

FRIENDS OF FOREST HILL PARK

The Forest Hill Park Post



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www.friendsofforesthillpark.org

Forest Hill Park Blue Bird Trail News

Submitted by FHP Trail Coordinator Laura Dysart

Six years ago, Christina Woodson, of the Virginia Blue Bird Society reached out to the Friends of Forest Hill Park about placing a blue bird trail in our park. Volunteers came out to learn more, and the park has had a well-monitored trail ever since.

Trails have been developed across the country in response to a declining Blue Bird population. The Blue Bird population has been affected by urbanization and deforestation. Predators such as invasive bird species, snakes and raccoons also have contributed to a decline in the blue bird population.

Forest Hill Park currently has ten Blue Bird boxes on its trail. The boxes are reserved for native cavity nesters. If a non-native bird, or invasive species, such as a Sparrow, builds a nest in these boxes, trained volunteers are able to recognize the nest and remove it. Sparrows can build their nests in another place.



The increasing sighting of Eastern Blue Birds is welcome after years of their population declining.

Volunteers monitor the Blue Bird trail on a weekly basis during the nesting season (April-August) following the Virginia Blue Bird Society monitoring guidelines. Volunteers assess each box to make sure the boxes and predator guards are in good condition. All boxes on the trail have predator guards to prevent snakes, raccoons and other predators from reaching into the box to take eggs. Volunteers also soap the interior of the boxes on a regular basis to keep wasps from building nests, remove any beginning wasp nest attempts, as well as placing a Vaseline ring

on the birdhouse pole to prevent ant invasions.

Volunteers record all activity for the Virginia Blue Bird Society including nests, eggs, hatchlings and fledglings for all native species. The data from the Forest Hill Park trail is submitted to the Virginia Blue Bird Society annually. Forest Hill Park has had great success with both Blue Birds and Chickadee species during the last 6 years. During the 2018 season, already we have had 3 Blue Bird nests and 3 Chickadee nests. We have had a problem with Sparrows taking over Chickadee nests, but Blue Birds are holding their ground so far. We currently have 5 Blue Bird eggs in one box, 2 hatchlings in another box, and 4 fledglings in the third box. Blue Birds will often return to have one or two more clutches of eggs. It is very important not to tamper with or open boxes in the park. There is a point when opening a box is dangerous to hatchlings.



Blue Bird eggs in Forest Hill Park

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Thank you to Viv Bruzesse, Friends of Forest Hill Park Junior, Students of Good Shepherd Episcopal School, John Bander and Marina Alexander for their volunteerism this season. If you are interested in joining a monitoring session, please contact Laura Dysart at [lauradysart@verizon.net](mailto:lauradysart@verizon.net).

## The Summer Solstice . . . the Beginning of Summer in Forest Hill Park

Rain fell day after day in the middle of June in the Richmond area. The moisture was very good for all of the plants and trees in Forest Hill Park, most particularly the recently planted seedlings near the Stone Pyramid and on the slopes northeast of the lake. By June 21st, the summer solstice, the ground was saturated yet the rains continued and on that evening, about 6" fell. With no where else to go, the torrents ran into Reedy Creek which roared down into the lake taking trees, rocks, anything in its path with it. The lake overflowed its banks and the deluge continued north over the dam back into Reedy Creek all the way to James River Park and James River. The destruction was astonishing.



Tree debris and trash covered portions of the asphalt service road, park benches and steel and chain fencing were torn away, large old trees whose roots had been rain-soaked fell over and the asphalt road north of the dam was destroyed. There is no telling what ended

up in the lake itself.

Richmond Parks, Recreation and Community Activities began the clean up on June 22nd. They closed sections where they were working and where it was no longer safe for visitors. RVA Clean Sweep and volunteers spent two hours in the park on June 24th picking up debris. Other people appeared individually beginning June 22nd to do whatever they could to restore the park to its former undisturbed state. The volunteer efforts continue.

Forest Hill Park has undergone a lot of



changes during its 100+ year history. Mother Nature wrought a large bluster this time, but our park remains welcoming and enjoyable.

This beautiful heron seemed oblivious to the destruction around it. It was in Reedy Creek north of the dam. Its presence means that fish are still in the lake—a very good sign.



# Park Champions



One of our volunteers has been cutting down Ailanthus trees (very invasive) near Forest Hill Avenue and Brookside Road. When the piles get large enough, the mysterious volunteer hauls them away.



We placed bright yellow signs where FFHP has planted native shrubs, trees and perennial flowers. We hope the mowers can see these signs even through the perspiration in their eyes.



**HAPPY JULY 4TH!**



Richard Bruce, Marlie Creasy-Smith and John Harris have been park champions for a long time. They are part of Richmond's finest Parks and Recreation staff.