



The official newspaper  
of Rock Creek Park

Summer 2008

# A Tomato Grows in Rock Creek Park

*By Deanna Ochs; Park Ranger*  
From its inception, Rock Creek Park has been a place for urbanites to reconnect with the natural world. Visitors have found dozens of ways to appreciate nature's bounty, some more surprising than others. On any summer day, one may encounter bike riders, birdwatchers, painters and poets, and, if the timing is right, gardeners plucking sun-ripened tomatoes off the vine. Thriving within Rock Creek Park are nine community vegetable gardens. Each has a unique story about how it came to be.



Rock Creek Park Community Garden near Rock Creek Nature Center

Blair Road Community Garden for example, located at Blair Road and McDonald Place NE, might today be trampled under the feet of thousands of metro commuters, had metro planners not opted to build in a more populated area. The Mamie D. Lee Community Garden, which sits behind the school it was named for, became a tool to foster responsibility and resourcefulness in the students. When a later principal sought to pave it, the garden was saved only through opposition by community members.

***Today, the community gardens express a new kind of patriotism.***

Several gardens are descendants of "Victory Gardens." To understand Victory Gardens we must think back to the days of the World Wars. Gas and food were critically short. Transportation systems were overwhelmed with masses of troops and supplies. Americans were full of patriotism and eager to do their

part. The weapons of choice: a garden hoe and watering can. By 1943, 20 million victory gardeners were raising nearly 8 million tons of food nationwide. The availability of local produce freed up trucks, trains and gasoline for the war effort.

After the war, the need for backyard produce waned, and most Victory Gardens slowly gave in to the indomitable weed. But a handful of gardeners had been "bitten by the bug" and entreated the National Park Service to allow a few gardens to remain active. The results are still turning out ripe tomatoes and crisp lettuce varieties.

Today, community gardens are perhaps an expression of a new kind of patriotism: the "greening of America." While large grocery stores haul produce from far afield, locally grown food reduces the need for transportation. This generates less air pollution and frees up space on crowded D.C. roads. There's no bulky packaging for the landfills, and gardeners use earth-friendly pest controls and fertilizers.

Perhaps most significantly, the gardens offer their caretakers an awareness of nature's ability to soothe the city dweller's soul. That is exactly why Rock Creek Park was established and why the gardens remain popular for those who don't mind getting a little dirt under their nails.

To see a community garden in Rock Creek Park, walk one-half mile north from the Nature Center on the Western Ridge Trail. Although managed by the National Park Service, the gardens are run by volunteers. Those interested in gardening may contact Ms. Brenda Hynson at Rock Creek Park at (202) 895-6012.

## Welcome from the Superintendent

Since Rock Creek Park's establishment, generations of people have worked tirelessly to see that the park's mission is fulfilled. The core of this mission is to see that the park is "perpetually dedicated and set apart as a public park or pleasure ground for the benefit and enjoyment of the people of the United States" and to "provide for the preservation from injury or spoilation of all timber, animals or curiosities within said park, and their retention in their natural condition as nearly as possible."

For those of us that work here every day, it has been a privilege to be the stewards and protectors of these diverse and inspirational natural and cultural resources. But we have not labored alone. For one hundred and eighteen years partnerships with park neighbors, community organizations, businesses, educational institutions, concessioners, and individual volunteers have helped us meet our mission. These collaborations have been invaluable and appreciated.

The combined effort has resulted in providing our visitors with the opportunity to experience one of the oldest and largest urban parks in the United States -- containing thousands of acres of vital plant and wildlife habitat within the nation's capital. These affiliations have also provided a wide range of recreational opportunities for our visitors and helped to preserve the park's cultural resources which link the past to the present.

So welcome to Rock Creek Park, a respite from modern life provided for you by the diverse generations of dedicated employees, partners and volunteers of Rock Creek Park.

Sincerely,

Adrienne A. Coleman  
Superintendent

## 2. Honey bees

Learn about this humble insect and its secret for communicating with other bees.

By Ian Lothian, Volunteer and Deanna Ochs, Park Ranger

## 3. Peirce Mill

Find out the latest in Peirce Mill's on-going renovations.

By Dan Winings, Park Ranger

## 3. Turtles

If you're seeing rocks move, look again. It may be an elusive Eastern Box Turtle.

By Park Rangers Geoff Clark and Deanna Ochs

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National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

### Rock Creek Park

Rock Creek Park was founded in 1890 as one of the first federal parks. When the park was established, it bordered the edge of the growing city and was a favorite area for rural retreats. In the establishing legislation, Rock Creek Park would “provide for the preservation from injury or spoilation of all timber, animals, or curiosities within said park, and their retention in their natural condition, as nearly as possible.”

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### Park Headquarters

202-895-6000

The National Park Service cares for the special places saved by the American people so that all may experience our heritage.

# The Humble Honey Bee

Amid the hum of human activity in Rock Creek Park this summer, there is another, less noticeable hum. Without it, however, Rock Creek Park might look a little different. Thousands of honey bees are quietly buzzing from flower to flower. Their activity, through nature’s amazing design, helps to ensure that there are plenty of wildflowers next summer.

Bees of all species are complex creatures that play a significant role in nature’s web of life. In fact, they are the major pollinators in ecosystems with flowering plants. They are also extremely important as pollinators in agriculture. It is estimated that nearly one-third of the human food supply depends on bee pollination.

Honey bees are one of several bee species found in Rock Creek Park, and are some of the most fascinating to observe. For many, a visit to the Rock Creek Park Nature Center is not complete without checking out the active honey bee hive in the exhibit hall. With a little patience, you can view some highly developed social behaviors through the hive’s clear walls.

Honey bees’ bodies are specially designed to feed on nectar and pollen, and in the process, they pollinate plants. Their long tongue (called a “proboscis”) enables them to obtain a flower’s carefully hidden nectar. While probing for this nectar, their fuzzy bodies pick up the plant’s pollen. Some of that



Honey bees, carrying pollen, enter the hive at the Nature Center.

pollen is then deposited on the next flower they visit. What remains on their bodies is carried back to the hive where it is fed to developing eggs. Watch a honey bee at work and you may see it stop foraging and groom itself to pack the pollen into specially designed baskets on its legs. When a bee finds a new source of nectar or pollen it does a “waggle dance” in the hive that tells other bees where to find the flower. In this dance, the bee shakes its abdomen rapidly, and then walks in a circle. Scientists are still trying to decipher this amazingly advanced form of communication.

Lately, however, scientists are puzzling over more than honey bees’ social behaviors. Something is devastating commercial honey bee hives. So far, more than one quarter of commercial honey bee populations in the U.S. have been lost. In what is being referred to as Colony Collapse Disorder,

adult bees leave the hive as normal, but never return. As a result, the abandoned queens, eggs and immature females die, and the hive “collapses”. Theories for this strange behavior range from toxic new pesticides, to diet, to parasites. Even cell phone signals have not escaped the realm of speculation. Whatever the cause, it has lead some to consider using several different bee species, as opposed to just the honey bee, for crop pollination.

Fortunately, the honey bee colony at the Nature Center seems healthy. In addition, Rock Creek Park has a variety of native bee species, so if there is a honey bee die-off, the flowering plants will still be pollinated. The next time you visit the Nature Center, look for bees laden with pollen on their legs and doing a waggle dance. As you do, consider the amazing complexity and diversity of Rock Creek Park’s web of life.

## Visitor Information

**There are NO entrance fees to Rock Creek Park**

### Nature Center & Planetarium

The Nature Center is open daily in Summer and Wednesday - Sunday the rest of the year, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

The Planetarium is open only during show times. Show times for the planetarium are Wednesday at 4:00 p.m., Saturday at 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m. and Sunday at 1:00 p.m. and 4:00 p.m.

### Peirce Mill

Peirce Mill is currently closed due to renovations and repairs. Peirce Barn, next to the Mill, is serving as a Visitor Contact Station and Bookstore. The Peirce Barn is open daily during Summer, from Noon to 4:00 p.m.

### Old Stone House

The Old Stone House, including the Eastern National Bookstore, is located at 3051 M Street in Georgetown and is open to the public daily from Noon to 5:00 p.m.

### Park Regulations

Fires permitted only in grills or fireplaces; visitors may bring grills and use them in designated picnic areas only.

Parking is allowed only in designated parking areas.

Dogs must be on leash in all park areas.

### The following are prohibited in all areas of Rock Creek Park:

Camping

Viewing of wildlife with artificial light

Swimming, wading, and bathing

Removing or damaging natural or cultural resources

Alcoholic beverages

Washing vehicles

**Volunteer information is at Rock Creek Park’s website: [www.nps.gov/rocr](http://www.nps.gov/rocr)**

## Junior Ranger Opportunities in Rock Creek

With the arrival of summer vacation, a special type of park ranger becomes more abundant in Rock Creek Park. Armed with park map, bird caller, binoculars, and magnifying glasses (and possibly a fruit juice box and snack that mom or dad packed), the intrepid ranger’s mission is to explore the unique natural and cultural resources of Rock Creek Park. He or she is a Rock Creek Park Junior Ranger working hard to learn about Rock Creek Park, as well as to achieve the ultimate goal...an official Rock Creek Park Junior Ranger badge!

For decades, parents (some who were Rock Creek Park Junior Rangers themselves) have brought their children to the park to discover its diverse natural and historical resources. Through observation and hands-on activities, the Junior Ranger Program instills a sense of discovery, appreciation and preservation for Rock Creek Park.

One fun way for children to learn about the park (and earn the illustrious Junior Ranger badge!) is to complete the Junior Ranger Activity Book or Advanced Junior Ranger Journal. Geared for ages 5-15, the

books can be found at the Nature Center, Peirce Barn, and the Old Stone House in Georgetown. To help young explorers, free Discovery Packs with guides and observation tools are available at the Nature Center.

For a greater challenge, during July and August, Rock Creek Park offers free Junior Ranger Camps. These two-day ranger led camps, geared for ages 7 – 12, include field studies, games, hikes, hands-on history programs, stream observations, and planetarium programs. Contact the Rock Creek Park Nature Center to register.



So what are you waiting for? Pack a lunch, put on your hiking shoes, and bring the kids to Rock Creek Park today. Help them learn all there is to discover in the Rock Creek Park Junior Ranger Program.

# Peirce Mill Progress

Peirce Mill has been standing on the shore of Rock Creek since the 1820s. While the exterior of the building has changed little over time, the mill itself has seen many changes. After ceasing operation in the 1890s, Peirce Mill was converted into a teahouse, so that visitors to the new Rock Creek Park could enjoy the peaceful setting of the creek as it ambled by. When the National Park Service took over administration of Rock Creek Park in 1933, Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes took an interest in the mill, and set out to restore it into a working gristmill. By the summer of 1936, the old mill was once again grinding grain.

In 1958 the mill stopped running once again due to a lack of trained millwrights, machinery breakdowns, and low water volume. In 1965 the National Park Service sought to put it back in working condition. The Fitz Water Wheel Company was hired to build a new wheel. In 1970 the mill was again in operation.

Water and time, however, are hard on wooden water wheels, gears and shafts. In 1993 the main shaft broke while the mill was grinding grain for a demonstration, and once again the mill was silenced. Today the non-profit group Friends of Peirce Mill is working with Rock Creek Park to restore the mill to operating condition. To date they have raised about \$712,000 towards the rehabilitation. They have completed the repairs to the columns and beams which support the first floor and have rebuilt the frame that supports the main gears

for the water wheel system. They are currently repairing selected floor joists.

The Friends of Peirce Mill have also completed a new main shaft. The original massive piece of wood for the new shaft weighed 6000 pounds and was trimmed from the trunk of a large white oak tree that once grew in southern Virginia. In June of 2008, the finished shaft was trucked to Peirce Mill, and set into place with a crane.

The Friends of Peirce Mill have received grants in recent years totaling \$126,000, from the 1772 Foundation, the Kiplinger Foundation, the Kiplinger Family Foundation, the Clark-Winchcole Foundation, Deutsche Bank and FOPM member Adam Sieminski. Grants from Georgia Pacific contributed money and wood for the flooring. For more information, visit the Friends of Peirce Mill web site at <http://www.peircemill-friends.org>.



Peirce Mill's main shaft, cut from a 6000 pound wooden beam, in its new home.

# On the Trail of the Elusive Box Turtle

Watch for moving rocks...because it may not be a rock at all. You may be seeing one of Rock Creek's oldest and most elusive inhabitants: the Eastern Box Turtle. Just how elusive is it? Ideally there should be at least five for every acre of parkland. Right now Rock Creek Park has fewer than one per acre.

To better study the turtles, park Natural Resource Managers have outfitted several with radio transmitters. This allows them to monitor the turtles' movements and behavior. So far it looks like their low numbers are stable, or even dropping slightly.

Why are Eastern Box Turtles in short supply in Rock Creek Park? Although prohibited, people still collect them from the park. Also, while turtles' tough shells discourage predators, they can't stand up to a couple of tons of automobile steel. Their journey across Rock Creek's busy roadways is perilous. And raccoons, who love to snack on turtle eggs, wreak havoc

on turtle populations.

Help prevent box turtles from becoming even more elusive. Watch for them crossing the road. If you see one, and can do so safely, move it off the road, in the direction it was heading. Otherwise, do not move a turtle or take it out of the park. Imagine being plucked from your backyard, put down somewhere unfamiliar, and expected to continue with life as usual! Like us, they have familiar places to find food and shelter. Finally, call the Nature Center if you see a turtle with a transmitter. You, too, can help protect one of Rock Creek Park's treasured inhabitants.



Eastern Box Turtle

## Contact Information & Phone Numbers

Facility	Address	Phone
Nature Center	5200 Glover Road, NW	202-895-6070
Peirce Barn	Beach Drive and Tilden Street	202-282-0927
Old Stone House	3051 M Street, NW	202-426-6851
Carter Barron Amphitheatre	16th Street and Colorado Ave.	202-426-0486
Thompson Boat Center	2900 Virginia Ave, NW	202-333-9543 202-333-4861
Rock Creek Horse Center	5100 Glover Road, NW	202-362-0117
Tennis Center	3149 16th Street, NW	202-722-5949
U.S. Park Police	1800 Beach Drive	202-619-7300

# Ranger Led Programs

## Junior Ranger Camps

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Nature Center

Our Junior Ranger Camps introduce kids, ages 7-12, to Rock Creek Park. Explore woodland trails, examine the wildlife in Rock Creek and make new friends. Registration is required by calling the Nature Center. Dates are as follows:

Ages 7-8: July 9-10, August 6-7

Ages 9-10: July 16-17, July 30-31

Ages 11-12: July 23-24

Spanish Jr. Ranger Camp:

*Edades 7 - 10: Agosto 13-14*

## Young Planetarium

4:00 p.m. Wednesdays

Nature Center Planetarium

This introduction to the night sky is a shortened version of our Night Sky Planetarium Program. Ages 4 and up.

## Summer Night Sky

1:00 p.m. Saturdays & Sundays

Nature Center Planetarium

Visit the only planetarium in the National Park Service. View the brightest stars, planets, and constellations and learn their stories. Ages 5 and older.

## Exploring the Universe

4:00 p.m. Saturdays & Sundays

Nature Center Planetarium

Topics include the sun, moon, stars, planets, and other space phenomena. Ages 7 and up.

## Exploring the Sky

One Saturday night each month from April through November. Times vary, call for details.

See the stars and planets through a telescope. For stargazers of all ages.

## Creature Feature

4:00 p.m. Fridays

Nature Center

Get acquainted with the Nature Center's live animals and assist a park ranger in their feeding.

## Ranger led Horseback Tours

Call Horse Center for times.

Rock Creek Horse Center

Tour leaves from Rock Creek Park Horse Center and travels south along Rock Creek. Participants must be at least 12 years old and weight limits may apply. Reservations must be made by credit card at least 24 hours in advance. Fee \$35. Please arrive 30 minutes before your ride. For further information call (202) 362-0117.

## Nature Walks

Please contact the Nature Center for locations and times.

Experience the diverse natural and geological features of Rock Creek Park on these ranger led hikes. Distances and ability level vary. Ages 7 and older.

## Peirce Mill Updates

Contact Nature Center for times.

Peirce Barn

Discover what's happening at Peirce Mill, Rock Creek's last remaining mill. All ages.

## Black Georgetown Walks

Contact Nature Center for times.

Old Stone House

Explore stories of sacrifice, adversity, and success on this ranger led tour of historic Herring Hill, a Georgetown neighborhood that holds reminders of a thriving 19th-century African-American community. Ages 8 and older.

## Rock Creek Park Day

Saturday, September 27

10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Nature Center

Ranger led programs, horseback riding, puppet shows, and more.

Contact the Nature Center at 202-895-6070 or visit the Rock Creek Park website at [www.nps.gov/rocr](http://www.nps.gov/rocr) and click on Ranger Led Programs for a complete list of activities.



National Park Service  
U.S. Department of the Interior

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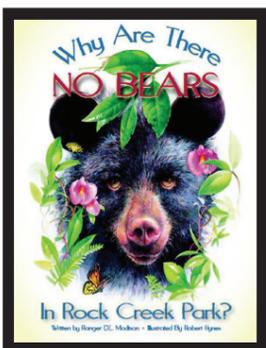
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# Rock Creek Park Updates

- **Rock Creek Park Day, Saturday, September 27, 2008.** Celebrate Rock Creek Park's 118th birthday with free festivities from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. at the Nature Center and Planetarium. Activities include ranger led programs, horseback riding, puppet shows, and more.
- **Rock Creek Park volunteer honored.** The National Capitol Region's *Outstanding Individual Park Volunteer Award* was presented to Gary Sikora at the George B. Hartzog, Jr. Award Ceremony in April of 2008. Sikora, a volunteer for over 20 years, was honored for his work in restoring an eroded section of Rock Creek Park and replanting native species.
- **Thanks to Rock Creek Park volunteers** who participated in the Alice Ferguson Foundation's Potomac River Watershed Cleanup on April 5, 2008. Rock Creek Park volunteers were among thousands who removed 1360 tires, 13,600 plastic bags and over 100,000 recyclable containers. To help next year call (301) 292-5665 or visit [www.PotomacCleanup.org](http://www.PotomacCleanup.org).



Rock Creek Park Volunteer Gary Sikora accepts his award.  
L to R: P. Angelakis, Regional Volunteer Coordinator; Gary Sikora;  
R. Emerson, Site Manager Ford's Theatre; J. Lawler, Regional Dir.  
NCR; L. Mendelson-Ielmini, Deputy Regional Dir. NCR



**Why Are There No Bears in Rock Creek Park?**, the first children's book

written about the park, was launched on Saturday, April 19. One hundred and twenty-seven visitors attended the release, co-hosted by Eastern National. The event kicked off National Park Week with a bear exhibit, book reading, special guests, book signing and refreshments. The book is for sale at the Nature Center, Peirce Barn and Old Stone House.

Thirty-five young visitors earned **National Junior Ranger Certificates and Junior Ranger Badges** on Saturday, April 19. Their task was to assist the park's resource management rangers, by using a transmitter to locate and count the number of box turtles in the park.

- **Rock Creek Park ya ofrece programas en español.** *Temas incluyen el cielo de la noche, insectos y un show de títeres.* El 13 y 14 de agosto ofrece el *premier Junior Ranger Camp en español.* Para mas información en inglés o español, llame a Deanna Ochs a (202) 895-6223.