



**Christmas at the Stone House**

The Stone House in Forest Hill Park will be open and decorated for the season on December 2nd from 11:30 a.m. until 4:30 p.m. The Backpack Storyteller will share folk stories for children beginning at 1:00 and Santa will arrive at 2:00 to visit with the children until 4:30.

Tables will be set up for the little ones to enjoy crafts. Apple cider and cookies will be available for everyone starting at noon. There is no charge.



Both children and adults were beguiled by the Backpack Storyteller's tales. The children were thrilled when she said she heard bells jingling and then Santa entered the parlor from the north entrance.

Santa gave each child who visited with him a candy cane and parents captured memorable photos in the old fashioned setting.

I heard a bird sing  
In the dark of December,  
A magical thing,  
And sweet to remember:  
"We are nearer to spring  
Than we were in September."

~Oliver Herford, "Hope," in *The Century Magazine*, 1914



What follows is the first of a series of articles related to the book *The Nature of Oaks: The Rich Ecology of Our Most Essential Native Trees*, by Douglas Tallamy, with supplemental information from other sources. The intent is to stimulate further interest in ecological interactions in nature. Dr. Tallamy is a well-known entomologist who works at the University of Delaware. His previous books include *Bringing Nature Home* and *Nature's Best Hope*.

Tallamy and his students have worked for many years to quantify the benefits of native plants. *The Nature of Oaks* is a follow-up on his determination that oaks support over 900 species of native moths and butterflies. In contrast to this staggering number, other genera of trees may support just a few species of native insects. The book focuses on the role of oaks in food webs, which are defined as complex networks of food chains identifying food relationships within communities of organisms. This is just one of many ways that things are interconnected in nature.

*The Nature of Oaks* describes the many ecological benefits provided by this genus (*Quercus* Oaks are distributed across not only North America, but also Asia, Europe, and northern and central South America. In fact, *Quercus* is the largest genus of trees in the Northern hemisphere.

Below a few of the many interactions and phenomena covered in the book are described. Topics are organized by month, as in the book.

October: Oaks and blue jays are mutually beneficial. Oaks produce large, nutritious fruits, and jays disperse them. Jays have evolved to have a small hook at the end of their beaks to open the tough exterior of acorns, and jays have an expanded esophagus to carry up to five acorns at one time. According to Tallamy, a single jay can bury up to 4,500 acorns per year. Most of these are not eaten, but rather germinate to form new trees. Furthermore, jays preferentially disperse acorns from healthy trees. How? Healthy trees produce more acorns than trees affected by diseases such as oak wilt and sudden oak death.

Of course many animals in addition to jays consume acorns. Ecologically, acorns and any other type of fruit are called mast, and nuts are considered hard mast. Masting refers to the very large production of fruits regionally in some years. Furthermore, the red and white oak groups seldom mast in the same year. Acorn predators, including deer, squirrels, wild hogs, turkeys and other birds, get their fill in mast years, called acorn predator satiation. In these years plenty of acorns are left behind to germinate. However, in other years, limited supplies of acorns will limit the populations of acorn predators. Thus, in the long term, irregular acorn supplies may help manage the population size of all species involved.

November: This section includes information on weevils, which are small beetles with an elongated head capsule. Acorn weevils, along with some ants and moths, spend at least a part of their life cycles within acorns. These and many other insects serve as pollinators as well as food for other animals.



White oak (*Quercus alba*) tree in Forest Hill Park.

Photo courtesy of Chris Catanzaro

December: Have you ever noticed that oaks, beeches and chestnuts (members of the Fagaceae family) tend to hold onto at least some of their dead leaves through the winter and early spring? Why does this leaf marcescence occur? It may protect leaf buds over the winter or trap snow for spring moisture.

A final species included here due to its association with Christmas is mistletoe (covered in the book in July). Mistletoe loves to grow in the canopy of oaks, and it is categorized as a hemiparasite. Being green, it generates almost all of its own energy, but taps into the vascular system of oaks to get water. Mistletoe is the only host for the great purple hairstreak butterfly, and emarginea moths are also specialists found on it.

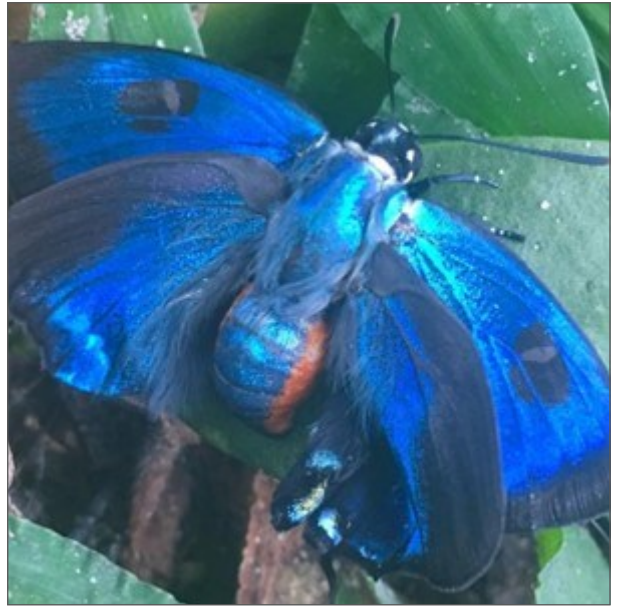
In our next newsletter issue you will find more descriptions of critters dependent on oaks. Meanwhile, since “fall is for planting”, Friends of Forest Hill Park encourages you to consider planting a new tree on your property. If you don’t have room for an oak, consider one of the other tree types that support many native moths and butterflies. They include native species of cherries, willows and birches. Examples are black/wild cherry (*Prunus serotina*) and river birch (*Betula nigra*). Also, if you’re interested in purchasing a copy of *The Nature of Oaks*, by Douglas Tallamy, it was published in 2021 by Timber Press, ISBN 9781643260440 (hardcover).



An acorn weevil.

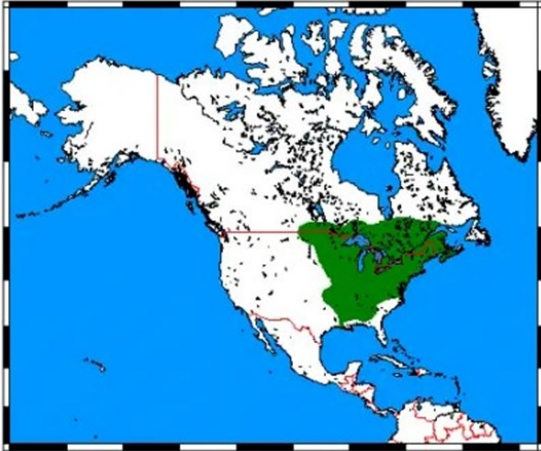
Photo by Susan Ellis, Bugwood.org

Adult acorn weevil (*Curculio glandium*.) Female adults lay their eggs in acorns, and larvae hatch inside the acorns.



Great purple hairstreak (*Atlides halesus*) butterfly adults. Left and right photos show dorsal and ventral sides of wings, respectively. Oak mistletoe (*Phoradendron leucarpum*), which grows on oaks, is the only host for the great purple hairstreak in the southeastern U. S.

These small rodents were first described by Mark Catesby in his 1743 *The Natural History of Carolina, Florida, and the Bahama Islands*. The name “chipmunk” comes from the Ojibwe word which translates as “one who descends trees headlong.” Five dark stripes stretch from their rumps to their shoulders, alternating with four light colored stripes. Chipmunks have pouches in their cheeks that can carry large amounts of food to their burrows.



The green area on the map is the territory of Eastern chipmunks. These small rodents prefer deciduous forests or rocky ground with logs and tree stumps. Sometimes, they share their habitat with humans in garden areas near houses and outbuildings. They are active during daylight hours with heightened movement in mid-morning and mid-afternoon.

Eastern chipmunks are extremely territorial, particularly near their burrows. Though they are skilled climbers, chipmunks prefer to forage on the ground, hoarding much of the provision they find in their burrows. They hibernate during cold months in their burrows, which they dig themselves, but they might emerge above ground during this period on warmer, sunny days. Typical burrows are composed of numerous entrances and tunnels which are connected to each other. Chipmunks make their nests from dried or chewed leaves in one of the burrow chambers. Other chambers contain food, such as nuts, seeds and berries. They complement their diet with insects, slugs, bird eggs, earthworms and mushrooms.

Eastern chipmunks have two breeding seasons – February to April and June to August. The gestation period is approximately 35 days and each litter is from 2 to 8 young. The newborns are called “pups” and are hairless, blind and pink – about the size of jelly beans. Females are very protective of their pups and will remain with them for the first two months.



In addition to being cute, Chipmunks contribute to the good health of our ecosystem. They promote plant growth by dispersing seeds and they are natural pest controllers. They eat critters that can harm plants and crops such as beetles, caterpillars and grasshoppers. They are a valuable asset in Forest Hill Park.

Sources *Britannica Animals and Nature*



This May 1911 advertisement for the amusements in Forest Hill Park shows a park quite unlike the one we know today.

The trolley cars came west on Semmes Avenue and turned right on 41st Street into the park. In the days prior to radio and television, parks of this type were a tempting attraction for the public.

THE RICHMOND VIRGINIAN—SATURDAY, MAY 13, 1911.

**The Coolest Place in the State. Five Cents Car Fare. Fast Schedule.**

**Get the Habit! Everybody Goes! Many Attractions. Opens Monday, May 15th.**

**Richmond's Famous Breathing Spot. NEW FAST CAR SERVICE.**

## FOREST HILL PARK THE PIC-NICERS PARADISE

<p><b>For Pic-Nics</b></p> <p>The most attractive places around Richmond for picnicking are found within the confines of Forest Hill. "The shady woods, the bubbling brooks," are suggestive of the most ideal places. Pure, fresh spring water is abundant, and mosaic banks everywhere lend an air of cool quietude, to be found nowhere else.</p>	<p><b>Perfect Protection</b></p> <p>Every possible precaution has been taken to maintain the best of order. No person will be allowed on the grounds if are in any way objectionable. The highest class of patronage is desired only. So ladies and children can avoid themselves of the pleasures of the park with the assurance of perfect protection.</p>	<p><b>Experienced Management</b></p> <p>Arrangements can be made with the manager for special entertainments and private parties. High class refreshments are served at reasonable prices. All classes of realized amusements have been provided. For any information desired write or apply in person to Colonel J. H. Livingston, Manager Forest Hill Park. Phone Madison 5945.</p>	<p><b>For Outings</b></p> <p>Churches, Sunday schools, clubs, societies, lodges, etc., can arrange for an outing at Forest Hill that will not only afford indelible pleasure, but the cost of transportation is brought down to the minimum. The special car schedule now in effect makes this place the most popular with Richmond people.</p>
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**Offers Every Form of High-Class Amusement. Boating, Bathing, Bowling, Field Sport, Merry-Go-Round, Toboggan Slide, &c., &c.**

J. H. LIVINGSTONE, Incorporated.

This year, up until the Dave Ridderhof Day of Service, the Friends of Forest Hill Park volunteers had worked 485 hours in the park. The camaraderie had been agreeable. The fresh air, sunshine and physical work had been invigorating. The native flora and fauna had benefitted from the removal of non-native invasive plants. To keep the positive momentum going, 53 volunteers, some from as far away as New Mexico and Oregon, arrived to work on the Ridderhof Day of Service.

**Before**



**After**



English ivy grows in layers so what is visible to the viewer is only the top tier. Four volunteers spent 2 hours removing ivy from the hill on the left until it looked like the photo above.



Carolyn and Christie directed participants and answered their questions. Michael Gee (Parks and Recreation) brought a truck load of wood chips for use as mulch. His load included tools needed to spread the mulch.



Native trees, young and old, benefitted from the load of mulch. Volunteers unloaded it and raked it around the trees in short order. In some cases, they connected 3 or 4 trees within the same mulch bed. This achieved an attractive appearance.



When the work was completed, everyone enjoyed pizzas, soft drinks and ice cold water. The fellowship was singular among those who had worked toward the same goal; to take care of the park Dave loved and keep it healthy for future generations.

## A Toast to Eggnog

Most culinary historians agree that eggnog originated from the early medieval Britain “posset,” a hot, milky, ale-like drink. By the 1200s, monks drank posset with eggs and figs. Since milk, eggs and sherry were costly, eggnog was used to toast prosperity and good health by the wealthy classes.

When eggnog hopped the pond during the 1700s, it became tied to the holidays. American colonies had farms and farms had an abundance of chickens and cows and inexpensive rum.

The origin of the name is not clear. One theory is that “nog” comes from “noggin,” meaning a wooden cup, or “grog,” a strong beer. By the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the term “eggnog” was part of American vernacular.

### Virginia Eggnog (1914 recipe)

Beat separately the yolks and whites of ten eggs, the yolks to a soft cream. To the beaten yolks add one pound of granulated sugar, beating until fully blended and very light. Let one quart of fresh milk come to a boil and pour over the yolk of egg and sugar, stirring constantly until well blended. To this add one gill of French brandy or one-half pint of good whiskey. On top of this place the beaten white of egg and grated nutmeg. Serve recipe either hot or cold.



*A RIGHT MERRIE CHRISTMAS*





These 19 volunteers multiplied by 2 hours completed 38 hours of work in Forest Hill Park on October 28th. The predominant enemy was English Ivy followed closely by Japanese Honeysuckle. Native honeysuckle also grows in the park. It has coral colored blooms as opposed to the yellow-white blooms of Japanese honeysuckle. Thanks to this energetic group, a large area of the park has been freed of the ivy invaders.