



Educational Farm & Nature Preserve

Farm Connection

by
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LAMBS AND SPRING TIME COME TOGETHER AT STRATFORD ECOLOGICAL CENTER

The annual Maple Sugar Breakfast on March 3 at Stratford Ecological Center on Liberty Road was as popular as ever with 500 visitors. Volunteers found sufficient space to park vehicles on the lanes around the farm as families rotated in and out thanks to the “timed-eating” schedule. Farmer Jeff only needed to tow three cars! One or two large pancakes, along with farm raised sausages, OJ and hot cocoa is usually enough for a child, but this year the kids were coming back in droves for more of the whole wheat, full milk, egg and honey pancakes.

New lambs were on hand in the barn during Breakfast. The first, a set of twins, were born on February 24 and there are now 13 lambs. Initially, the lambs and the ewe are housed in a small pen for five days. This gives them time to accept each other, helps ensure the lambs drink the ewe’s nutritious colostrum with its crucial antibodies in the first twenty-four hours, and allows us easier observation. We try to avoid picking up the lambs during that period to avoid stressing them, and their protective Mom. It is amazing how quickly they grow and become leggy, functioning well when moved in with the flock. They nibble hay and soon start to eat an easily digestible feed called creep feed, but for many weeks most of their nourishment comes from the ewe.

Breakfast visitors carefully made their way along the hilly trail in the woods to the Sugar Shack where maple syrup production was in full swing. After all the rain it was necessary to find a way to help maintain footing. This year the farmhands tried spreading leaves from the forest floor and it worked to a large extent. We are experiencing a lot more foot traffic, so the farmhands are coming up with solutions, including more culverts, wooden steps, and bridges.

Our annual maple syrup production is again low due to the fluctuating temperatures. We made ten gallons of our own syrup, with production ending shortly after the Breakfast. At least one Ohio farmer missed the season as he waited to tap his trees. We always have a need to buy in some local syrup and this year it was difficult to find. We ended up with a forty-gallon barrel! Thanks to Volunteer Marilyn’s two days of valiant effort we have an abundance of bottled syrup for sale.

Some chorus frogs and spring peepers have been heard in the woods surrounding the vernal pool. Salamander eggs have been spotted in the pool. There has not been a mass migration of salamanders across the entry lane this year, nor is it likely to happen. When they run depends on how far they are from the pool, how deep they buried themselves for the winter, and the amount of sunshine and rainfall. Ideally salamanders like to run when it is around 50 F and raining to keep their exposed bodies wet. When picking up a salamander, a great joy for school children after discovering them under logs, hands should be muddy to avoid contaminating them with hand acids and lotions. The next public Vernal Pool monitoring is Friday, April 6.

Last fall Paw Paw seeds were planted in pots outside the small greenhouse. They have grown well and will remain there to develop more roots until planting this fall. Potted Catalpa trees have been purchased from Michigan to produce browse for the Zoo. These lovely trees were planted March 13 around the farm and on the hillside by the pond.

Should you feel it is not warm enough to hike around the farm, you may want to install yourself in the rocking chair in the big room and watch birds at the feeders. We have designated this area Gale's Corner. Gale Warner was the inspiration behind Stratford, basing the concept on her experience as an intern at Hidden Villa Ranch in Palo Alto, California. This week a beautiful shadow box created by frame artist Benny Shoults, Curator of the Meeker Homestead Museum, was unveiled and contains her original Fall 1980 Journal. Hanging nearby is a framed collage by Board member Clyde Gosnell, providing a glimpse into life at Hidden Villa. A copy of the Journal, along with binoculars and bird books are available on the book shelf. You may even find coffee in the kitchen.

It is that time of year at last and gardening classes for adults and children are planned for our Spring Garden Day on March 24. As usual this event will include a seed swap so please bring any to share. Beekeeping 101 – Biology and Behavior Basics – is scheduled for April 14. This year Stratford Apiarist, Dave Noble, is offering a series of monthly Beekeeping 101 classes and Beekeeping Bootcamp classes through August. He hopes this format will allow more people the opportunity to learn.

The 2nd annual Llama and Sheep Shearing Day will be Saturday, April 21 from 10-4 pm. Last year there was tremendous interest in the activities. Details of all our classes and programs may be found on our website. We hope you find plenty that encourages you to take advantage of the fascinating facets that make up Stratford's farm and nature center.

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