

# the urban naturalist

NEWS FROM BLUFF LAKE NATURE CENTER • SPRING 2008



BLUFF  
LAKE  
NATURE  
CENTER

Wildlife Refuge ~ Outdoor Classroom

## Our New Address:

9801 East Colfax Avenue  
Suite 100  
Aurora, CO 80010  
303.344.0031  
info@blufflake.org  
BluffLakeNatureCenter.org



At Bluff Lake Nature Center,  
we are fostering lifelong learning  
and environmental stewardship of  
a unique urban wildlife refuge.

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## Bluff Lake Staff:

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*Education Director*

**Mendy Evans**

*Development Director*

**Kristin Libberton**

*Volunteer Program Manager*

**Antonio Muñiz-Martinez**

*Bilingual Educator*

**Chris Story**

*Site Manager*

**Christin Ripley**

*Community Education Coordinator*

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## Executive Director's Report

Growing up near the confluence of the Little Miami and Ohio Rivers just east of Cincinnati allowed for constant adventure into the many unplanned natural areas near my home. My days were filled chasing my older brother Mike and our friends around on a dirt bike, playing flashlight tag in the woods, and following the small creek that ran near our home down to the banks of the Miami. We imagined ourselves to be Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer as we splashed through the creeks and swung from Sycamore trees.

In the summer, it wasn't uncommon for us to leave the house early in the morning, returning only when my dad rang the old bell in our yard for meals. We spent our time in the woods building forts, jumping off the shed into the leaf pile, or playing 'Ghost in the Graveyard' in the twilight hours. We were exhausted by the time evening came, as the chirp of the crickets and glow of lightning bugs took over. These childhood adventures are largely responsible for the path I've chosen as an adult.

In environmental education circles and beyond, Richard Louv's "Last Child in the Woods" has spurred a serious discussion about our relationship to the natural world. Our children's lives are increasingly dominated by television, video games, and cell phones, and there is a growing concern about what Louv terms a "nature deficit disorder."

Bluff Lake Nature Center has one of the largest pieces of open space in the metropolitan area, and thousands of children live in the neighborhoods around us. We hope that tomorrow's adults will look back at Bluff Lake as a place where they learned about the cycle of life with their 3rd grade class, imagined themselves soaring like a Red-Tailed Hawk, or simply discovered the powerful ability of nature to regenerate the human spirit.

Bluff Lake Nature Center begins our 15th year with our greatest offering of Junior Naturalist camps, Fireside Chats, and restoration projects. We invite you to join us this year as we continue to connect the local community to our natural world.

Handwritten signature of Glenn Fee.

*Glenn Fee, Executive Director*

# Book Review

## Last Child in the Woods

Author: Richard Louv

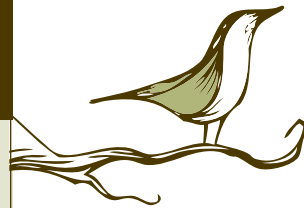


By: Antonio Muñiz Martínez

In his groundbreaking book, *Last Child In the Woods*, author Richard Louv immediately takes the reader back in time. Utilizing a romantic tone the author recollects some of his early experiences with the outdoors, the impact these had on his life and how these helped shape an environmental steward's way of thinking. While reading this you might find yourself lost in thought, thinking about your first experiences outdoors, the colors, the smell in the air, the sounds of your surroundings, the textures, and tastes of whatever you might have gotten into.

Most likely these experiences helped shaped your attitude toward the outdoors as an adult, and this is the prevailing theme in the book. By unplugging the younger generation and encouraging outdoor play we are laying the foundation for the development of a future generation of environmental stewards. And while this might be a convincing enough argument for us to expose our kids to the outdoors, especially given the urgency to act to save our planet, Louv takes it a step further by giving a comprehensive list of the benefits and impact that time outdoors could have on our children.

*Last Child in the Woods* is written to appeal to a broad spectrum of readers with different interests and agendas. That is, from those interested in fostering a creative and artistic inclination in their children to those who are more practical, who expect their children to be driven and entrepreneurial, for advocates of environmental protection and those interested in inculcating healthy living habits in our children. For the most part Louv supports his arguments with anecdotal evidence, given the apparent lack of scientific research on the subject, but as a result the book turns somewhat repetitive. Nonetheless, a very strong case is made for encouraging outdoor play for children and it lays the foundation for the development of a social conscience that returns to valuing outdoor experiences as essential for our development.



### 2008 Restoration Projects

Bluff Lake volunteers work tirelessly throughout the season to improve the wildlife habitat, accessibility, and the beauty of our Nature Center. Each of our four projects will include breakfast and lunch, and provide the perfect opportunity to work alongside other individuals who are passionate about conservation in Colorado. To register for any of our projects, visit VOutdoors ([www.voutdoors.org](http://www.voutdoors.org)). For more information about our 2008 projects, or other group or individual restoration opportunities, please contact Chris Story at [cstory@blufflake.org](mailto:cstory@blufflake.org)

#### April 5—Native Grass Planting COMPLETE

More than 50 volunteers joined us on a brisk spring morning to plant thousands of plugs of native grasses and shrubs.

#### 5/17—Stream Restoration 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Volunteers: 50

Plant willow and cottonwood whips and remove non-native species along a stretch of the Sand Creek Greenway.

#### 9/13—Trail Restoration 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Volunteers: 40

Construct new trail and stabilize current trails that wind through our 123 acre site.

#### 10/11—Fall Wetland Planting 8:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Volunteers: 50

Plant native grasses and shrubs as part of our ongoing effort to restore our wetland area.



## 2008 Fireside Chats

Enjoy a campfire and marshmallow roast as you learn about the animals and ecosystems at Bluff Lake. Watch as nocturnal animals come to life while the sun sets slowly behind the mountains. In 2008, Bluff Lake is proud to partner with The Nature Conservancy and other partners to present ten Fireside Chats. The chats will begin with a Spanish presentation on May 22, then occur on the second and fourth Thursday of each month through September.

- » Fireside Chats are free for members, and we ask for a \$1 donation from each non-member.
- » All presentations will begin at 6pm.
- » These programs are fun for the whole family. Children of all ages are invited, but required to bring an adult.
- » For full descriptions, visit our website: [www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org](http://www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org).



### May 22—Bluff Lake en Español

*Antonio Muñoz-Martínez, Bluff Lake Education Staff*

### May 29—Meet the Natives

*Michelle Deprenger-Levin, Botanic Gardens and  
Chris Story, Bluff Lake Site Manger*

Many of the native species that grow at Bluff Lake are perfect for your yard and garden. Learn about these plants while children will have a chance to plant their own seeds to bring home.

### June 12—The Buzz About Bees

*Liz Wickard, Morrison Nature Center, City of Aurora*  
Bees are more important than most people realize. Come and learn how these busy workers help us every day.

### June 26—Fire

*Mike Babler, The Nature Conservancy*  
Learn about wildfires, Colorado's forests and steps that we can take as residents to live in harmony with our natural world.

### July 10—Turkey Vulture!

*Carin Avila, Rocky Mountain Raptor Program*  
Carin will bring a live Turkey Vulture from Fort Collins to show us all about the attributes of raptors that make them so special.

### July 24—Fields of Grass

*William Parton, The Nature Conservancy*  
Much of eastern Colorado is dominated by short grass prairie. The Nature Conservancy will share their knowledge of this ecosystem, a small piece of which thrives at Bluff Lake.

### August 14—Clever Canines

*Sue Schafer, Fort Collins Natural Areas*  
Canines are smart, adaptable and beneficial to Bluff Lake and our world, and they're not nearly as scary as you think.

### August 28—Bodacious Bats

*Jody Morse, Bear Creek Lake Park, City of Lakewood*  
Many misconceptions surround these important little Colorado mammals. Bat mounts will allow you to see these fascinating critters up close and personal.

### September 11—These Boots Are Made For Walking

*Kristin Libberton, Bluff Lake Education Staff*  
Feet are neat! Find out how toes and feet make life possible for creatures large and small, feathered and furred.

### September 25—Prairie Dogs

*Kathy Boucher, Prairie Dog Specialists*  
Come learn about these interesting critters that surround Bluff Lake and hear about the efforts to preserve their habitat.

# Volunteer Profile

## John Yurchak

For an organization that still considers itself rather young, we were caught off guard to discover that one of our longtime volunteers has now served for more than a decade. Volunteer Naturalist John Yurchak discovered Bluff Lake Nature Center in 1997 when a photographer friend invited him to take sunset photos at the quiet site next to the old airport. John immediately discovered a love for wildlife photography and Bluff Lake, and has dedicated 11 years of smiles and service ever since.

While the wildlife brought John to Bluff Lake, the child-life kept him here. According to John, after photographing the area, he then “thought about the school programs to keep my hand in photography as well as teach children about nature.” After a 32-year career in education, children still inspire John and he found the Bluff Lake education programs to be the perfect place to feed his inspiration. His favorite part about being a Naturalist is “being with the children to see the light go on in their eyes to what is new here and to enjoy the outdoors.”

In addition to his naturalist duties, John spends about four hours each week photographing wildlife and the site to document the changes taking place at Bluff Lake. He feels that people in the surrounding neighborhoods should know “how close Bluff Lake is to them and that it is in the midst of the city. Most important to me is to enjoy but not destroy.”

Outside of Bluff Lake, John enjoys spending time with his two grandchildren, keeping fit, visiting ghost-towns and always taking pictures. He is chairman of the Rocky Mountain Chapter of the Photographic Society of America, as well as part of the High Country Camera Club. Bluff Lake Nature Center belongs to all of us. As John has done, we hope more local residents will consider how they might contribute to this special place.



*After a 32-year career in education, children still inspire John and he found the Bluff Lake education programs to be the perfect place to feed his inspiration.*



## Become a Member!

Earth Day is a time to celebrate the special places on our planet that help us thrive, and serve as a reminder of places that we still need to protect. We hope that Bluff Lake is one of those special places for our visitors. Please become a member today, and help us continue to offer great programming for area schoolchildren and habitat protection for our wildlife.

## Thank you!

Bluff Lake Nature Center would not be able to provide any of our services without support from the community. So it is with much enthusiasm that we thank the many agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals that made donations last year.

### Major Donors:

- Department of Aviation, City of Denver
- SCFD: Denver, Adams & Arapahoe
- The Denver Foundation
- Charles T. Beaird Family Foundation
- Charles R. Jelm Charitable Foundation
- Gary-Williams Energy Corporation
- Denver Active 20/30 Children's Foundation
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- McStain Neighborhoods
- Forest City
- Braun + Yoshida Architects
- Rollie R. Kelley Family Foundation
- Crestone Capital Advisors
- FirstBank
- Johnson & Wales University
- GP Xpress
- Kenneth King Foundation
- Harvard Communities
- The Haddon Foundation

### Conservators:

- Phyllis & Vance Allen
- Sally Allen
- Dr. Neiel Baronberg
- Linda Boone
- Susie Crane & Gary Prado
- Tom & Lucy Creighton
- William Eichelberger
- Sam & Nancy Gary
- Tom Gougeon
- Fran & Carol Haas
- Tom & Caroline Hoyt
- Ann Lederer & Robert Hickler
- Barry & Donna Levene
- Pat McClearn
- Jackie & Steve Norris
- Dan Reimer & Wendy Berhman
- Mary Seawell & Lee Ferguson
- Craig Sommers
- Carl Wells



## The Father of Bluff Lake

By John K. Nelson, BLNC Volunteer

*Bluff Lake Nature Center has carved a unique niche in the Denver community, and our land has an equally unique history. In each newsletter, we'll explore different aspects of that history, in an effort to create a richer sense of the place we all love.*

The history of Bluff Lake can be drawn from an 1899 Willits farm map which shows an outline of Bluff Lake on property owned by the Cyrus G. Richardson Estate. In this map, the lake is fed by the combined flows of West Toll Gate Creek and Coal Creek. Today these tributaries make up the Sand Creek flow as it passes by Bluff Lake Nature Center.

Carl Vincent McFadden describes in his book, *Early Aurora*, that by 1891, Aurora (or Fletcher as it was known in its earlier years) was cut by irrigation laterals which would make a garden spot out of the "gateway to the Rockies." The Sand Creek lateral, an extension of the High Line Canal, fed Guthiel Park Nurseries (the current location of Fitzsimons) before going into Bluff Lake.

As anyone who has worked on a restoration project at Bluff Lake knows, water is scarce in this region. Cyrus Richardson was a well known lawyer, rancher and educator, originally from Maine, who owned 7,500 acres along the Sand Creek lateral. Richardson continually attempted to bring water to his land east of Denver, until his untimely death in 1894. Richardson's obituary described him as the owner of the Richardson and Greenwood farms. He operated the Greenwood ranch where he constructed eight reservoirs along the High Line canal. His influence continues today as his "Greenwood Ranch" is the inspiration for the name "Greenwood Village."

Following her husband's death, Julia Richardson managed the property with Cyrus's nephew, Albert Packard. Packard graduated from the Harvard School of Law and specialized in tax title property. Julia made a specialty of the raising of horses, mules and cattle and in 1918 she had over 1,000 acres planted to wheat. The greater part of her land was "under ditch, a most excellent irrigation system keeping it in fine condition." Mrs. Richardson died in 1923 at the age of 91 years. She died on her ranch a mile north of Fitzsimons hospital and is buried in the Riverside cemetery. Among the 6,000 acres she owned were 1,100 acres of irrigated land adjoining Aurora and Fitzsimons hospital.

When you visit Bluff Lake today, look for signs of the original Richardson Ranch. A small spur of the Sand Creek lateral, now dry, carves a ditch along the western edge of the property. Old aerial photos show that a house stood just to the north of the bird blind. Imagine living in a home along the lake, with the wide plains opening up to the towering Rockies in the west. While they certainly weren't the original inhabitants of the land around Bluff Lake, the Richardson family is largely responsible for the Bluff Lake we now know.

## Meet Your Neighbors

Because most animals have such a good sense of hearing, it can be difficult to get a glance of Bluff Lake's many inhabitants. However, if you look in the right places, you can find plenty of signs of your animal neighbors. Rivaling some of the most ambitious homes in Stapleton, a giant beaver dam has sprung up above the waterfall in Sand Creek, just at the bottom of the stairs coming off the bluff. The dam has partially blocked the flow of the creek, creating a pond that freezes over in the winter.

Beavers are an incredibly adaptive species, with two layers of fur that allow them to live in cold Colorado waters. Their furry layer keeps them warm, but they also need a layer to protect the fluffy fur from getting wet. A gland creates oil that the beavers comb through their top layer of fur using their back feet. This oil operates like GORE-TEX®, making water roll off the sleek top layer and keeping the fuzzy layer underneath dry.



### BEAVERS

Many of the trees at Bluff Lake show signs of this industrious critter. Beavers use branches for food and construction materials. They eat the soft wood under the bark, using their strong front teeth. Their teeth grow continually, so they must chew in order to keep them short and sharp.

Did you know beaver can hold their breath and stay underwater for 15 minutes? While there, they use their specially adapted lips, which close behind the four incisor teeth, allowing them to eat underwater!

Another important adaptation that beavers have is their strong, orange front teeth, perfect for chewing wood. Their favorite food is new green growth on cottonwood trees, and they will cut down whole trees just to get to the new branches at the top. They also use the older less nutritious branches to build their dams and lodges. In the fall, beavers will gather sticks and sink them to the bottom of the river for winter food storage.

Come visit Bluff Lake to look for signs of beaver habitation. In addition to the dam, you will find chewed down trees throughout the refuge.

Wildlife can often be unsettling to residents of urban areas. As Denver's urban wildlife refuge, Bluff Lake Nature Center strives to live harmoniously with our natural neighbors. To learn more about the animals that call Bluff Lake home, visit our website: [www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org](http://www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org)

## Save the Date!

### June 11th: Wine & Cheese on the Bluff

Every year, BLNC hosts Wine & Cheese on the Bluff to thank and celebrate our community of members, major donors and volunteers. Together, we will enjoy a variety of wine, delicious appetizers and lively jazz on top of the bluff as the sun sets. The event is free for our supporters and will be held on June 11th this year. Not a BLNC supporter? Become a member now and we'll send you an invitation in May.



## Our New Address:

9801 East Colfax Avenue  
Suite 100  
Aurora, CO 80010



# Nurture Your Natural Neighbors:

## Become a member of Bluff Lake Nature Center

- Bluff Lake’s natural, secluded, quiet, and wildlife-rich environment offers a unique experience to visitors and school groups. It is an “island” with wetland, woodland, stream, and prairie surrounded by a dense urban environment.
- Our award winning science education program serves more than 5,000 metro-Denver children every year, specializes in standard’s based curricula, and offers free programs to schools in low income neighborhoods!
- We manage the 123 acre refuge as a natural ecosystem without financial help from Denver or Aurora parks, and we make the refuge available free of charge everyday to people who enjoy nature and wildlife.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

- Please contact me with information about volunteering.
- Please contact me with information about my member benefits.
- Don’t contact me about member benefits. I prefer to take the full tax deduction.

### Bluff Lake Donation Levels

<b>Member</b>	Individual	Family
<i>Heron</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50
<i>Deer</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$50	<input type="checkbox"/> \$125
<i>Coyote</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$125	<input type="checkbox"/> \$250
<i>Eagle</i>	<input type="checkbox"/> \$250	<input type="checkbox"/> \$500
<b>Conservator</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> \$500	<input type="checkbox"/> \$1,000	<input type="checkbox"/> \$2,500 <input type="checkbox"/> \$5,000
<b>Other</b>		
<input type="checkbox"/> \$ _____		

**Please return completed form and check to:**  
Bluff Lake Nature Center • Attn: Mendy Evans  
9801 East Colfax Avenue, Suite 100 • Aurora, CO 80010

For more information about membership and donation levels, visit [www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org](http://www.BluffLakeNatureCenter.org)