



Walking the Woods

Fall 2009

Calvin College Ecosystem Preserve



Connecting Families with Nature Passport Program

The Ecosystem Preserve is proud to participate in this new and exciting program. Made possible by a grant from the Environmental Protection Agency, this is a collaborative program between seven Kent County environmental education providers - Ada Township Parks, Blandford Nature Center, Calvin College Ecosystem Preserve, Howard Christensen Nature Center, John Ball Zoo, the Kent Conservation District and Wittenbach/Wege Agri-Science and Environmental Education Center. Through this free passport program, we are partnering together to provide resources for families to reconnect with their natural world in Kent County. You and your family are invited to get outside and start connecting with nature today!



Who: Families with children ages 4 to 12 years old
Parents, grandparents, guardians and mentors are all welcome to participate in this program with the special children in their lives.

When: September 19, 2009 to September 25, 2010
The program officially started with our open house on September 19 and ends with a celebration at John Ball Zoo on Sept 25, 2010. Free passports can be picked up at the BIC anytime throughout the fall and winter during normal business hours.

Where: Calvin College Ecosystem Preserve and the five partner locations throughout Kent County listed to your left.

How: Pick up your free passport to outdoor adventures in Kent County at the Bunker Interpretive Center. Then as a family attend a variety of fun educational programs, go on family hikes, and participate in stewardship projects throughout the year. A stamp will be awarded for each completed activity. A complete passport will earn one free zoo pass for your child to attend the celebration on September 25, 2010. All 1st Saturday Programs will qualify for a passport stamp.

Why: Our goal is happier families and a healthier environment!

Upcoming Educational Programs & Events

Saturday, December 5, 2009 10:00 to 11:30 am
Animals Preparing for Winter
Nancy McIntyre, CCEP Volunteer Naturalist

Brrr ! It's getting cold outside! Join Miss Nancy in front of the fireplace as she reads the story First Snow in the Woods by Carl Sams II and then head outside for a hike through the preserve to discover how Michigan animals prepare for the winter. Please come prepared for the weather and wear warm boots. A great program for families with children ages 4-12.

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Hours

Bunker Interpretive Center

Monday—Friday 9 am to 5 pm

Saturday 10 am to 4 pm

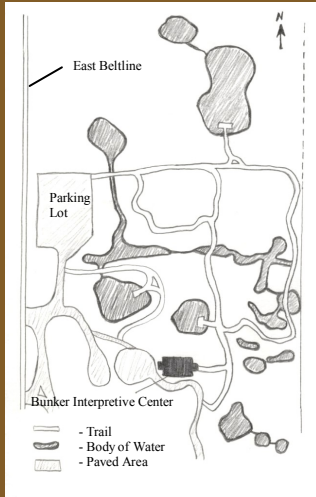
(school year only)

Closed Sunday

Trails

Open Daily

Dawn –Dusk



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Walking the Woods is published quarterly as an educational connection to Calvin staff and students, neighbors, volunteers, and friends who support the Calvin College Ecosystem Preserve with their involvement and care.

Featured Creature



American Mink

Mustela vison

The mink is an exciting new resident to the Calvin College Ecosystem Preserve, first sighted during the spring of 2008.

The mink has been seen occasionally around South Pond and Whiskey Pond.

Size

Male: 22-28 inches long

Female: 18-22 inches long

Color

Dark brown sleek coat, tail is darker than body. Look for white under the chin or belly. Mink fur is highly prized.

Diet

Carnivorous mammal that feeds on muskrat, fish, frogs, crayfish, snakes, birds, and rodents.

Habitat

Wetland environments

Interesting Facts

- Minks are related to skunks and otters
- Let off a foul smell when threatened
- Excellent swimmers
- Nocturnal

Unplugged: Connecting Children with Nature

The purpose of this column is to provide small fun ways to get the children you know outdoors and enjoying God's creation.

Galls: Small Homes for Tiny Creatures

Do you ever wonder what those sphere shaped growths on goldenrod stems or reddish worm-like protrusions on black cherry leaves are? A gall is an abnormal growth of plant tissue produced by a chemical irritation or intrusion by fungi, viruses, mites, or insects. Galls come in a fascinating range of sizes, shapes, and colors. One of the most common types of galls are the goldenrod ball gall which is the result of an adult fly laying eggs in the plant stem which stimulates plant tissue growth around the egg. A larva emerges from the egg and spends winter in the gall. In the spring it pupates and emerges as an adult fly from a hole previously created in the gall by the larva.



Black Cherry Leaf Galls

Go on a Gall Hunt!

Fall and early winter are great times to discover galls. Many different types of galls can be found in fields and woods including: goldenrod galls, oak leaf galls, and tree galls. Go on a gall hunt to see how many different types of galls you can find together, then discover what is inside.

Investigate What's Inside!

Under adult supervision, take a sharp knife and cut open a gall and investigate whether or not the larvae is still inside. What texture does the leaf tissue have inside? If the larvae is gone, can you find an exit hole? If you find a larvae, leave it outside so a woodpecker can find it and enjoy the tasty treat. Here are some internet resources to continue learning more about galls: www.backyardnature.net/galls.htm and www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/abrahmsn/solidago/main.html



Goldenrod Gall

Thank You Volunteers!

Thank you to all who spent their time and effort volunteering at the Calvin College Ecosystem Preserve this summer & early fall with the following projects:

Building our New Puppet Theater

Bill Sweetman (carpenter) & Helen Grasman (seamstress)

Clearing and Creating a New Trail

Rhonda Reider, Andrea Lubberts and family, Mark White, Bryant Vander Lei

Presenting Programs and Assisting at Summer Camp

Mary Ann Sheline, Dr. Dave Warners, Dr. John Wertz, Tim Langenberg, Ben Groenhout

Removing Invasive Species and Weeds

Bryant Vander Lei, Kathy Martin

Rescuing Plants Before They Were Plowed Under

Mark White, Kathy Martin

Teaching School Programs

Carole Gaiser, Sharon Bajema, Nancy McIntyre

Transplanting Native Plants

Andrea Lubberts and her sister-in-law, Virginia Van Anandel, Brian Seely

Connecting Families with Nature Open House

Nancy McIntyre, Allison Graff

Repairing Bluebird Houses

Bill Sweetman

Fall Clean Up Day Around the BIC

Virginia Van Anandel and sister-in-law, Allison Graff, Mark White, Brian Seely, Anna Casto

We would like to extend a special thanks to Bryant Vander Lei! Bryant is a student at Grand Rapids Christian High School and volunteered this summer at the preserve assisting Jodi Unema and Josh Garone with various steward projects. He volunteered over 40 hours of service to the preserve.

Volunteer Opportunities

Prune Plants in the Solarium

A volunteer is needed a couple times a month to care for and prune the plants in the solarium in our laboratory. Occasionally, the volunteer would also be responsible for planting new plants in the solarium. If you enjoy getting your hands dirty and working with tropical plants a couple hours a month, this job is for you.

For a list of other volunteer opportunities check out our new volunteer webpage at www.calvin.edu/academic/eco-preserve/getinvolved or contact Jeanette Henderson at 616-526-7601 or preserve@calvin.edu for more information.

Meet a Student Staff Member

Jacob Meier

Preserve Steward & Stewardship Intern

Jacob is a senior biology major from Perrysburg, Ohio and has worked at the Calvin College Ecosystem Preserve for over a year in a variety of positions. On the job, he removes invasive species and non native plants, inventories animal and bird populations, works with volunteers, and collects seeds from the native gardens.



Jacob played lacrosse for Calvin and also enjoys wakeboarding, snowboarding, and outdoor activities. He plans to attend graduate school to study restoration ecology

Our Wish List

We appreciate all contributions! Your donations help us with education programs and stewardship projects.

Bird Seed & Suet Field Guides Work Gloves
Arts & Craft Supplies Binoculars Loppers

Recycling Closet: Help us be naturally crafty! Bring in your reusable materials to be used for displays and art projects for our summer camp and public programs.

Cloth & Fabric Scrapes White, Blue, Green, & Brown Sheets
Toilet & Paper Towel Rolls Egg cartons Beads
Velcro Plastic Milk Cartons Coffee Cans with Lids Corks

Becoming Green: Small Ways You Can Make a Difference Green Up Your School or Work Lunch



The best way to begin "greening" up your lunch is to **reduce waste!** Make the switch from plastic sandwich and snack bags to reusable containers that can be washed at home.

Send your child with homemade snacks, vegetables, and fruits instead of pre-packaged, processed food; it will make for a healthier child and a happier environment. Healthy and possibly cheaper alternatives might include carrots, celery, raisins, homemade cookies, or popcorn.

Teach your child what products are recyclable and encourage them to become good stewards and dispose of trash correctly.

5 Reasons Why it is Important for Your Family to Connect with Nature

1. Happier Families

Playing outdoors as a family is important for everyone and lots of fun, too! We all know that spending time together creates and builds positive bonds.

2. Smarter Families

Spending quality time outside invites all of us to use our senses, observe, ask questions and use our creativity. We learn as we play! The inquisitive questions of our children spur all of us to become lifelong learners.

3. Affordable Adventures

Outdoor adventures are extremely affordable as most are free or low cost!

4. Healthier Families

A growing body of research indicates getting outdoors and enjoying nature as a family can have a positive impact on the physical, emotional and mental health of children and their parents. Simply taking a walk through your local park can lower the whole family's stress level. Walking, running, hiking, climbing, kayaking and snowshoeing are activities all members of the family can do together.

5. Healthier Environment for All

Ultimately, families who play outside are families that care for the environment in small and big ways. They are more informed about important local and global environmental issues and simple ways they can help. They participate in stewardship and pollution prevention projects such as litter clean up and planting trees and native flowers. Make a choice today that you and your family will find ways to make this a healthier planet for us all.



For a variety of ways to connect with nature in Kent County visit the **Connecting Families with Nature** website at www.kentconservation.org/families

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MINDS IN THE MAKING
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