

In the Belly of the Bear



Broad-headed skink in the belly of the bear

A lesson on species biodiversity in the children's garden yielded one exciting surprise for USC preservice teachers in the Three Bears Garden. When students were investigating plant life growing in Papa Bear's pot belly (there really is a flower pot under all that moss), they startled a 12" long broad-headed skink, the largest lizard of the southeastern US. The bright orange head indicated it was a mature male.

While we did not probe deeper inside the belly of the bear for a nest, it would have been a good hidden spot for a clutch of eggs. Department of Mental Health horticulture therapists Liz Fuller and Pat Redmond, who originated this theme garden with and for their patients, were soon coming to add moss to the topiary bears and were alerted to what might be found

residing in the belly of the bear.

On the April nature discovery hike lead by John Galbary, retired Richland One science teacher and naturalist, he used the iBird app with bird calls to summon a pair of cardinals to our view. Later we encountered a 3 foot long brown banded water snake under the dock near the edge of the water. We were able to watch his serpentine motion on land as he moved into the water. Galbary's monthly hikes have been popular with adults and children and will resume in September.

Marie Daniels and Mary Kelly have been meticulous in bringing back the Butterfly Garden for this year's pollinators. Both propagate plants from seed for the garden as was originally done by Tommie Moody, member of the Carolina Butterfly Society, who designed and installed the first garden. A troop of Boy Scouts and their leaders toured the garden on the May workday and asked if there was a project they could participate in. They will be helping us bring back the monarch with milkweed.

Stan Perry, Clemson Director of Special Projects and treasurer of Friends of the Children's Garden, reported that the irrigation system is up and running and the fountain repairs had been made. Winter's persistent cold disabled both systems temporarily.

Maureen Mitchell schedules monthly workdays in the garden to prep, plant, and prune. Todd Beasley, fifth grade teacher at Heathwood Hall, has donated many plants to us. His latest gift of five Aronia shrubs, aka chokeberry, was planted in the Bird Garden in May. Master Gardener volunteers have cleaned and reorganized McGregor's storage shed and weeded the raised bed herbs the flopsy bunnies use for tea.

Ms. Slither, the garden's education snake has made numerous classroom visits to elementary grade students this school year. She lets students pet her cool dry scales and examine the latest shed skin. They love to watch her swallow a dead mouse that is much larger than her head.



Children examine the feeding wells made by the yellow bellied sapsucker on nature discovery hike with John Galbary

The garden is embarking on an outreach this summer. We have been invited by EdVenture to set up a display booth once a month from June through September to publicize the garden. Cathy Beattie starts the promotion on Saturday, June 21 from 10am to noon inside the Blooming Butterfly exhibit.

The Xerces Society for Invertebrate Conservation has been invited to use the garden as a demonstration or tour site when they present their Pollinator Short Course Workshop at Sandhill in June.

Appreciate the biodiversity in the children's garden while you picnic there this summer.