

# FRIENDS OF FOREST HILL PARK

*The Forest Hill Park Post*



www.friendsofforesthillpark.org

**Autumn 2022**

## Forest Hill Park Nature Walk

**Suzette Lyon**

On June 11 an interested group of people spent the morning exploring the plant life in the Old Azalea Garden. Friends of Forest Hill Park has been removing invasive species there for a long time and much progress has been made. However, our first stop was in an area where at least 10 non-native, invasive plant species grow in small numbers and very close together. Species included multiflora rose, liriopse, winter creeper, oriental bittersweet, Japanese stilt grass, Japanese honeysuckle, mimosa, privet, English ivy and Himalayan blackberry. While this makes for a very good collection for learning invasive plant ID, we don't plan to keep it! All of these are a growing problem throughout the park and perhaps in your yard; most are spread by seed after birds and others consume the fruit. We suggest this website for more information. <https://blueridgeprism.org/>

The trees we observed included oak, hickory, maple, pine, sassafras, hackberry, elm and magnolia. The approach was to simply observe the differences between one tree and another. Is branching arrangement opposite or alternate? Are the leaves simple or compound, lobed or not lobed, edges smoother or serrated? Key characteristics like these, in addition to subtle clues, are needed to arrive at a correct ID, but for some species, especially oaks, ID is difficult. We also discussed keystone species - those species that maintain the integrity and function of an ecosystem. Our native oaks are one such species for this area and we were delighted to find many young oaks sprouting in areas that are no longer mowed. That is good news indeed!

We found several native shrubs and perennials while exploring, all of which make their contribution to wildlife with their pollen, nectar, fruit or leaves. And we talked about...

**Caterpillars** - The caterpillars of moths and butterflies (Lepidoptera) are the base of the food chain for many creatures and most Lepidoptera only lay eggs on plant species that their caterpillars will eat. (Think Monarchs and milkweed.) Therefore, it is important that our plant populations include those species that will produce the most caterpillars; oaks support more than any other genus.

**Leaf cutter bees** – A group of native bees cut pieces of leaves for making their nests. We know they are in the area because we found evidence on redbud leaves. (Note that the image of leaf cutter bees' work on page 2 is spice bush, not a redbud.)

**Gall** – Abnormal growths on plants can have many causes. The ones we observed were homes for tiny insect larvae. The female adult lays an egg on a leaf and this causes the leaf to form an abnormal growth which protects the larva while it grows. Insects usually lay eggs on specific plant species and the galls are each unique for the species. Page 2 contains images of three different galls found in the park.

**IMPORTANT NOTE:** Caterpillars eat leaves, some bees cut leaves and some insects prompt plants to form protected places for their larva to grow. This is how an ecosystem functions and should not be viewed as damage to the plants. In fact, I find it fascinating!

This is just a partial list our observations and discussions! Please consider joining us on our next nature walk.



Top row: Leaves can help ID trees, tulip tree beauty moth, eyespot gall on maple  
 Second row: onion gall on hickory, goldenrod gall, evidence of leaf cutter bee activity.

The image on right is rattlesnake plantain. The image under that is milkweed. Both plants live in Forest Hill Park. In the photo below, Suzette explains how members of the ecosystem in the park depend on each other for survival.



Are raccoons and snails a gardener’s scourge or balm? Turns out they’re both.

Directly or indirectly, each resident in ecosystems, such as home gardens, depends on other residents. For example, ladybugs are predator insects that eat other insects. But ladybugs are favorite meals for martins and robins. It is probable that each member of an ecosystem makes both positive and negative contributions.

Snails are not held in high regard by gardeners because they often devour leafy vegetables and seedlings at an alarming rate, but snails need lots of energy to eat decaying plant matter – a favored snail meal - in gardens. When digested, the decaying plant matter is returned to the garden in the form of poop, which is an excellent fertilizer.



Another snail delicacy is insect eggs, including eggs of other snails. If the snail population in your garden is abundant, you will not see many beneficial or harmful bugs because snails have consumed the bug eggs. To keep the snail population up, use organic mulch.

Snails do an excellent job aerating garden soil. During hot weather, they tend to go underground where it’s cooler. They construct small chambers to allow the flow of air and do not return above ground until it rains.

Natural predators will visit your garden if snails live there. Snakes, frogs and some birds enjoy consuming snails. The final contribution of snails to their ecosystem occurs after they die. Their shells contain calcium that returns to the soil as the shells decompose.

Raccoons are not appreciated for their mischief, such as ransacking trashcans and inhabiting attics, but aspects of their diet are helpful to the ecosystem.

There is almost nothing raccoons will not eat and they have good appetites. They enjoy fruit, vegetables, nuts, meat and pet food but their diet also helps control the populations of yellow jackets, snakes, mice and more.

Raccoons’ habit of dunking their food in water prior to consumption isn’t completely understood. One theory suggests that wetting their front paws makes them more pliable to increase their sense of touch. This would allow them to feel spoiled spots, which they wouldn’t want to eat.



Raccoons have a rare ability to climb upward or downward and can climb down head first. They’re strong swimmers and can run up to 15 miles per hour. Imagine their pursuing prey at that speed! They communicate with each other by vocalizing sounds such as hisses, chatters, grunts, and squeaks and they can purr similar to domesticated cats.

During cold weather, raccoons seek out attics, sheds, culverts and other human infrastructure that provides warmth and shelter. The layer of fat they gained during warmer weather helps them survive the cold since they do not hibernate.

## Victorian Entertainment in Forest Hill Park

Prior to the introduction of electronic amusements such as radio and television in American homes, outdoor venues served as stages and theaters for family diversions. The advertisement below on the right appeared in a September 11, 1897 local newspaper. In addition to offering rolling hills, a lake and forested paths, Forest Hill Park was a popular destination for variety shows.

Fortune tellers, magicians, jugglers and other entertainers rented rooms from local residents. Trolley cars brought visitors to the park on Semmes Avenue to 41st Street.

The park continued to attract large crowds well after the end of the Victorian Era and up until the end of Prohibition and the 1929 stock market crash, but the subsequent financial hardships forced Americans to spend their money on less frivolous things and the amusement park closed.



This image was taken on the west side of the Stone House. The Dip-the-Dip roller coaster can be seen on the left. Photo courtesy of Carolyn Paulette



Victorian era couples enjoying fresh air and sunshine in the park. No doubt, this type of pastime was healthier than most indoor diversions.

**FOREST HILL PARK**

Week SEPT. 6th.  
Every Night  
at 8:30 o'clock.  
Matinee:  
Saturday at 4:30  
P. M.

**VAUDEVILLE.**

Last Week of the Vaudeville.

Return of the Favorites  
OSCAR P. SISSON,  
Assisted by  
ESTER WALLACE,  
In a New Musical Comedy entitled  
"A LITTLE OF EVERYTHING."

PAYNE AND CRAYPO,  
Society Sketch Artists.

HART and IRVING,  
Transformation Artists and Mystifiers.

REYNARD,  
In Ventriloquial Pastimes.

MISS JESSIE COLE,  
Singing Negro Character Songs.

BLUES' BAND plays at each performance. See the GONDOLA and FIREWORKS on the Lake every night.

ADMISSION, 10c. No charge for Seats. Ladies and Children (Matinee) 5 cents.