

**Briar
Bush**
NATURE CENTER

Become a Member and Receive:

- 20% discount on programs
- Early registration for summer camps
- Invitations to members-only events
- Facility rentals for your celebrations
- 10% discount in the Nature Shop
- Discounted/free admission to select nature centers across the nation
- And more!



Newsletter and Calendar

www.briarbush.org

215-887-6603

May – August 2026

Spring & Summer Hours

Business Hours

Monday - Friday: 9:00 AM - 5:00 PM

Dede Long Nature Museum

Daily: 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Griscom Bird Observatory

Daily: 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Briar Bush Pond

Daily: 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM

Pollinator Garden

Daily: Dawn to Dusk

Trails

Daily: Dawn to Dusk

Facility and trail access may change due to weather or scheduled programs/events. Please call ahead for current hours.

Admission: Donations Accepted

Admission fees are subject to change.

**Spring & Summer
program guide
starts on page 5.**

The Dede Long Nature Museum, Griscom Bird Observatory, and Pond will be closed on Memorial Day, Emancipation Day, and Independence Day.

www.briarbush.org

Dragonflies: Nature's Most Successful Predator

By: Sarah Busby, Environmental Educator



© Ser Amantio di Nicolao

While visiting the Briar Bush pond this summer, you may catch a glimpse of a small but mighty predator lurking about. With their flashy colors, compound eyes, and two sets of wings, dragonflies can be abundantly found flying around wetlands in the summer months. But hidden behind this charismatic insect lies one of nature's most successful predators. While hunting prey, dragonflies have a catch rate of 95%, higher than

any other animal observed. The secret to their success lies in the many unique adaptations they have accumulated throughout their evolution, including aspects of their eyesight and flight. However, their journey as predators begins well before their aerial emergence; it begins at the bottom of our ponds and streams. It is here where the dragonfly spends most of its life in its larval, or nymph stage.

Dragonfly nymphs develop in the water anywhere from 2-3 months to 1-2 years depending on the species. During this time, nymphs will prey on anything they

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Dragon fly larvae labium extended to capture prey

can catch. Other insect larvae, worms, crustaceans, snails, tadpoles, and even small fish are all fair game for the dragonfly. In order to catch their prey, dragonfly nymphs have evolved a unique, extendable hinged jaw, or labium, that can shoot out faster than most prey can react. In fact, this creepy arm-like projection is credited as part of the inspiration for H. R. Giger's Xenomorph design from the movie *Alien*.

In order to keep up with its prey and avoid predation itself, the dragonfly nymph uses a unique mode of transportation: jet propulsion. No other insect uses such a strategy for locomotion. Nymphs will intake water from their anal valve, extract oxygen from it to

breathe, and sharply expel the water back out the anal valve to propel themselves forward. This tri-leaflet valve is surprisingly similar in structure to the human tricuspid heart valve and has even been studied as inspiration for prosthetic heart valve designs.

As they develop, dragonfly nymphs will molt 5-14 times until fully grown. As they approach their final larval molt, nymphs will sit in shallow water to prepare for transitioning from breathing water to air. They then emerge from the water, climbing up tall vegetation in the stream or nearby bank, searching for a nice vantage point to begin their transformation. Here, they will pump and redistribute their body fluids, slowly pushing themselves out of their larval skin. Once emerged, they leave behind an empty cast of this larval skin, or exuvia.

After their extravagant emergence, dragonflies will take off on their maiden flight. A dragonfly's first flight is typically weak and short lived, making them particularly vulnerable to other predators at this time. But as their body and wings harden over time, they reach their peak predator performance. Once fully developed, dragonflies are ready to take to the skies as masters of flight. With independent control of its fore and hind wings, the highly maneuverable insect is able to hover and fly in any direction, including backwards. While hunting, they can reach speeds of 30-35 miles per hour!



In addition to their flying skills, dragonflies are equipped with a nervous system working just as fast. They have the ability to fixate on their prey and predict its future location. In this manner, they are able to intercept prey midair with extreme accuracy. This ability is complemented by their impressive eyesight. Each eye is made up of thousands of units called ommatidia that span across

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Meet Our New Team Member

Marissa Burr, Environmental Educator



Marissa originally joined the Briar Bush team in 2025 as a Summer Camp Counselor and in early 2026, returned as an Environmental Educator. She received a B.S. in Environmental Biology and minors in Wildlife Conservation and Environmental Science from Delaware Valley University in 2023. Since graduating, she has held various environmental education positions at Peace Valley Nature Center, Elmwood Park Zoo and College Settlement Outdoor School. Marissa grew up exploring the forests and coasts of Maine, which has given her a profound appreciation for nature and a passion for spreading that joy with others. She now lives in Montgomery County and in her free time enjoys board games, crafting and going on adventures with her partner.

most of the insect's head. As a result, they have nearly 360-degree vision, with the exception of a small blind spot directly behind them. Their unique vision also serves as a model that multiple researchers are looking to mimic in developing artificial eyes.

The muse of both science fiction and medical invention, these precise predators demonstrate just one of the many treasures our wetlands house. Next time you stop by Briar Bush, be sure to keep an eye out for this incredible insect!



References

[Douglas, E. \(2014, July 14\). *There are aliens among us. The Guardian. Retrieved May 31, 2022*](#)
[Evolution, paleontology, and classification. \(n.d.\). Retrieved June 2, 2022](#)

Gonzalez-Bellido, P. T., Peng, H., Yang, J., Georgopoulos, A. P., & Olberg, R. M. (2012). Eight pairs of descending visual neurons in the dragonfly give wing motor centers accurate population vector of prey direction. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 110(2), 696-701. doi:10.1073/pnas.1210489109

[Life cycle and biology. British Dragonfly Society. \(2022, April 29\). Retrieved May 31, 2022](#)

[Pannett, R. \(2015, October 06\). Scientists tap dragonfly vision to build a better bionic eye. Retrieved June 2, 2022](#)

[Perkins, R. \(2018, July 17\). Dragonfly larvae inspire new designs for prosthetic heart valves. Caltech. Retrieved May 31, 2022](#)

Briar Bush News and Information

From Canopy to Community, Restoration Begins Here.

Dear Friend,

For 23 years, I've had the privilege of caring for Briar Bush's 12 acres, a rare urban refuge where we help nature take its best course. It is a sanctuary for over 450 species and a vital space for human healing; such spaces are proven to reduce stress and restore focus.

I have witnessed incredible transformations: the pond's restoration, the birth of our Nature Playscape, and the managed growth of our forest. However, some changes have been harder. We are losing ash, oak, hemlock, and beech trees to disease, while violent storms and a growing deer population challenge the forest's ability to regenerate.

But where the canopy opens, we plant.

In 2025, we planted over 300 trees—the most in our history. Wellness programs that connect health to our forest are in the works for this coming year. Our Strategic Plan also focuses on restoring our staff capacity.

Your gift today supports Briar Bush through three pillars of restoration in our new Strategic Plan:

- **Land:** Increasing our budget to plant and protect a native forest.
- **Self:** Launching wellness programs that use nature as a place for healing.
- **Capacity:** Investing in the key staff who make this mission possible.

Whether it's a child's muddy discovery in the Playscape or a quiet moment of peace on our trails, Briar Bush is a gift we give to one another. Help us make these next three years our most restorative yet.

With gratitude,



Mark Fallon, Director

Ways to give your gift:

- Mail a check payable to Friends of Briar Bush
- Visit: <https://tinyurl.com/BBAA2026>
- Scan the QR Code



*Did you know some employers match their employee's charitable donations?
Ask your employer today for a chance to increase your impact.*



Playscape Construction, 2010



Native Tree Planting, 2012



Pond Renovation, 2016

Programs for Children

Most programs require registration for participants ages 2+. Children under 2 years of age are free of charge.

Please review all program information at the time of registration.

To register, visit www.briarbush.org. Questions or need help registering? Call 215-887-6603.



Magic Mornings

For 2-5-year-olds with Adult

Hey, toddlers! Bring your favorite adult for walks, animal encounters, crafts, activities, and more! Each week features a new nature-themed lesson; register for one day per week.

Day: MOST Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays in May

Time: 10:30am-11:30am

Cost/Session: \$12.50 | Abington Resident: \$11.25 | BBNC Member: \$10.00

Cost/Add'l Child (Same Household): \$7.50 | Abington Resident: \$6.75 | BBNC Member: \$6.00

Nature Pioneers

For 4-6-year-olds

Children can join us on their own for age appropriate activities, walks, crafts, games, animal encounters, and more! Each week features a new nature-themed lesson.

Day: Thursdays in May

Time: 1:00pm-2:30pm

Cost/Session: \$15.00 | Abington Resident: \$13.50 | BBNC Member: \$12.00

School's Out, Get Outside!

For Children in Grades K-5

When school is not in session, students can spend a day with Briar Bush exploring the outdoors, meeting animals, making crafts, playing in nature, and more.

Day: Tuesday, May 19, 2026

Time: 8:30am-3:30pm

Cost per Participant: \$75.00 | Abington Resident: \$67.50 | BBNC Member: \$60.00

After-Care is available from 3:30pm-5:30pm for an additional \$12.00 per participant.

Programs for All Ages

Most programs require registration for participants ages 2+. Children under 2 years of age are free of charge.

Please review all program information at the time of registration.

To register, visit www.briarbush.org. Questions or need help registering? Call 215-887-6603.

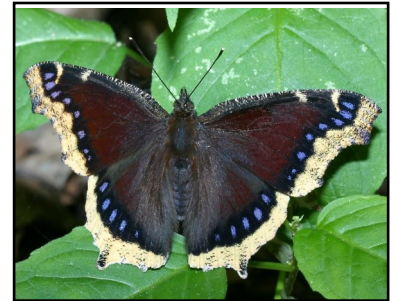
Sensory Adventure

Humans and animals alike use their senses to explore the world around them. Discover creatures that taste with their feet, identify objects through touch, smell the air with their tongue, and more! Use your senses on a guided hike and learn how our animal ambassadors use their senses.

Date: Saturday, May 9, 2026

Time: 2:00pm-3:00pm

Cost: \$12.50 | Abington Resident: \$11.25 | BBNC Member: \$10.00



Owl Prowl - Popsicle Program

Whinnies, screeches, and hoots – oh my! Join us in meeting our live owl ambassadors, learning about their specialized senses, and getting a sneak peak of their life at night. We'll also explore the trails in search of resident wild owls. Then, enjoy refreshing popsicles after the program.

Date: Wednesday, June 24, 2026

Time: 7:00pm-8:00pm

Cost: \$12.50 | Abington Resident: \$11.25 | BBNC Member: \$10.00



Water Olympics - Popsicle Program A Briar Bush Nature Center Members-Only Program

Put water to the test in Briar Bush's Water Olympics! Perform experiments and activities that explore water's extraordinary properties. Visit the pond in search of some amazing animals that deserve gold medals of their own. Then, enjoy refreshing popsicles after the program.

Date: Wednesday, July 15, 2026

Time: 7:00pm-8:00pm

Cost: FREE for BBNC Members (*Registration is required.*)



Micro Hike - Popsicle Program

When we think of ecosystems, we think of forests, oceans, and deserts. But there are entire tiny worlds right beneath our feet! We'll meet some of the smallest residents of Briar Bush both under the microscope and out on the trails in this program that encourages you to think small! Then, enjoy refreshing popsicles after the program.

Date: Wednesday, August 12, 2026

Time: 7:00pm-8:00pm

Cost: \$12.50 | Abington Resident: \$11.25 | BBNC Member: \$10.00



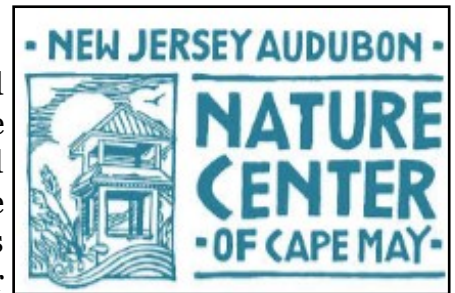
Programs for Adults

Most programs require registration.

Please review all program information at the time of registration.

To register, visit www.briarbush.org. Questions or need help registering? Call 215-887-6603.

Trip to the Nature Center of Cape May



Join us for a day centered around horseshoe crabs and shorebird migration at The Nature Center of Cape May: *the* place to explore the coastal habitats of the Jersey shore, interact with local wildlife, and learn about the area's natural history. We'll visit the beach at Cape May Harbor to see horseshoe crabs spawning as well as shorebirds feeding on the eggs. We'll also sein, dragging a net through the water to catch fish, crabs, and shrimp, and discuss the connections among all organisms of the ecosystem. We'll then explore the Center's horseshoe crab aquatic lab, complete with a touch tank, to discuss their natural history and importance to the medical field. After the program, we'll stay for lunch and explore the Center and walking trails.

Date: Saturday, May 16, 2026

Time: 8:00am-3:30pm

Cost: \$60.00 | Abington Resident: \$54.00 | BBNC Member: \$48.00

Notes:

- Participants will meet at Briar Bush at 7:45am, then leave at 8:00am to travel in the Briar Bush van to the Nature Center of Cape May. Sit back and enjoy the ride!
- Be sure to pack a camera, binoculars, and lunch.
- This program will take place rain or shine. Please dress appropriately for the weather. You will be contacted in the case of cancellation due to extreme weather.
- Walking a short distance is required. Some areas may be accessed by vehicle. Chairs will be provided.



Volunteer at Briar Bush Nature Center!

Briar Bush could not accomplish its goals without the help of dedicated volunteers.

The Friends of Briar Bush is currently seeking Board of Director candidates with backgrounds in community leadership, business, finance, non-profit management, and education.

If you are interested in a Board of Director position, please email info@briarbush.org with "Board Candidate" in the subject line.



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36th Annual
Friends of Briar Bush
Feather Our Nest Gala & Auction

Briar Bush In Bloom

Friday, September 25, 2026
6:30pm-10:00pm
North Hills Country Club
99 Station Avenue, Glenside, PA 19038

Dinner & Drinks • Live Auction • Games
Individual Ticket: \$150.00 / Pair of Tickets: \$275.00
Festive and themed attire is welcome!

