

Warner Park Nature Center

2023 Annual Report



Our Mission

To provide quality environmental education and responsible recreation
To help protect, preserve, restore, and manage the park ecosystem and its natural resources
To raise awareness, foster respect, and share enthusiasm for the natural environment

Our Vision

To build a community of people - joined by wonder, curiosity and respect in nature – to protect, sustain and enrich our natural world and each other.

Our Values

Ensure Nature Endures | Practice Kindness and Vulnerability
Pursue Equity Intentionally | Embrace the Unexpected
Follow Curiosity and Inspire Connection with Nature



Environmental Education Programs

2023 Highlights

Five professional development opportunities were provided for K-12 MNPS and WCS teachers this year, modeling how to effectively take students outside to practice science.

After participating in the full-day **Hands in the Dirt: Taking Science Exploration Outdoors** in-service, teachers were asked, "How has your thinking or approach to teaching outdoors changed?" A few responses:

Teaching outdoors can actually work!

I feel much more equipped and confident on how to structure my time, prep and lessons to set my students up for success.

I am more confident in taking students outside, this gives me new ideas and ways to better engage students.



Outdoor Science: Birds workshop led by Shelby Bottoms and Warner Park Naturalists

1076 students served during in-person high school and college Environmental Science field labs.

647 students served during in-person K-5 field trips.

1,930 direct student encounters through naturalist-led field trips and labs.

23 on-your-own field trips scheduled for organized school groups

Offered **seven** week-long sessions of summer Naturalist Camps led by seasonal staff, providing 109 campers with **2,738** hours exploring nature. See Summer 2023 Report for more details.



AP Environmental Students collect macro-invertebrates as part of a Water Quality field lab

The Bird Banding Field lab was updated and tested in the fall of 2023, providing students with the opportunity to observe local research and discuss data and trends in bird movements and populations.

My students absolutely loved being able to apply what we have learned in a natural setting. It helped make connections that will last a lifetime with my students. - Doug Anderson, APES teacher

I found both trips very enjoyable and informative! It was great to be so hands-on and I enjoyed that it's aligned with our curriculum. It was super fun and engaging! - NSA student after attending the Water Quality and Ecosystem field labs



Elementary students observe and ask questions about organisms discovered in the pond during a naturalist-led field trip

Public Education Programs & Events

2023 Highlights

Four special events occurred with record-breaking attendance, thanks partially to amazing weather and also to the excellent marketing and planning of our staff and Friends of Warner Park.

The Winter Solstice event in particular drew more than 1200 visitors in just 3 hours! Many visitors commented on this amazing event, saying:

Great event! Loved the luminary walk and s'mores! Thanks for all your hard work!

Thank you - it was a wonderful way to celebrate the solstice.

It was our first year and my kids asked if we could do it every year. Very cool - this is my favorite!

It was magical, thank you!

In total, more than **3,000 visitors** attended our special events in 2023.



A young visitor zips around the garden like a hummingbird during the Hummingbird Celebration

Naturalist Rachel Carter introduced several new programs focused on the mind and body in nature.

Meditation, sound bowls, certified forest therapy guidance, Shinrin Yoku / Forest Bathing and new moon circles were some of the wellness programs offered.

These programs reached **107 visitors** and the positive feedback made it evident that people appreciate soaking up the park at a slower and calmer pace, offering healing, renewal and peace.



Young visitors work by lamplight to create fantastical fairy houses during the Winter Solstice event

Open house-style “Explore with a Naturalist” programs continued to be very popular with drop-in visitors, reaching nearly **1900** children, adults and families with fun topics like Nature Fools Day, Eclipse Viewing and Mud Mysteries..

Find Your Inner (FYI) Naturalist adult learning programs continued on a variety of topics, including a special presentation and discussion with author David Haskell!

From spring and fall break programs to evening star parties and night hikes, Warner Park naturalists engaged **7,586** visitors in scheduled nature programs.



Naturalist Elyse Dilks helps a young visitor entice a dragonfly to land on a stick for closer observation

Nature Discovery Program

2023 Highlights

Nature Detectives Club after-school programming was expanded to four new community centers this year!

We planted flowers and salsa vegetables in pots at 10 community centers in May! Community Center staff and youth in summer and after-school programs tended to the gardens all summer long and snacked on tomatoes, peppers, and basil.



Youth from Madison Park hold seedling plants that they will transplant into pots during their Nature Detectives gardening program.



A young participant practices using a magnifying glass as she peers into a tree cavity during an after-school nature exploration.

Our partners at Nissan generously donated a van to the Nature Discovery Program in the spring. The van allowed us to expand field trips to Beaman Park over the summer and to transport youth to Warner Parks for outdoor adventures.

We hosted a professional development workshop for community center staff in October. Leaders learned tools, skills, and techniques for engaging youth in nature and outdoor science, took a hike on the Nature Loop trail, and practiced saving seeds to use in their potted gardens.

PEN Pals Campfire & Night Hike programming was re-kindled this fall, providing enriching experiences for participants such as learning to safely cook their dinner over a campfire, taking their first night hike, letting their eyes adjust to the darkness for the very first time, and seeing bats fly overhead!

Nature Detectives Club: **942 youth** encounters

PEN Pals summer camps: **175 youth** encounters

Summer field trips to Beaman and Warner: **72 youth** encounters

Fall Campfires & Night Hikes: **65 youth** encounters

PEN Pals Orientations: **225 youth** encounters

Professional Development Workshop: **9** community center leaders

130+ encounters with additional community members (parents & community center patrons)

80 programs in total for the year

22 community centers served by PEN Pals

12 community centers served by Nature Detectives



Youth roast hot-dogs over the campfire during a Fall PEN Pals Campfire & Night Hike program.

Celebrating WPNC's 50th Anniversary

2023 Highlights

We hosted a Public Celebration with presentations from Metro Parks Director Monique Odom and Mayor Freddie O'Connell on October 28, 2023.

A State Proclamation, presented by Representatives Caleb Hemmer and Justin Jones, was delivered during our public celebration.

Whereas, *we are pleased to recognize one of our finest parks and its facilities as it celebrates a historic milestone of preserving its natural and cultural resources for both the Tennesseans of today and generations to come.*

Whereas, *today, Warner Park Nature Center remains a valuable place of beauty and history in Nashville and Davidson County.*

Mayor Freddie O'Connell speaks during the public Celebration on October 28, 2023



The public event was followed by a special, invitation-only Reunion Celebration with more than 100 former and current staff and volunteers in attendance!

The Tennessee Conservationist featured Warner Park Nature Center with an article, *50 Years of Connecting People with Nature*, contributed by Vera Roberts and Sandy Bivens



Our social media marketing plan included "Throwback Thursday" posts each week of the year, detailing fun historical facts and photos and reaching thousands of people.

A timeline exhibit highlighting Warner Park Nature Center through the decades was created and installed in the museum.

A 50th logo and commemorative t-shirts and stickers were specially designed and marketed all year long.



WPNC staff Jed Hanserd and Kassie White show off our commemorative 50th t-shirts

BIRD Program*

2023 Highlights

Our **42nd** year legacy of research and engagement continued with **1,225** birds captured at the bird banding station.

BIRD engaged **3,996** park visitors during banding sessions, bird walks, and numerous presentations and bird-themed programs.

The BIRD team hosted the Inland Bird Banding Association's annual conference this past fall.



A recently banded Barn Swallow at Steeplechase. These nests, monitored by Lipscomb interns, had a success rate of 69% in 2023



BIRD program coordinator Laura Cook releases a White-throated Sparrow

43 thrushes and purple martins were radio-tagged this year. A male Wood Thrush first radio-tagged by us in 2021 returned in 2022 and was detected again in 2023. And during fall migration, one of our Swainson's Thrush was detected in Mexico and a Purple Martin was detected in Costa Rica.

85 volunteers contributed **3,239 hours** of their time feeding birds, cleaning feeders, engaging visitors and assisting with 15 research projects.



Participants listen to research presentations during the annual IBBA conference held at Warner Park Nature Center this fall



*See attached for complete 2023 BIRD Program report

Campus Enhancements

2023 Highlights

The newly updated Nature Play area re-opened to the public in the spring with a new creek bed, bird nest platform and slide and many hands-on objects for building, exploring, digging and playing.

A new Nature Play pavilion was constructed adjacent to the Nature Play area (project funded by FOWP) and it has quickly become the favorite place for family picnics and gatherings.



Campers enjoying a snack in the new Nature Play shelter



Youth being creative with the Nature Play water features and loose natural objects

Trails near the campus were re-routed and bridges were added as part of a park-wide trail restoration initiative.

A new campus map, welcome sign and trailhead were installed as part of the updated wayfinding and trail re-route initiative.

The Master Gardeners of Davidson County established and maintained two beautiful wildflower gardens.

Invasive Plant Control (IPC) removed and treated a large area of privet and honeysuckle on the campus. This area is now under restoration as the BIRD research habitat.



Staff & Volunteers

2023 Highlights

Two new part-time naturalists were welcomed to the nature center team! Jenna Atma and Elyse Dilks bring a new spark to nature exploration with their creative ideas and literal creative talents!

After another year of learning about Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Justice, staff formally adopted an internal DEIJ statement and are now working to apply and implement relevant actions to our daily work.

Jenna (left) and Elyse (right) were officially hired on the same day in August!



Cheryl (and her faithful companion Cleo) after they just finished entering 2022 bird banding data!

Incredible volunteers assist with almost every aspect of WPNC operations, including staffing the front desk, feeding the birds, maintaining the greenhouse, gardens and grounds, assisting with BIRD research projects, leading and assisting with field trips, APES labs, and public educational programs, helping with special events, collecting Community Science data, and working on special projects.

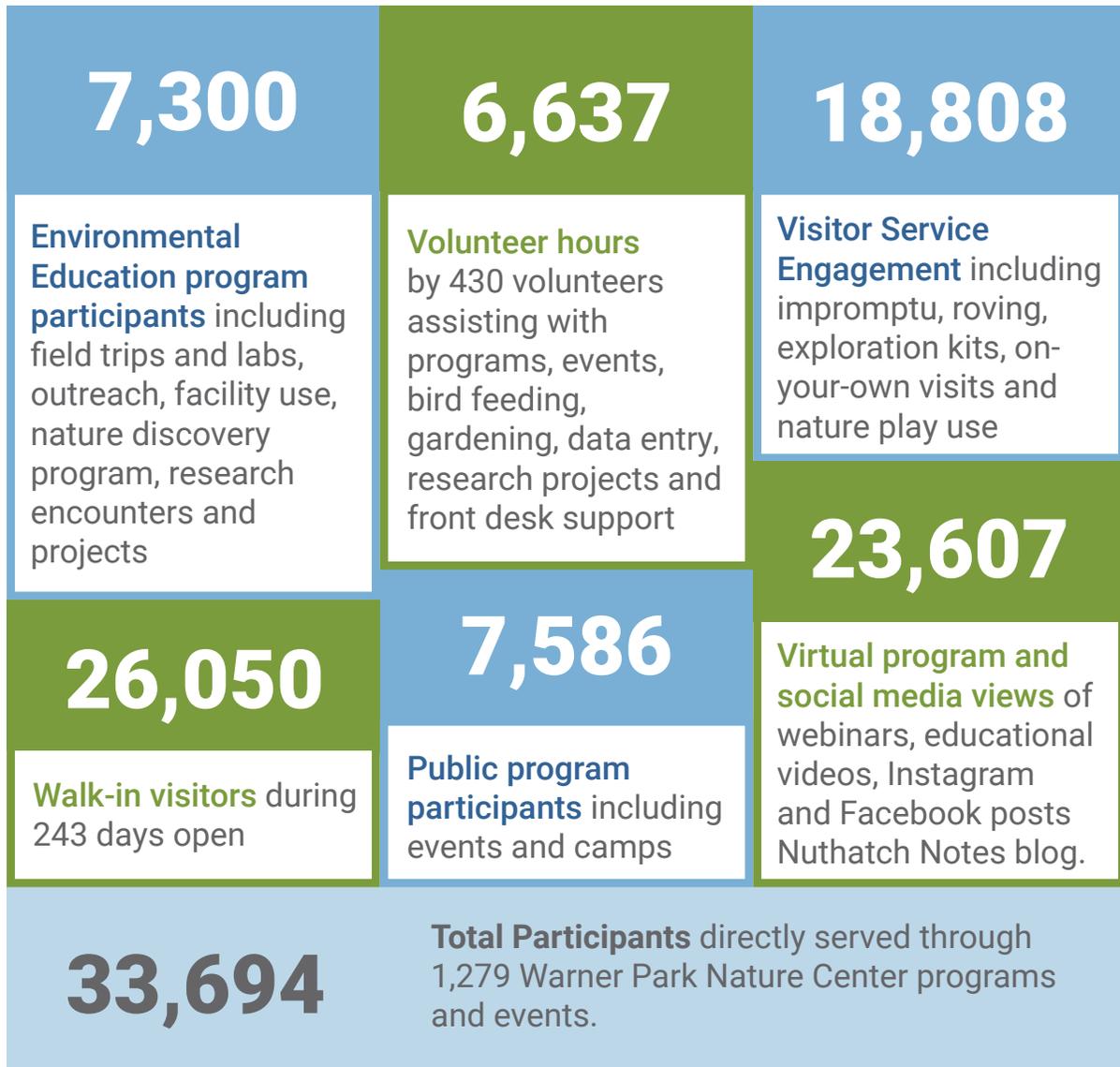
Volunteer Categories	# Hours	# Vols
Community Science	93	12
EE programs	267	14
Events	1590	263
Nature Center grounds	261	20
Nature Center office	945	12
Nature Discovery Program	242	34
BIRD Program	3239	85



EE staff and volunteers during a Geology and Soils field lab training.

By the Numbers

2023 Highlights



All 2023 successes only possible because of the ongoing support provided by Friends and our many community partners!



FRIENDS
OF WARNER PARKS