

GREEN ISLANDS

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Summit Metro Parks Bi-Monthly Magazine

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Our parks are like green islands in an urban landscape.

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BOARD OF PARK COMMISSIONERS

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The park district's governing body is appointed by the Summit County Probate Judge. Commissioners serve overlapping three-year terms and are assisted by the executive director, who oversees the work of full-time and part-time employees, seasonal workers and volunteers.

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SMP GREEN TIPS

Start the year off right and make a New Year's Resolution to be *green* — we can help!

- Recycle your Christmas Tree. The park district "recycles" residential Christmas trees by chipping them into mulch. Drop off your tree, cleaned of all decorations and tinsel, through January 31, 2020. Check our website for park locations.
- Cut back on single-use bags. Consider keeping reusable tote bags in a place that's easy to remember, like your car.

- National “Skip the Straw Day” is celebrated in late February. You can avoid this single-use plastic product by picking up a metal straw at Maple Leaf Gifts inside the visitors center at F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm!

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DISCOVER YOUR BACK YARD Section

RED-TAILED HAWK

by Dave Daly, Interpretive Naturalist

Sharp Vision, Sharper Talons

Soaring high above or perched in a tree, red-tailed hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*) are a common sight in Summit Metro Parks. In fact, these large, broad-winged predators are one of the most commonly spotted birds of prey in Summit County. They have adapted to live in urban environments, so it is not unusual to see one gazing down from a telephone pole or high-rise apartment building as well.

Although size and plumage can vary, these beautiful buteos are easy enough to spot with their cinnamon-red upper tails, distinct flight patterns and unmistakable long, raspy calls. The red-tailed hawk’s cry is so recognizable that it has become synonymous with other raptors. Often, when you see a bald eagle on television or in movies, it is accompanied by the hawk’s call rather than its own less impressive one.

Red-tailed hawks primarily prey on small mammals and they play an important role in keeping populations of mice and other small critters in check. Liberty Park in Twinsburg, designated an Important Bird Area by the Audubon Society, is a great place to observe them in action.

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PARKS FOR ALL

by Stephanie Walton, Chief of Marketing & Communications

With an average of 5 million visits and 30,000 program participants every year, Summit Metro Parks is on a

never-ending mission to help people connect with nature through clean and safe parks.

“One of our top priorities is ensuring that all Summit County residents are able to access and enjoy the parks,” says Summit Metro Parks Executive Director Lisa King. “This *Parks for All* philosophy is the driving force behind a number of exciting new initiatives for the park district.”

The community engagement department at Summit Metro Parks works to foster an appreciation for natural resources, encourage healthy outdoor activities and help make meaningful connections with nature. Through educational programs, recreational opportunities and outreach to organizations throughout the county, community engagement staff are regularly finding innovative ways to fulfill this mission.

“We’re building new relationships while continuing to maintain the programmatic foundation that has served us so well over the past several decades,” explains Chief of Community Engagement Demetrius Lambert-Falconer. “By broadening our reach, we’re hoping to make nature a way of life for everyone in Summit County.”

WELCOMING FAMILIES OF ALL ABILITIES

With Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) ranking as the fastest-growing developmental disability in the nation, Summit County organizations are taking steps to ensure that individuals and families living with ASD are welcomed and included in the community. In 2018, the Autism Society of Greater Akron certified the F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm Visitors Center as the county’s first Autism Friendly Facility, meaning staff there are specially trained to accommodate visitors of all abilities. In 2019, the park district introduced an Autism Friendly Hour to our popular Touch-a-Truck event, allowing children and families to experience the trucks and other activities without bright lights and sirens.

Connecting With Seniors

At 17 percent and growing, Summit County’s senior population is looking for ways to stay active and remain engaged in the community. Summit Metro Parks is reaching those 65 and older through targeted nature-based programming and initiatives that encourage first-time park visitation. With external grant funding, the park district piloted a new program to remove transportation barriers for minority seniors, while also promoting the

multiple health benefits of spending time outdoors. On two separate days, 44 Outdoor Rx participants traveled to several Summit Metro Parks locations to experience a naturalist-led hike in the herb garden, a nature center facility tour with bird viewing, a volunteer-led physical activity and finally, a cooking demonstration and heart-healthy lunch.

TAKING THE SHOW ON THE ROAD

Summit Metro Parks staff are even bringing nature directly into local senior centers, schools and preschools — reaching about 4,000 people each year! These specialized outreach visits are tailored to the individual audience and can include topics such as wildlife in your back yard and seasonal happenings in nature. As a special treat, sometimes our education animals even join us to serve as living ambassadors to the parks.

ENCOURAGING SAFETY AROUND WATER

In another 2019 pilot program, Summit Metro Parks partnered with Akron Area YMCA to familiarize kids with water safety, especially around “dark water,” like lakes and other natural water bodies. Over the course of four weeks, 25 kids honed their water safety skills at local pools and at Munroe Falls Metro Park in Munroe Falls.

HELPING KIDS GROW WITH NATURE CLUB

Serving as a community connector and after-school program for children who otherwise may not be introduced to the parks, Summit Lake Nature Club operated its first full school year in 2018-2019. Serving children from surrounding neighborhoods, the 20 participants included homeschool, public and private school students ages 5 to 11. This program provides environmental, recreational, health and literacy-based education and wrap-around services while building familiarity with the outdoors and Summit Metro Parks.

PARTNERING WITH LOCAL SCHOOLS

Also during the most recent school year, park staff fostered an ongoing relationship with children in grades kindergarten through sixth grade at Robinson Elementary School, first visiting their classrooms in the fall, then welcoming the kids to the Summit Lake Nature Center in the spring. In partnership with Akron Public Schools and Cuyahoga Valley Environmental Education Center, Summit Metro Parks also welcomed 80 incoming freshmen from four Akron high schools to learn fishing and canoeing last summer.

Through these programs and more, we're on a mission to bring the parks to every person in Summit County! Please contact us at 330-865-8065 for more information about facilitated group visits to our centers or to schedule an outreach visit from our staff. We look forward to seeing you soon.

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SMP Community Spotlight:

DON DRUMM

Award-winning sculptor, designer, craftsman and Akron icon for more than 50 years, Don Drumm is also a loyal fan of Summit Metro Parks.

By Karl Simonson, Graphic Designer

Because of his love of nature, Mr. Drumm started out as a biology major at Hiram College to become a veterinarian, but took an elective figure study drawing class that changed his life forever. Mr. Drumm then transferred to Kent State University and earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree and eventually a Master of Arts.

In 1960, Mr. Drumm opened his own studio and married his wife, Lisa. As their young family grew, so did their love for the parks. The Drumms soon found that Hampton Hills Metro Park was their favorite place to see wildflowers, hike the trails and foot bridges with their dog and let their children have fun.

“We started going to the parks with our kids in the early '60s and ended up going many Sundays with picnic lunches through the '60s and '70s,” recalled Mr. Drumm. “It was inexpensive for a young family and a great way to get out and get involved with the kids.”

Being close to nature and seeing wildlife was important to Mr. Drumm and his family, and he treasures memories of the time they spent together in the Metro Parks. He especially enjoyed watching his children giggle as they rolled down grassy hills.

“The Metro Parks are a great value for the cost — they're one of the joys of living in this area,” stated Mr. Drumm. “We are blessed to live here being surrounded by the parks.”

Mr. Drumm and SMP collaborated in 2018 and 2019 on two pieces of custom pewter art. These ornaments are for sale at Maple Leaf Gifts in the visitors center at F.A. Seiberling Nature Realm.

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ENJOY Section

BASS IN THE STREAM: THE NEW CANARY IN THE COAL MINE

By Mike Johnson, Chief of Conservation

The year was 1996 and I was working for an environmental consulting firm as an aquatic ecologist. My company sent me to New Orleans for an international conference on water quality. I was there to drum up business, but decided I had time to go to a workshop on biocriteria. I was just becoming familiar with Ohio's procedures for using fish and aquatic insects to quantify water quality in our streams and rivers and thought I might learn something new. However, I was surprised I already knew more than many people in the room! This was because our Ohio EPA was a leading developer of new biocriteria techniques that were just beginning to spread to other states.

So, what is biocriteria? Basically, it is an expansion of the definition of water quality to include fish and aquatic wildlife. There was a time when water quality was only measured in a lab — evaluated by what was in the water itself without considering the health of the living things in it. If water was safe to drink, it was considered good. Although we still use laboratory testing for drinking water, the concept of good water quality has been expanded to include “drinkable, fishable and swimmable.” The wildlife that lives in rivers and streams helps us determine what is good. Fish are like canaries in a coal mine: if the fish are healthy, then the water is probably of good quality. Ohio EPA developed the techniques we use today to measure water quality, even changing state law and legal definitions to include fish, aquatic insects and habitat. Fish are sampled using a mild electric shock, which is considered safer than using nets. Temporarily stunned fish are collected, sorted, recorded and then released. The data is run through an index called the Index of Biotic Integrity (IBI). The index considers factors such as the diversity of species, number of species that are tolerant of pollution, number

of insectivores versus omnivores, trophic (or nutrition) levels and percent of fish with DELT (deformities, eroded fins, lesions and tumors) anomalies. The index calculates a single numerical score that is compared to regional ecological standards.

At Summit Metro Parks, we use these same tools to help us restore habitats that have been physically degraded. As part of our river restoration project at the Valley View Area of Cascade Valley Metro Park in Akron, we sampled the fish to determine the pre-construction condition of the water. This data will be compared to new data taken from the river when restoration work is complete. The goal is to improve IBI scores by creating better instream habitat. We take the time to do this work because what is good for fish is ultimately good for the thousands of people that eventually drink the water from our Cuyahoga River.

Over the years, we have been fortunate to receive many grants to protect and restore our water resources. Water Resource Restoration Program (WRRSP), Clean Ohio Conservation Fund, Ohio EPA Section 3□9 and private mitigation dollars have been utilized to protect and restore thousands of acres of wetlands and miles of stream corridors.

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HAMPTON & FRIENDS

Activities for Adventurers of All Ages

FINDING WINTER TRACKS

By Janean Kazimir, Interpretive Naturalist

Many animals are secretive and try their best not to be noticed. In winter, snow makes it easy to see what's been roaming around. Look for these tracks in Summit Metro Parks and in your own back yard!

RACCOON:

Look like small handprints with five “fingers” pointed forward.

SQUIRREL:

Five toes on hind feet, four toes on front feet. Like rabbits, their tracks are often found in groups of four.

VIRGINIA OPOSSUM:

Very distinct with five toes spread wide like a star.

COYOTE:

Narrow with four toes, showing two, sometimes four, claw marks. Coyote tracks can be distinguished from domestic dogs because they tend to travel in long, straight lines.

EASTERN COTTONTAIL:

Sets of four very round tracks found together with no distinguishable toes. Because of the way they hop, their larger hind feet land outside and in front of their smaller front feet.

WHITE-TAILED DEER:

Their hooves create an inverted heart-shape with their two toes.

Bonus track:

WING PRINTS

Birds of all shapes and sizes leave behind marks when they land and take off, resembling scratches or paintbrush strokes on the snow.

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WINTER SPORTS

As conditions permit, several winter sports can be enjoyed in the Metro Parks, and some locations are lighted for after-sunset fun. Please bring your own equipment.

To learn if winter sports areas are open, call 330-865-8060 or follow @metro_parks on Twitter.

SLEDDING

The best conditions for sledding include frozen ground with at least two inches of snow cover. Walk up the side of sled hills, not in the center where you may be in the path of moving sleds. Sledding is prohibited on trails and wooded hills.

ICE SKATING

Never skate on a pond or lake unless signs indicate it is open for skating. Ice must be four inches thick and free of snow, and temperatures must remain several degrees below freezing for long periods of time. Wear

properly fitted skates with sharpened blades for enhanced control and safety.

ICE FISHING

Ice fishing is possible in Liberty Park's Tinkers Creek Area, Nimisila Reservoir Metro Park and the lake in Silver Creek Metro Park, dawn to dusk as conditions allow. Users may not light fires, take motorized vehicles onto the ice, or build/leave structures and shelters on park property. Temporary shanties may be moved only by hand from the parking lot to the lake, and must be removed daily.

CROSS-COUNTRY SKIING

Some areas are too steep to negotiate safely on skis. To help keep your skis from being damaged by sharp, uncovered stones, ski only when the trails have at least two inches of snow cover.