

Friends of Forest Hill Park



Autumn 2023

Volunteers' Efforts Get Results

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After expelling plant invaders from Crooked Branch Ravine Park, look what's reviving.

Reedy Creek Coalition has been removing non-native, invasive plants from Crooked Branch Ravine Park for several years. Removing invasive plant species requires time, effort and persistence. We've seen encouraging progress and would like to share some examples with you.



Cranefly Orchid

There are new oak seedlings, members of the genus *Quercus*, sprouting where English ivy once covered the ground. There are some mature oaks in the immediate area but young oaks previously were rare. Removing the ivy must have improved conditions to allow acorns to sprout. What's so special about oaks? Oaks support so many creatures in a variety of ways that are absolutely necessary to diversity and stability of the eco system. Here are a few examples starting from the ground up:

Leaves decompose very slowly. This ensures that the ground is always covered and moisture is retained. Fungi and the many other organisms that live in the leaf litter slowly create fertile soil appropriate for the plants that belong there.

Leaves are host to more than 400 *Lepidoptera* species (moths and butterflies). A few caterpillars even feed on the dried oak leaves on the ground. Caterpillars are protein rich morsels and are the primary food for baby song birds.

Twigs, buds and leaves are browsed by some mammals, usually when other food sources are in short supply.

Acorns are food for some adult birds and mammals. Acorns are also essential to the life cycles of some insects.

The trunk provides long term storage of carbon.

Canopy shade moderates temperatures.

As an old oak declines and dies, it is still useful. There are cavities for nesting and food for woodpeckers. When it falls to the ground it decays slowly, providing a cool, moist habitat for many small critters living on the forest floor.

While all trees make similar contributions, oaks do it best.

The Cranefly Orchid, *Tipularia discolor*, blooms in August. The flower is pollinated by a nocturnal moth. The moth needs the flowers, the flowers need the moth. The plant can only grow in association with specific

fungi found in places with decaying, woody debris on the ground provided by a healthy tree canopy. But this cycle is broken if non-native plants, such as English ivy, spread and prevent leaves from getting to the ground and so the decaying, woody debris that is needed for the Crane fly/ fungi association is reduced. These striking plants could decline or die out altogether. This plant is now more abundant in areas where we have worked in previous years.

Partridge Berry, *Mitchella repens*, is a delicate woody vine that creeps along the ground, typically found in high quality natural areas. Last winter, while removing English ivy from the ground, we found this plant struggling to survive under the ivy. There were a few blooms this spring and it is now thriving and spreading. The berries remain on the plant until winter and our hope is that this will provide a bit more variety in the food available to some birds, chipmunks and other small mammals at a time when other food sources have been consumed. Several Native American tribes used this plant's leaves and berries for medicinal purposes.

We have also uncovered small sassafras trees, *Sassafras albidum*, that now appear to be thriving. Used by Native American tribes in the region, sassafras also came to have significant medical and food-related uses among colonial settlers.

These are just four of many examples of what revives when invasive plant species are removed. With each native species that begins to grow, flower, set seed and spread there are benefits to a variety of insects, amphibians, reptiles, birds and mammals, as well as to those of us to enjoy spending time in nature.



Partridge Berry

While there has been progress, the Reedy Creek Coalition needs more volunteers to help restore more of this small park. Please contact us at <https://reedycreekcoalition.org/contact-us/> for information about our work and how you can help.

Suggested reading: The Nature of Oaks by Douglas Tallamy. This book is available from our lending library. Check it out at <https://reedycreekcoalition.org/good-reads-for-the-watershed-2/>

Work and Recreation

Join Matt Zipperer and Chris Catanzaro on the Forest Hill Historic Walking Tour September 23rd or October 21st. Free for FFHP members, otherwise \$15 per person. Meet at the Stone House at 10:00 for a two hour tour during which you will hear about neighborhood beginnings, people who lived here and local architecture.

The David Ridderhof Day of Service will be on 9/30 from 10:00 until noon. Volunteers will work in the park removing invasive plants such as English ivy, Japanese honeysuckle, privet and more. Meet in the 3800 block of Forest Hill Avenue near the Historic District sign. Parking is available on Brookside Road across from the park. Bring gloves and hand clippers. At noon, we will gather in the park near the Stone Pyramid for pizza and soft drinks. **If you will be with us on 9/30, register your name at chriscatanzaro3@gmail.com no later than 9/25** so we'll know how many pizzas to bring.

We hope you will be with us on the Ridderhof Day of Service to help make the park a healthier place for our native plants and trees to thrive.

The Weed War



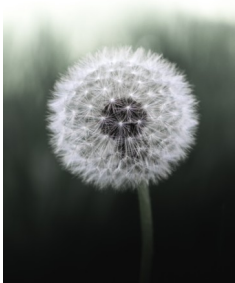
The lower left area in the top right photo shows a lot of greenery. The trouble is, it's all weeds. It doesn't take long for that unwanted greenery to sprout and march across the soil, overtaking native plants as it goes. Sometimes, park volunteers give Mother Nature a helping hand by pulling up the enemy plants, as they did on May 27th. The greenery seen in the lower photo is friendly foliage that supports the critters that live in the park. In addition to helping wildlife, it offers lovely blooms as the season moves along.



The volunteers in this photo stayed later than the usual quitting time to complete mulching two of the planting areas. A few of the volunteers left before the cameras appeared. The mulching on either side of the volunteers reflects their thorough work.



June Nature Walk



Suzette Lyon led an enlightening and fascinating tour through Forest Hill Park where she described methods to identify trees, plants, animals and insects and how they depend on each other to survive.

Luna moths prefer sweet gum, hickory and persimmon trees as hosts and those trees grow throughout the park. The photograph below left was taken in an area where milkweed is abundant. Monarch butterflies are drawn to milkweed and visit the area each blooming season. In the picture, a Swallowtail butterfly has stopped for a visit. In the picture on the right, Suzette stands near a Catalpa tree. Its flowers are attractive to bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds for pollination, and this tree is the sole host for the catalpa sphinx moth. Nature's bounty is rife in Forest Hill Park.



Symmetrical Leaf Damage, Also Known as Caterpillar Art



A future Swallowtail butterfly.



Most caterpillars eat plant matter. They usually prefer soft green plants that have lots of moisture since they usually don't have access to water. Some of the most common foods that caterpillars enjoy eating include wild grasses, herbs, fruit and vegetable vegetation, wild vegetation, and much more. Some species might even enjoy dead leaves.

As caterpillars nibble on leaves, they become prey for birds, which feed them to baby birds. Birds look for leaf damage, which is a good indicator of the presence of feasting caterpillars. Undamaged leaves are likely to dodge the presence of birds looking for food.

The leaves shown in these images are those of red bud trees and show signs of caterpillars' art. They appear to be evenly proportioned when, in fact, caterpillars created the natural looking designs as they consumed the leaves. This is a clever method used by caterpillars to enjoy a meal while avoiding becoming a meal for birds.



Photos courtesy of Suzette Lyon.

One Hundred Twenty Seven Years Ago

This article is reprinted from the June 30, 1896 issue of *The Roanoke Daily Times*.

Two Shots in the Dark

A Sensational Episode at Forest Hill Park Furnished by a Local Couple

There was a bit of sensation on the lake shore, at the foot of the glen, over in Forest Hill Park a few nights ago. There is a puzzled watchman over there yet.

A young man, who figures conspicuously in the social life of Church Hill and a pretty girl, who accompanied him on the occasion, were the central figures.

They were strolling in the moonlight when the lady called her escort's attention to the fact that their footsteps were being dogged by a man who was following closely behind them.

To ascertain whether the lady's surmise was correct, the young man suggested that they follow several paths in turn leading in various directions. The experiment proved beyond a doubt that the individual in their wake was trailing them.

"Suppose we sit down here on the grass," the gentleman suggested, halting. They sat down. Their shadower moved into a clump of bushes a short distance behind them. The Richmond couple was feeling most uncomfortable by this time.

"Are you afraid of a pistol shot?" the young man whispered into the lady's ear. "I've got a revolver in my pocket, and I think I can frighten him off."

"Fire away," she answered. The much provoked youth got his pistol out and fired two shots in rapid succession into the green sward twenty yards away from the spy's lurking place. The echo of the last report had hardly died away before the form of the park policeman loomed up before the couple, greatly to their confusion.

"Did you fire those shots?" asked the official.

"No," replied the guilty party, untruthfully; "but I think they were fired by someone in that clump of bushes." The next instant the park policeman had collared the man in the bushes, who clamorously asserted his innocence. After searching his man the watchman returned to the young couple. In the meantime, the frightened youth, acting upon a brilliant idea which suggested itself, had given the weapon to the young lady, who secreted it in the bosom of her dress.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the Cerberus of Forest Hill Park, approaching the embarrassed youth, "but unless you permit me to search you, and thus convince myself that you have no pistol on your person, I shall have to arrest you on the charge of carrying a revolver concealed and shooting in the park."

"It's hard to be subjected to such an indignity, but rather than bring this lady into disagreeable notoriety I'll submit," replied the gallant beau, throwing up his hands.

"Well, I'll be blowed," was all the surprised park guard could say when he had finished the search. Nearly fifty people had gathered on the scene when the young man hastened away with his feminine preserver. The park policeman searched the bushes and the grass in vain for the revolver, which, he said, he was certain must be somewhere around. But he groped about in his search without avail.

"What do you think of that?" he asked in astonishment of the man whom he had captured in the clump of bushes.

"I think that young fellow's a blankety blanked prevaricator," returned that worthy, "for I'll swear I saw him fire the shots. He ought to give that girl a \$50 bracelet."

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