleaning up after your pet.

Victuals From the Park

Forest Hill Park holds tasty edibles for birds, animals and insects if they know where to look. The same can be said for humans, although harvesting any living thing on park property today is forbidden. Nevertheless, the park contains food suitable for eating, such as blueberries.

It probably would be a safe bet that, in past years, park blueberries provided the basis for some old-fashioned cobbler. With that thought in mind, we found an old-fashioned cobbler recipe in an old cookbook. Our grandmothers might have made this and almost certainly served it with ice cream.

Blueberry Cobbler

1/2 cup butter
1 cup flour
1 cup white sugar
1 cup milk
4 cups fresh blueberries



Preheat the oven to 350 degrees F. Place butter in an 8 inch square baking dish. Melt butter in the preheating oven—about 5 minutes. Meanwhile, mix flour, sugar and milk in a bowl until combined: pour batter over melted butter in the baking dish. Scatter blueberries over the batter. Bake in the preheated oven until a toothpick inserted into the center comes out clean, about 1 hour.



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New Logo

The new logo of Friends of Forest Hill Park makes its first appearance in this issue. It can be seen below and at the top of the first page, where it will appear in future issues.

We are all accustomed to seeing the former logo, the Stone House with rolling hills and trees to its right. That design was the creation of our former officer and Board Member, Monica Rumsey, and it served us well for many years. However, in recent times, symbols and emblems have become compact. Acronyms are used instead of spelled out names. Wishing to remain current, we made the decision to produce a logo that is easily recognizable as well as practical, meaning it could fit on a pocket or a cap.

The chief designer was our Webmaster, Page Hayes. Her use of the Stone House captures the essence of the park and the chosen colors represent pleasant park days under blue skies.



Help us fundraise with Kroger Community Rewards

Did you know that when you shop at Kroger, you can help raise funds for the Friends of Forest Hill Park?

[Sign up at their website](#), and designate us as the recipient, and every time you use your Kroger card, you'll help fund our many activities! Thank you! [krogercommunityrewards](#)