

Litzsinger Road Ecology Center

Community Newsletter

9711 Litzsinger Road • Ladue, MO 63124 • Phone (314)442-6717 • www.litzsinger.org

Holiday Thanks

By Bob Coulter

As I write this over the Thanksgiving weekend, there are many people I'd like to thank for making this another successful year.

For teachers, we thank you for your dedication to the kids and your courage in creating great learning opportunities in what is for many a challenging political climate. So much of what we do together doesn't fit into narrow accountability schemes, but this fact is more a reflection on the tests than it is on the value of the projects you design. You know what good learning is and you make it happen despite the obstacles.

For volunteers, we thank you for giving your time so freely to make a difference in kids' lives. Academic studies and our common sense tell us how important it is for kids to have nature experiences growing up. Whether it's leading student groups or making improvements on site, you help to make that happen every day in a way that builds students' engagement and commitment to the environment.

For the Litzsinger Road Ecology Foundation, we thank you for your generous support of the programs on site. By supporting our having an ample staff and funding transportation costs, we can sustain having intensive, ongoing relationships with teachers and schools. We know one-shot field trips have limited impact. Your financial support allows us to do better for the kids.

Finally, for the kids, we thank you for your interest and enthusiasm. Every discovery you make and every project you undertake makes it all worthwhile for us.

As we move into the holiday season, the staff and I wish you the very best. ☺

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Upcoming LREC Events:

Volunteer Holiday Party

December 14, 11am-2pm. At Glasshouse.

Upcoming Opportunities:

December at the Garden

For more information go to www.mobot.org.

- "Gardenland Express: Wilderness Escape" annual holiday flower and train show. This year's theme is National Parks.
- Holiday wreath exhibition by local floral designers.
- Tower Grove House is decked out for the holidays.

Chanukah: Festival of Lights

December 2, noon-4pm at the Garden. Includes Israeli music and dance, a menorah-lighting ceremony, and Chanukah merchandise.

Christmas Carols in the Garden

December 8 and 9, 1-5pm at the Garden. Includes holiday carols, Santa in his sleigh, chestnuts roasting, and gingerbread house display. Special event admission rates apply.

Kwanzaa: Festival of the First Fruits

December 28, noon-4pm at the Garden. Includes storytelling, drumming, musical performances, and crafts and jewelry displays.

HT, MBG, SSD, ASD, and LREC

By Eddie Jones

Last month, Litzsinger Road Ecology Center was visited by a group of students who were, as usual, captivated by the sights, sounds, and smells of the woods and prairies. On this particular day, LREC staff and volunteers were just as captivated by the students. These young people are courageously learning to cope with the pervasive challenges of autism. Accompanied by their teachers and assistants from Southview School, the teens explored the ecology center in small groups, each lead by an orange-clad educator.

As one of five schools for special needs students in the Special School District of St. Louis County (SSD), Southview serves students with developmental disabilities and autism. Classroom activities include instruction in recreational, vocational, and basic life skills as well as academic instruction. The average class size is seven students with one teacher and one paraprofessional. School staff includes occupational therapists, physical therapists, speech and language therapists, physical education teachers, nurses, social workers, art and music teachers, guidance counselors, instructional technology facilitators, music therapists, and hearing and vision specialists.

According to the National Institute of Mental Health, autism

spectrum disorders (ASD), “are characterized by varying degrees of impairment in communication skills, social interactions, and restricted, repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior.” Each affected individual displays these deficits differently, ranging from mild to severe. For more information, go to www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/autism/complete-publication.shtml.

When the students are at the school, they may not be in their classroom. Southview has a greenhouse, an accessible garden, and a privately-owned woodland adjacent to the school. Students and staff make use of these educational settings to study plant life and develop gardening skills. As an added benefit to LREC, Jeanne Carbone, the Southview teacher serving as our primary school contact, did a summer stint as a LREC horticulture volunteer.

In addition to excursions to Litzsinger Road Ecology Center, students make regular visits to a variety of community destinations, including Missouri Botanical Garden (MBG), where students participate in the Therapeutic Horticulture program, led by program director, Jennifer Smith. Between their monthly excursions to MBG, Jennifer visits Southview each month, facilitating plant-based learning both outdoors and in the classrooms.

Horticultural therapy uses plants and gardening activities to improve the body, mind, and spirit. The mission of the MBG program is “to enrich the lives of senior citizens and special needs populations, particularly those with limited resources and limited abilities, by sharing knowledge about and interacting with the diversity of life in our natural world.” For more information, select the “Therapeutic Horticulture” link under “Education” on the Missouri Botanical Garden home page, www.mobot.org.

The combined work of Southview School, the MBG Therapeutic Horticulture program, and Litzsinger Road Ecology Center is emerging as an effective example of educational partnership. We are looking forward to the students’ return visit this winter. ☞

Southview School at a glance:
Location: Crestwood, Missouri
District: Special School District of St. Louis County
Current enrollment: 230
Number of staff: 125
Students served: Ages 5–21 years with developmental disabilities, emotional disturbances, and autism
Classrooms served by LREC: 2
Classrooms served by MBG Therapeutic Horticulture: 4

Red-tailed Hawk Release

By Mary Voges

Recently, LREC was the scene of the release of a red-tailed hawk, (*Buteo jamaicensis*), with an interesting story. It seems that this juvenile hawk detoured into the breeze-way glass doors of the glasshouse, where Malinda found her on October 6. She was listless, and at first we thought she had died from the crash. But lo and behold, when we approached her, she slowly moved, although she appeared hurt.

We called the World Bird Sanctuary, an educational and rehabilitative facility in Valley Park, whose mission is, in part, to rehabilitate birds of prey (hawks, eagles, owls, vultures, etc...) in and around the St. Louis area. They advised us to wrap the hawk with a towel or sheet, careful to not hurt her wings—which is much easier said than done! This juvenile (noticeably different from an adult by the mottled belly markings and still-banded tail), was none-too-happy to be covered and she showed her talons and partial wingspread. What a beautiful and intimidating sight!

Luckily, the bird was stunned enough to allow us to load her into a box for transport to the sanctuary, where she was examined for injuries and found to be in good condition, with no bone or ligament damage and only minimal mite infestation.

The World Bird Sanctuary decided to keep the hawk for further observation and allow it time to gather strength. The hawk was put into the sanctuary's aviary where it had to be able to fly one hundred feet horizontally and twenty feet vertically in order to be released into the wild.

On November 12, Roger Holloway, WBS staff, brought the hawk back to LREC for release. Unfortunately, due to weather, the scheduled school group was not present, but many volunteers and staff showed up for this extraordinary event. After Roger briefly talked about the recuperation of the bird, volunteer Ray Potter released her. Unfortunately, on her first flight, she flew right into a tree and veered to the ground to be picked up by Roger and carried to a different location, near the pasture prairie.

This time, she took off over our heads and flew onto a limb in a nearby tree, where she stayed until the next morning, when a red-shouldered hawk couple

that had been inhabiting trees in the vicinity chased her off. This time her flight was majestic, and we wished her a fond farewell, hoping to see her soon.

The World Bird Sanctuary has long been involved in the preservation of threatened and endangered bird species, and through their rehabilitation project, treats two to three hundred raptors annually. Through the years, WBS has been called upon by many government agencies to assist in the rescue and relocation of smuggled and confiscated animals. In 2005, WBS officially opened the doors to a new wildlife hospital located at the sanctuary. This hospital features viewing windows so guests may see injured birds being cared for and readied for release into the wild.

This wonderful organization offers special events such as World Eagle Day and Christmas for the Birds, as well as educational programs for all ages, ECO tours, nature trails, live raptor exhibits, and family picnic areas. ☞

If you do come upon an injured bird, do not go near or touch it without first talking to one of the following organizations. Please remember...these are wild animals!

For raptors only:
WORLD BIRD SANCTUARY
(636) 861-3225
www.worldbirdsanctuary.org

For songbirds only:
WILD BIRD REHABILITATION
(314) 447-0060
www.wildbirdrehab.org



Photo by Colleen Crank

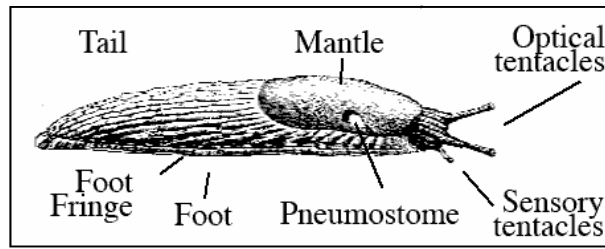
Slugs

By Malinda Slagle

At this time of year, finding signs of wildlife can be very difficult. Few insects are out, many mammals are hibernating, and many of the birds have flown south for the winter. But this is still a good time to lift the drop boards and the dead logs to look for slugs!

Slugs are any kind of gastropod mollusk (not insects or arthropods) with no shell. Other than the lack of a shell, they really are no different from snails.

Slugs require moist environments because their slimy bodies easily dry out. That's why we often find them hiding under leaves, logs, or boards where the moisture levels are high. Their mucus preserves their moisture, helps



Anatomy of a slug

them move, and deters predators. Slugs make two kinds of mucus—a thin watery mucus for underneath their bodies and a thick mucus for on top of their bodies.

Slugs chew their food using their radula, which is like a rough tongue. They have two pair of tentacles (not antennae) on their heads. The upper ones are light sensors and the lower ones are smell sensors. If they lose their tentacles, they can regrow them. The saddle on the slug's back is actually called the mantle and serves other important purposes aside from being a sitting spot for Thumbelina. Slugs breathe through a hole in their mantle, the pneumostome. Underneath the mantle are the genital opening and anus. Slugs are hermaphrodites, each with both male and female reproductive parts. They mate with other slugs by each providing the other sperm. Both slugs lay about 30 gelatinous eggs under leaves or a log. To move, slugs use the foot under their bodies.

Slugs are very important ecologically. They are detritivores, eating dead leaves, fungus, and animal and vegetable matter. (Detritivores break up organic matter into small pieces, speeding up the decomposition process

carried out by bacteria and fungi.) Some slugs are also predators. Slugs are an important food for frogs, snakes, toads, eastern box turtles, some birds,

and some beetles. When attacked, slugs contract their bodies, making them harder to grab. Their mucus also deters some predators.

Gardeners hate slugs because they put holes in prized vegetables and eat young tender leaves. Slugs usually feed at night so they are hard to catch in the act. Many gardeners put a shallow dish of stale beer by their prized plants to drown the slugs. Barriers such as copper sheeting and diatomaceous earth are also effective deterrents.

The next time you're on a walk through the woods, turn over a rock or a log and see if you can find a slug. You might find one chewing some dead leaves with their radula. It might contract as you try to pick it up its slimy body for a closer look at its mantle and tentacles. Make sure to put the gastropod mollusk back so that it can keep on helping the important work of decomposition in the woods! 🐌

References:

- Hamir, A. Non-Toxic Slug Control. www.gardenguides.com/pests/tips/slugs.asp
 Slugs. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Slug