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AT HOME & LIVING

## A Parent's Review: Lewis Creek Park Story Time

BY ISABEL SANDEN

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Hidden in the hills of Bellevue, the Lewis Creek Visitor Center puts on a gem of a story hour and craft time the first Friday of each month.

Conveniently located just five minutes south of I-90, the Lewis Creek Visitor Center has established an eager following of children and parents who return each month to listen to stories that open their eyes to the wonders of nature. These regulars come to "get away from the urban sprawl," said one Issaquah mom, and immerse their children in the natural landscape Lewis Creek provides.

"This story hour is special," mentioned another mom. "My kids get to learn about animals and their habitats, and gain an appreciation for what makes our world beautiful."

The drive to Lewis Creek Park itself is beautiful, and tensions subside as you head closer to nature. The visitor center is situated with two clear glass walls that looks out over the Lewis Creek and the nature preserve. It is quite a sight.

The children on our visit were greeted warmly by Ranger Denise, and asked to sit in a circle in front of a large bookcase filled with books about nature and its many inhabitants.

Each month has its own nature theme. At our visit, the featured story was *The Boy Who Drew Birds: A Story of John James Audubon* by Jacqueline



Ranger Denise helps the kids with craft time at the Lewis Creek Visitor Center story time.



A bird created at craft time at the Lewis Creek Visitor Center story time.

*Photos by Isabel Sanden.*

Davies. It was a captivating true story about how a boy's passion and interest in birds led to his discovery of how and why birds migrate. Audubon's studies and drawings of birds in their natural habitat provided pivotal information that changed the world's understanding of migration, and his years of study and documentation became the foundation for the Audubon Society.

What made this story time most captivating was how Ranger Denise presented the story to the children. As she read, each page became a discussion. "What color are the birds on this page? Which one do you think is the male? Why do you think they are different colors?" asked Ranger Denise.

The questions continued and a chorus of children's voices echoed out with answers, each child thinking about and analyzing why a bird might nest in a certain area, or return to the same nest each year. Bringing the story to a close, she reviewed the vocabulary they had discussed throughout the book. It was interesting to watch how the ranger drew out the children's questions and built upon their understanding of the story and its impact on real history.

At the end of story time the craft was introduced. The children were to make their own birds. Ranger Denise again asked questions about what they remember about how a bird looks and asked them to build those features into their creations.

Craft time was fun! I was impressed by how well the craft was presented. Ranger Denise provided each child with materials, along with a brief discussion about each step. This allowed each child to be creative, but also to have a goal in mind to keep them focused. Mess was also kept to a minimum with this strategy, which I appreciated.

There are some other benefits to making this Friday morning or afternoon trip for story time. Lewis Creek has a wonderful playground to romp around on, and lots of trails to explore. Next time I am bringing a picnic and we will plan to stay for an afternoon hike before heading back into the urban sprawl.

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*Isabel Senden is a Seattle-area freelance writer and French instructor, and mother of three adventurous children ages 3, 6 and 8.*

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