

DeKalb County

# JUNIOR RANGER

Activity Journal



DEKALB COUNTY RECREATION, PARKS AND CULTURAL AFFAIRS



# ■ Dear Families and Teachers

DeKalb County's parks are great settings to share time in the outdoors and learn more about nature. We hope you enjoy assisting your child in accomplishing this program and that you learn new things, too! No matter your level of experience or expertise with nature, your role is to provide encouragement and help your children find their own answers. No individual can answer all of the questions generated by a curious child.

Though we hope you use this Junior Ranger activity journal to explore some of DeKalb's fabulous nature parks listed on pages 4-5, many of the DeKalb County Junior Ranger activities may be completed elsewhere—even in your own backyard

We would love to hear any comments you wish to share with us regarding your experience with the DeKalb County Junior Ranger program. Have fun!



*Cope's gray treefrog*

## Contact us

- ▶ [junior-ranger@dekalbcountyga.gov](mailto:junior-ranger@dekalbcountyga.gov)
- ▶ [dekalbcountyga.gov/parks](http://dekalbcountyga.gov/parks)



# Steps to Become a DeKalb Junior Ranger

1

Visit one or more DeKalb County parks.

2

Complete the activities in this journal at your own pace. Use the checklist below to keep track of your progress.

3

Contact a DeKalb Naturalist to get your badge:  
[junior-ranger@dekalbcountyga.gov](mailto:junior-ranger@dekalbcountyga.gov)

4

Care for our parks by following the park rules, picking up trash, enjoying nature, and teaching others to do the same.

## JUNIOR RANGER CHECKLIST

Activity	Page	Done
Fun in the Outdoors	8	<input type="checkbox"/>
Scavenger Hunt	10	<input type="checkbox"/>
Wildlife	12	<input type="checkbox"/>
Trees	14	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fruits & Flowers	16	<input type="checkbox"/>
Water	18	<input type="checkbox"/>
Birds	20	<input type="checkbox"/>

Activity	Page	Done
Nature's Recyclers	22	<input type="checkbox"/>
In the Sky	24	<input type="checkbox"/>
Our History	26	<input type="checkbox"/>
Pushy Plants	28	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nature Professions	30	<input type="checkbox"/>
Field Notes	32	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Junior Ranger Pledge	33	<input type="checkbox"/>

MARK EACH  
ACTIVITY YOU  
COMPLETE X

## THIS JOURNAL BELONGS TO

# ■ Be Prepared

## Follow park rules and **LEAVE NO TRACE**

**Take only pictures. Leave only footprints. Also:**

- 1 Keep dogs on leash.
- 2 Don't disturb or damage animals, plants, rocks, or artifacts.
- 3 Put trash and recycling in proper cans.
- 4 Stay on trails.
- 5 No open fires or swimming in streams or lakes.

## What to wear and bring

- Wear appropriate clothing for your activity, including comfortable walking shoes.
- It is best to dress in layers.
- Prepare based on the weather forecast.
- Know your abilities and physical limits.
- Bring water in a reusable bottle.
- Walk with a buddy and let someone know where you are going.





# ■ Potential Dangers

## Insects

Mosquitos, ticks, chiggers, bees, and hornets are some of the insects that can cause discomfort when doing outdoor activities. Wear insect repellent, stay on the trails, watch your step to avoid insect nests, and check your body for ticks after any outdoors adventure.

### RANGER TIP

Not sure if a plant or animal might be harmful? When in doubt, give it space!

## Snakes

It is unlikely that you will encounter a snake in the wild. If you do, however, slowly step back and give it plenty of space. There is only one venomous snake found in DeKalb parks: the copperhead. Look where you are stepping, especially when crossing rocks or fallen trees, and never reach blindly into holes or crevices.

## Wild berries or mushrooms

Do not eat any berries, mushrooms, or other plants found in DeKalb parks as they may be poisonous.



## Poison Ivy

Poison Ivy is a native plant found commonly in DeKalb County parks. Birds and other animals love to eat its berries, but many people develop an itchy rash if they touch poison ivy vines, roots, or leaves. Learn to identify poison ivy, but do not touch it! Each leaf is divided into three leaflets which may be smooth or serrated. The plant can be found growing on the ground or as a hairy vine climbing a tree.

DON'T TOUCH!

# ■ DeKalb County Nature Park Locations

All DeKalb County Parks contain pockets of nature, but some of our parks have more extensive nature areas. Naturalists are stationed at some parks. Visit the DeKalb Parks website ([dekalbcountyga.gov/parks](http://dekalbcountyga.gov/parks)) for current Naturalist program locations.

DeKalb County has more than 100 parks. Highlighted on the map to the right are some places we recommend you visit for a nature outing.

**1 Mason Mill** (Park Naturalist site)  
1340 McConnell Dr., Decatur

**2 Davidson-Arabia Mountain Nature Preserve** (Park Naturalist site)  
3787 Klondike Rd, Stonecrest

**3 Ira B. Melton Park**  
2080 Desmond Dr., Decatur

**4 W.D. Thomson**  
1760 Mason Mill Rd., Decatur

**5 Zonolite Park**  
1170 Zonolite Rd., Atlanta

**6 Kittredge Park**  
1520 Kittredge Park Rd., Atlanta

**7 Pendergast Park**  
1996 Chrysler Dr., Atlanta

**8 Mary Scott Nature Park**  
4150 Briarcliff Rd., Atlanta

**9 Briarlake Forest Park**  
3330 Briarlake Rd., Atlanta

**10 Frazier-Rowe Park**  
2880 Lavista Rd., Decatur

**11 Little Creek Horse Farm and Park**  
2057 Lawrenceville Hwy., Decatur

**12 Deep Dene Park**  
1999 N. Ponce de Leon Ave., Atlanta

**13 DeKalb Memorial Park**  
353 Wilkinson Dr., Atlanta

**14 Dearborn Park**  
1301 Dearwood Dr., Decatur

**15 Barker Bryant Memorial Park**  
2300 McAfee Rd., Decatur

**16 Redan Nature Preserve**  
5338 Redan Rd., Stone Mountain

**17 Hidden Acres Nature Preserve**  
1032 Stephenson Rd., Stone Mountain

**18 Glen Emerald Park**  
1479 Bouldercrest Rd., Atlanta

**19 Constitution Lakes Park**  
1305 S. River Industrial Blvd., Atlanta

**20 Intrenchment Creek Park**  
2109 Bouldercrest Rd., Atlanta

**21 Exchange Park**  
2771 Columbia Dr., Decatur

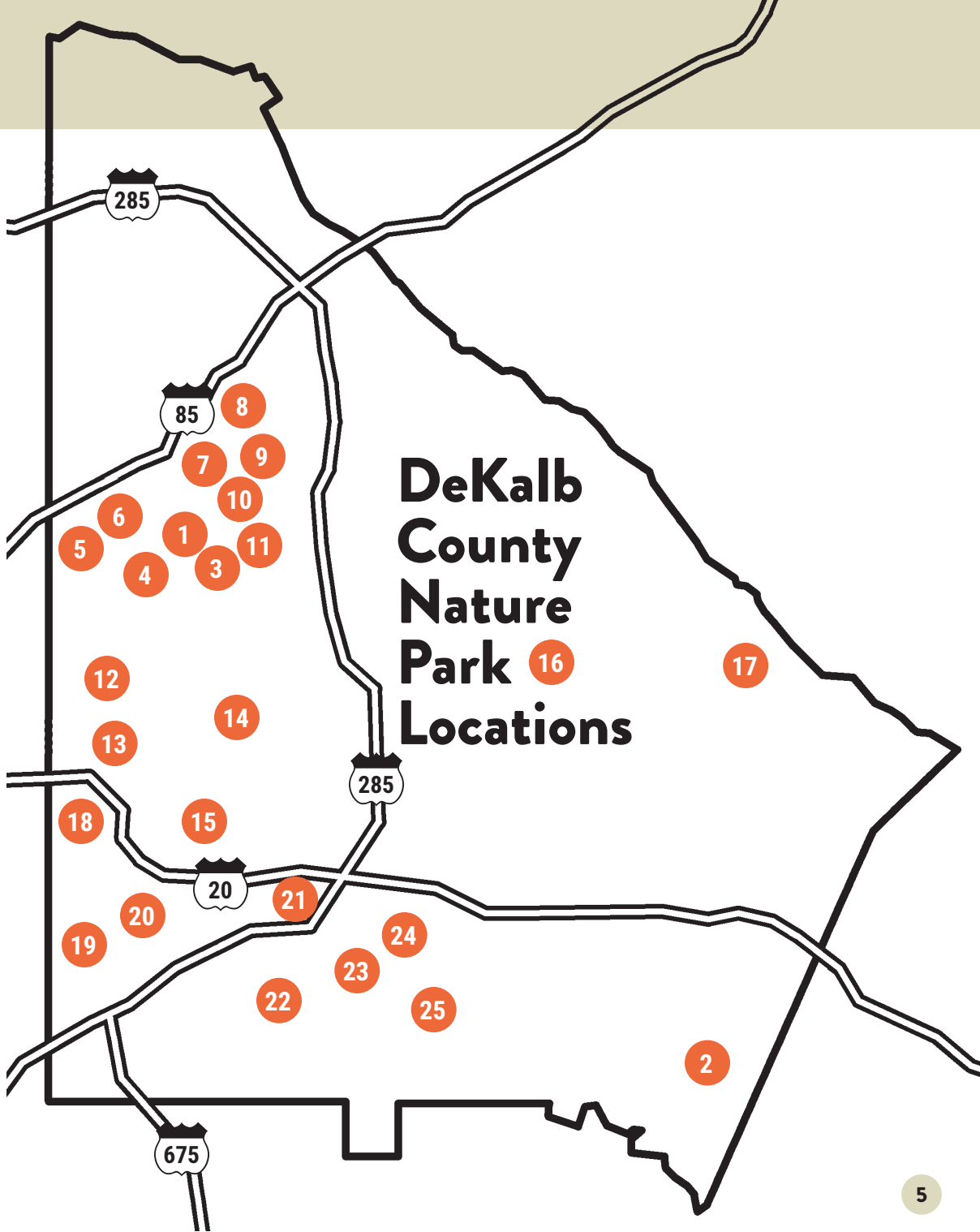
**22 Fork Creek Mountain Park**  
2835 River Rd., Decatur

**23 Flat Shoals Park**  
4462 Flat Shoals Pkwy., Decatur

**24 Summergate Park**  
3700 Columbia Pkwy., Decatur

**25 Chapel Hill Park**  
3984 Lehigh Blvd., Decatur





# Habitats and Ecological Zones

DeKalb County is located in the Piedmont region of Georgia, an area of rolling hills, streams, and hardwood and pine forests. Within the Piedmont—and particularly in DeKalb County nature parks—you'll find specific habitat zones.



## Riparian / Creek

### Common plants:

River cane  
Tulip poplar  
American hornbeam  
Virginia sweetspire

### Common animals:

Crayfish  
Great blue heron  
Kingfisher  
Beaver



## Floodplain

### Common plants:

Sycamore  
Black willow  
American holly  
Box elder  
Green ash

### Common animals:

Raccoon  
Opossum  
Frogs  
Eastern box turtle



**Common plants:**

Loblolly pine  
Carolina sweetshrub  
Oak  
Sourwood  
Muscadine

**Common animals:**

Deer  
Hawk  
Coyote  
Chipmunk  
Carolina wren

## Forest

**Common Plants:**

Alder  
Willow  
Jewelweed  
Cattails  
Milkweed

**Common Animals:**

Mallard duck  
Salamander  
Frog  
Great blue heron  
Raccoon

## Wetland / Pond



Haven't heard of one of these animals or plants? A web search can help you learn more. Then you can refer to this list of habitats, animals, and plants to help you when completing activities in this journal.

# ■ Fun in the Outdoors

**One of the most important parts of being a Junior Ranger is knowing how to have fun in nature.**

What activities will you participate in at a DeKalb County park?

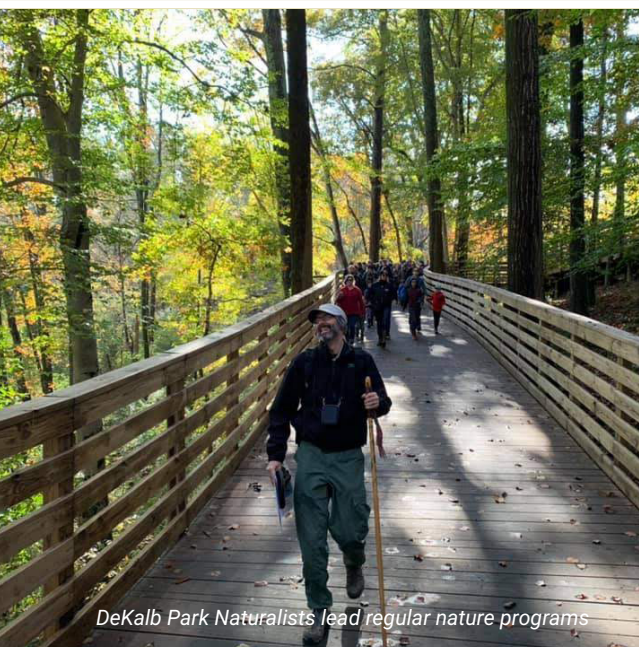
- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hiking   | <input type="checkbox"/> Exploring or Climbing |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bird-watching  | <input type="checkbox"/> Bicycling             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Horseback riding<br>(lessons at Little Creek Horse Farm) | <input type="checkbox"/> Fishing               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Walking with a Ranger                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> Something else?       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Picnicking   | _____  |

Check all the activities you do. You must do at least one to complete this activity.

*Take a nature walk with friends*







DeKalb Park Naturalists lead regular nature programs



Eastern phoebe nest



Canada geese



# ■ Scavenger Hunt

## TASK 1:

**Find a flower (but don't pick it)**

What color is it? \_\_\_\_\_  
10 points

**Bonus** How many petals? \_\_\_\_\_  
5 points

## TASK 2:

**Find another flower (but don't pick it)**

What color is it? \_\_\_\_\_  
10 points

**Bonus** Describe its smell: \_\_\_\_\_  
5 points

**FLOWER BONUS:** Are your flowers different colors from each other? ☐ No ☐ Yes (5 points)



*Milkweed*



### TASK 3:

#### Find the biggest leaf you can (but don't pick it)

Measure it using your hands. How many hands long is it? \_\_\_\_\_  
10 points

**Bonus** How many hands wide? \_\_\_\_\_  
5 points

### TASK 5:

#### Find a flying insect (butterflies included)

What color is it? \_\_\_\_\_  
10 points

**Bonus** What is it doing? \_\_\_\_\_  
5 points

### TASK 4:

#### Find a bird

Describe what it looks like or how it sounds.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
10 points

**Bonus** Is it a hummingbird or a bird of prey? (see below) ☐ Yes (5 points) ☐ No

### FLYING CREATURE BONUS:

What species is the bird you saw in Task 4?

\_\_\_\_\_  
5 points

What species is the insect you saw in Task 5?

\_\_\_\_\_  
5 points

Use iNaturalist to help.  
See page 18.

### Add up your points \_\_\_\_\_

Earn at least **50 points** to complete the scavenger hunt.

Can you collect all 90 possible points?

Birds of prey feed on mice, squirrels, lizards, and other small animals. The **red-tailed hawk** is one of the most common birds of prey in DeKalb County. Its wingspan (the distance from wingtip to wingtip) ranges from 3 to 5 feet).



# Wildlife

**How do we classify animals?** Draw an X to match these animals that live in DeKalb County parks with their classification. If you don't know an animal listed here, make an educated guess, ask an adult to describe the animal, or do an internet search for a picture.

Animals	Mammals	Reptiles	Fish	Amphibians	Birds	Invertebrates
coyote						
caterpillar						
catfish						
squirrel						
beaver						
American robin						
snake						
mussel						
brown-headed nuthatch						
mallard duck						
raccoon						
millipede						
bass						
red-tailed hawk						
salamander						
eastern box turtle						
midland water snake						
bumble bee						
blue jay						
American toad						
crayfish						
snail						
leopard frog						
chipmunk						
lizard						
red-bellied woodpecker						
carpenter ant						
minnow						



Eastern box turtle



Red-bellied woodpecker



Bumble bee

Now, see if you can find and observe two wild animals that are different classifications. Describe what you saw, where you saw it, and how you think it should be classified. Remember, finding a sign of an animal (bones, cocoon, scat, nest, burrow, bird song, footprints, feather, etc.) counts as much as seeing the animal itself.

1 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_

### RANGER TIP

Scat (animal poop) is a common sign of animals. Did you know that coyotes like to mark their territory by pooping on trails?

Sphinx caterpillar



Dusky salamander



Coyote





# Trees

On this page you'll find photographs of leaves from some of the most common types of trees in DeKalb County. Look for a leaf like one of these and make a rubbing in the park or at home. If you can't find one of these, make a rubbing of any interesting leaf. For this activity, you have special permission to pick one leaf from a healthy tree.

## WHITE OAK



- Leaves have rounded lobes
- Flaking, plate-like or scaly bark

## SWEET GUM



- Star-shaped leaves
- Round, spiky seed pods

## TULIP POPLAR



- Center vein ends in a "V," not a point
- Tulip-like flowers in spring

## LOBLOLLY PINE



- Deeply furrowed, flaky bark
- Three needles per needle bundle

Put your leaf  
rubbing here.

To make a leaf rubbing, put your leaf on a hard, flat surface. Then put your paper over the leaf and tape it down so it doesn't move. Use a pencil or crayon to go over the leaf with long gentle strokes so that the shape and details of the leaf appear. It takes a little practice to get a good rubbing.



# ■ Fruits & Flowers

This activity will help you become a citizen scientist, like the naturalist William Bartram. Observing fruits, flowers, seeds, and nuts are great ways to identify a plant. You can complete this activity in one of two ways:

(1) Download and learn to use the **iNaturalist** app on a smartphone or tablet. This free tool can help you identify living things through photo identification software and a community of citizen scientists who help each other learn about nature.

(2) If you like to draw, prefer not to use a phone, or don't have one to use, you can sketch your observations instead, just like botanists have done for centuries.

If applicable, write your iNaturalist username: \_\_\_\_\_

Find four fruits, flowers, nuts, or seeds in the following locations. Write what you found (fruit, flower, seed, or nut) and draw an X in the column where you found it. Then either post a photo of your observation on iNaturalist or sketch what you saw.

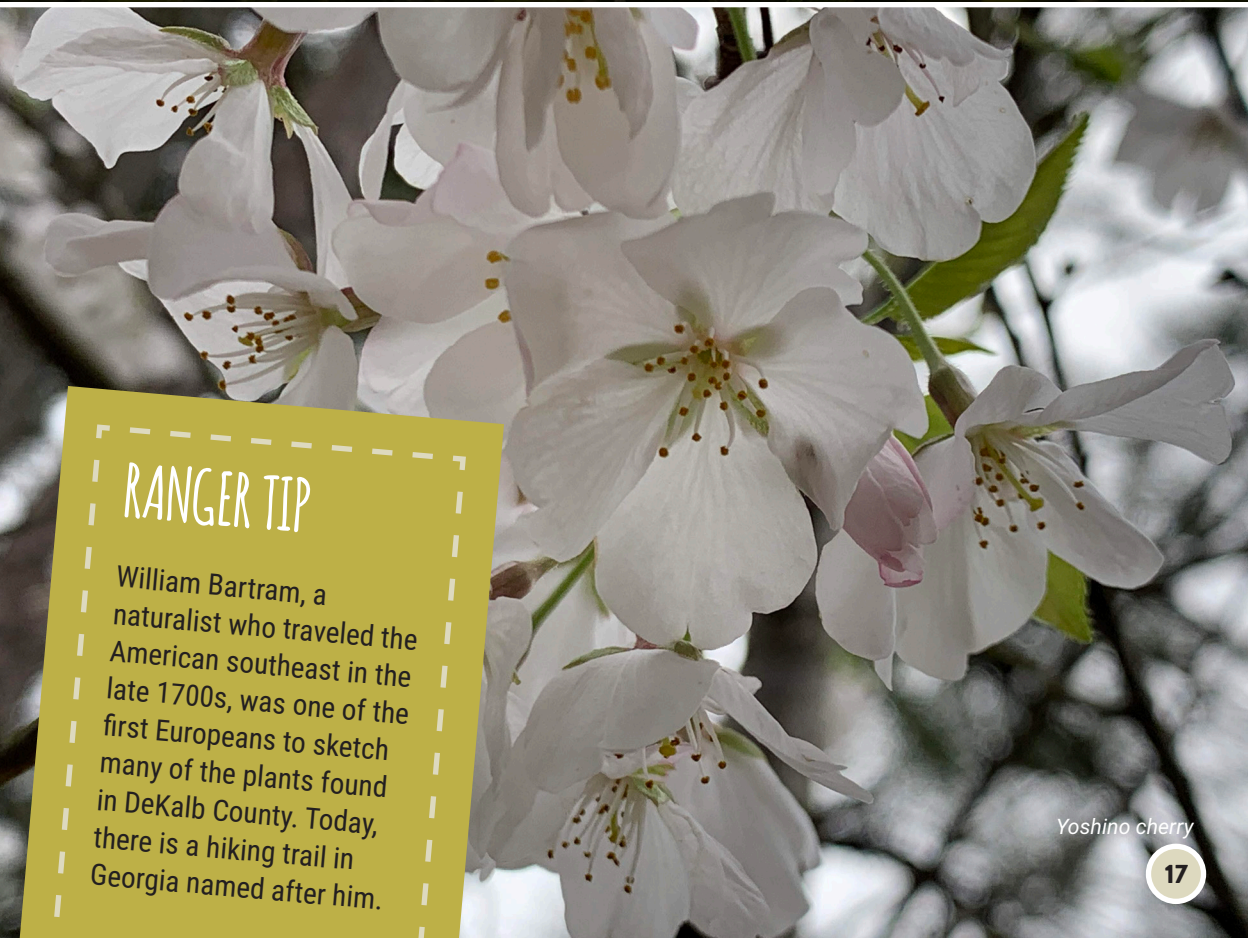
What did you find?	Where did you find it?			
	On a vine	In a tree	On the ground	In a bush
1				
2				
3				
4				

If you'd like, sketch your four observations on the Field Notes page in the back of this journal.





American beautyberry



Yoshino cherry

## RANGER TIP

William Bartram, a naturalist who traveled the American southeast in the late 1700s, was one of the first Europeans to sketch many of the plants found in DeKalb County. Today, there is a hiking trail in Georgia named after him.

## What is the Eastern Subcontinental Divide?

That's the high point of land that separates the Atlantic Seaboard watershed and the Gulf of Mexico watershed. All rain that falls east and south of the divide flows into the Atlantic Ocean. All rain that falls west and north of the divide flows into the Gulf of Mexico. The Eastern Subcontinental Divide runs right through the middle of DeKalb County, including through Decatur, Clarkston, and Tucker!

What side of the divide do you live on? Atlantic or Gulf of Mexico?

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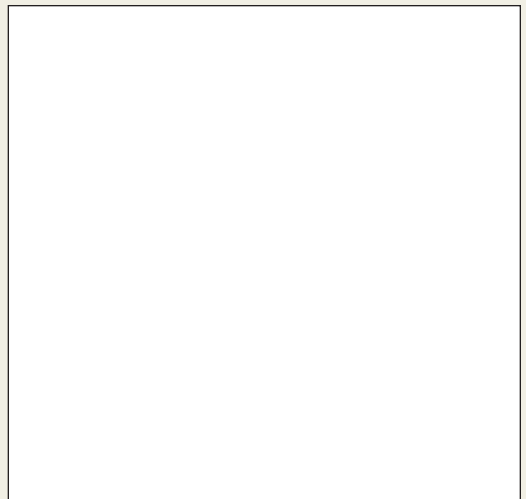
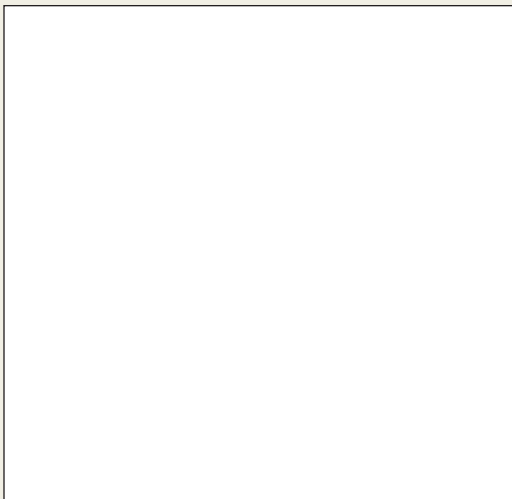
Visit a creek in a DeKalb County park.

What park did you visit? \_\_\_\_\_

To where does this park's water flow? The Atlantic Ocean or Gulf of Mexico?

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Sketch one animal and one plant you saw there.







# Birds

## WHAT KIND OF BIRDS DO YOU SEE?

Use **the 4 S's** to identify types of birds.

**Sight:** What does the bird look like? Describe its shape and color. Does it have a long tail or a short one? What is the shape of its beak? Are there other unique features that you notice?

**Sound:** Describe the bird's call. What word(s) does it sound like the bird is "saying"?

**Size:** How big is the bird? Sparrow-sized or smaller? Robin-sized? Crow-sized? Goose-sized or larger? What other ways can you describe the bird's size?

**Site (habitat):** In what habitat did you see the bird? Riparian or creek? Floodplain? Forest? Wetland or pond? Open field or meadow? Backyard?

**Activity:** What was the bird doing when you saw it? Eating at a feeder? Swimming or wading? Pecking at the ground? Soaring or flying?

**On page 21 you'll see some common DeKalb County songbirds.**  
**Go observe a bird in the wild and write your notes below.**

Binoculars are a great tool for watching birds. You can adjust how far apart the eyepieces are, and then use the focus to get a super clear image.



SIGHT

---

SOUND

---

SIZE

---

SITE

---

ACTIVITY

---

HOW MANY OF YOUR BIRD DID YOU SEE?

---



Northern cardinal



## RANGER TIP

The free Merlin Bird ID app can help you identify birds. It even includes recordings of bird calls.

Northern mockingbird



Carolina chickadee



Tufted titmouse



Eastern bluebird



Blue jay



American goldfinch



# ■ Nature's Recyclers

Many invertebrates and mushrooms do the important but often invisible job of recycling, or decomposing, things in the forest. They can't recycle most human trash, but they do decompose dead trees, animals, and plants and create new and rich soil in which new organisms grow! See if you can find some of nature's recyclers.

## Log flipping!

The easiest way to find nature's recyclers is to look for rotting logs. Flip over a log and find a creature that lives in the soil: earthworm, ant, grub, etc. Describe what you saw.

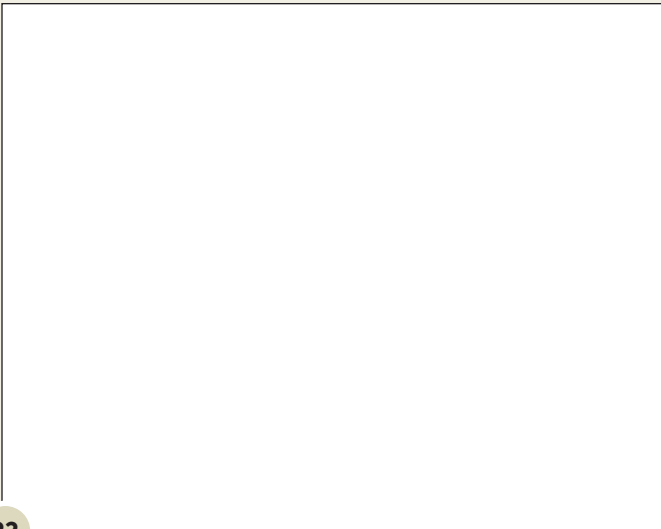
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Find a mushroom growing on a dead tree or rotting log. Draw it.



## RANGER TIP

**CAUTION:** Always pull a log or rock up toward you, so any animals that might be hiding beneath won't be right next to you when you move the log or rock. And do not pick up the animals you find! Be sure to carefully return the log or rock back to its original position when you are done.



## You can help recycle!

Find trash in the park, sort it into items that can be recycled or must be trashed, then bring it to a recycling bin or trash can. (Be sure to wear gloves while cleaning up the forest!)

List the items you recycled: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

*Gilled mushroom*



# ■ In the Sky

For humans and for nature, the passage of time is marked by the rise and fall of the sun and moon. This is one way we are connected to plants and animals. Do you know when the sun and moon rise and set?

Choose a sunny day and find out what time the sun rises and what time it sets.  
Find out what time the moon rises and what phase it is in.

Date of observation: \_\_\_\_\_

Sunrise time: \_\_\_\_\_

Moonrise time: \_\_\_\_\_

Sunset time: \_\_\_\_\_

Moon phase (draw it!)



Watch the sunrise or sunset. Draw what you saw!



**Phases of the moon** (White represents the visible part of the moon during each phase.)



NEW  
MOON



WAXING  
CRESCENT



FIRST  
QUARTER



WAXING  
GIBBOUS



FULL  
MOON



WANING  
GIBBOUS

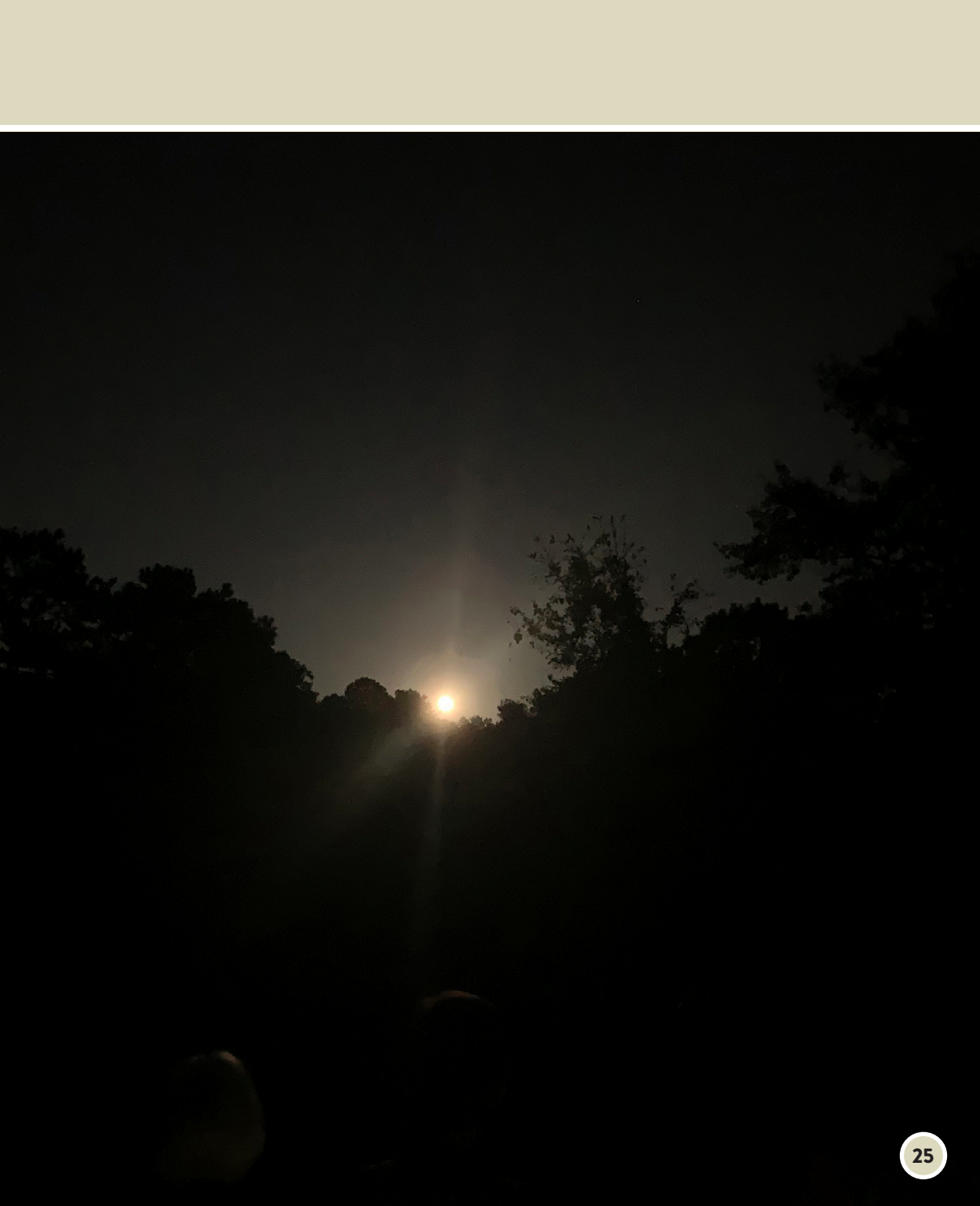


THIRD  
QUARTER



WANING  
CRESCENT





# ■ Our History

## Timeline of early DeKalb History

**Around 12,000  
years ago**

First humans arrived  
in what is now  
DeKalb County.

**10,000-3,000  
years ago**

Archaic Period—  
nomadic peoples  
develop spear points  
and pottery.

**3,000 years  
ago-900 C.E.**

Woodland Period—  
permanent  
settlements built,  
including mound-  
building.

**900-1541**

Mississippian  
Period—peoples  
join together in  
chiefdoms.

**1541**

Europeans  
first arrive  
(Hernando de  
Soto).

**1775-1783**

American  
Revolutionary  
War

**January 2, 1788**

Georgia becomes  
the 4th state in  
the Union.

**1790**

Treaty of Washington  
recognizes Muscogee  
(Creek) tribal rights to  
that land that is now  
DeKalb County.

**1861**

Georgia secedes  
from the Union  
and Civil War  
begins.

**September 1,  
1864**

Confederate  
forces defeated in  
Atlanta.

**1821-1822**

Treaty of Indian Springs  
forces Muscogee  
(Creek) people from  
their homes and DeKalb  
County is formed on the  
land taken by the State  
of Georgia.

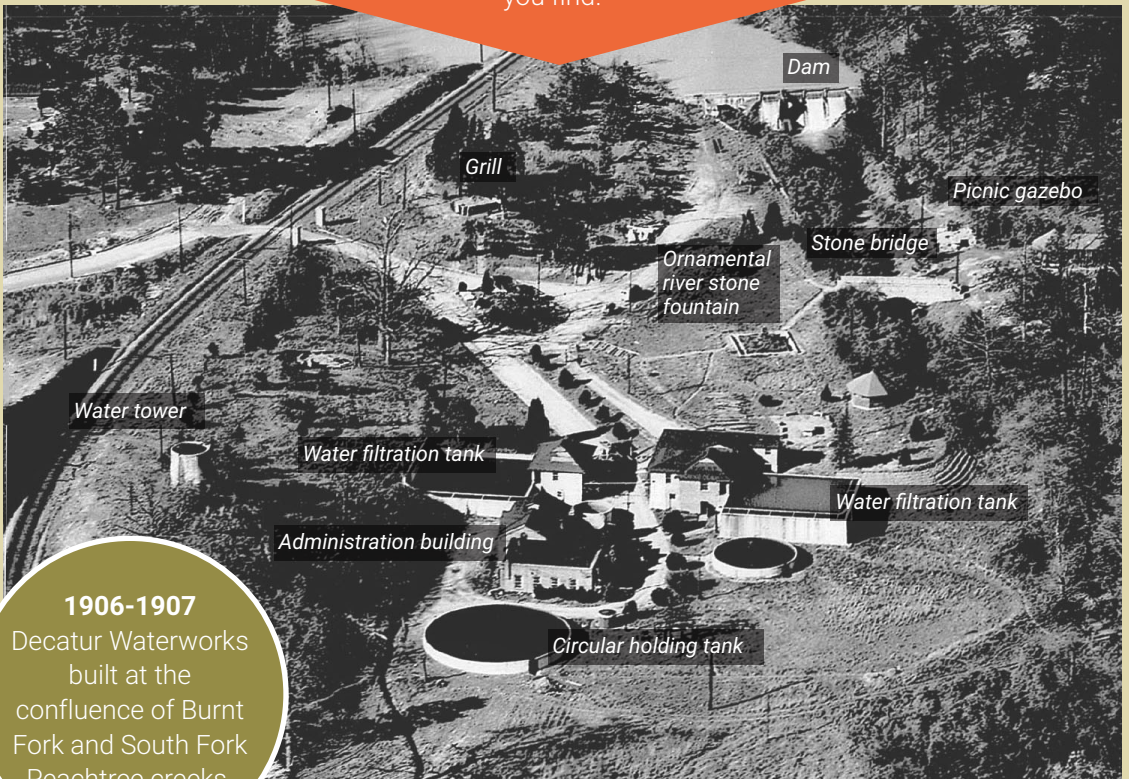
**1865**

Civil War ends and  
slavery is officially  
abolished by the  
13th Amendment.



One of the most extensive historical ruins in DeKalb parks is the Old Decatur Waterworks at Mason Mill Park. Visit Mason Mill and see if you can find five of the structures in this historic photo from the mid 1940s.

Circle each ruined structure that you find.



Can't get to Mason Mill Park? Visit another DeKalb park with historical significance and write down one fact you learn.

Where did you go? \_\_\_\_\_

What did you learn? \_\_\_\_\_

# ■ Pushy Plants

Pushy, or invasive, plants don't naturally grow in DeKalb County. They were brought here from other places to plant, and now are crowding out other plants. Pushy plants grow so thick and fast that they block the sunlight other plants need to grow.

Many pushy plants grow in a "monoculture" in which only one type of plant is successful. However, the most healthy forest is one with a wide diversity of plants and animals. When only one type of plant is present, animals have fewer opportunities for food and shelter. Some pushy plants (like the berries growing on nandina) are even harmful to animals.

## Common invasive plants in DeKalb County:



*Chinese privet*



*Japanese honeysuckle*



*Chinese wisteria*



*Nandina (heavenly bamboo)*



*Japanese chaff flower*



*Mimosa*

1 Find one pushy plant. What did you find? \_\_\_\_\_

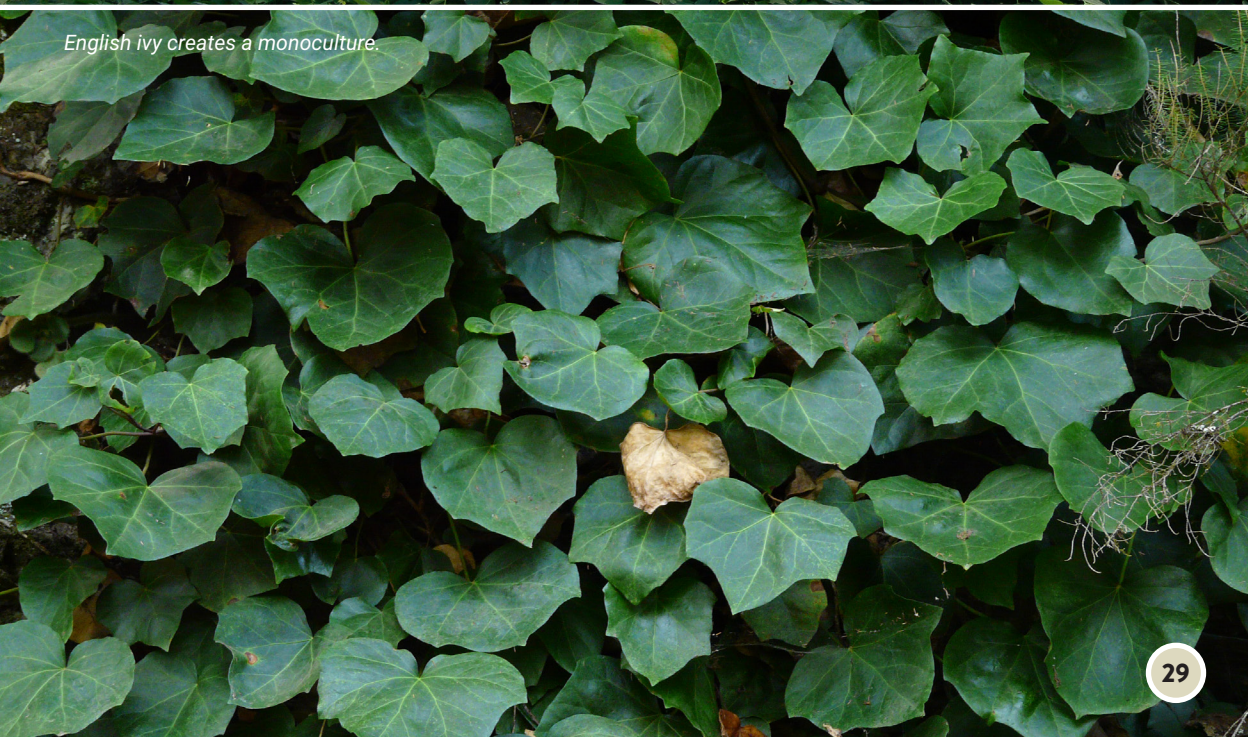
2 Tell someone why pushy plants are bad news. Who did you tell? \_\_\_\_\_

Optional: Contact a Park Naturalist or your local "Friends of the Park" group to find a volunteer day when you can help remove pushy plants.





*Kudzu completely covers the ground and trees.*



*English ivy creates a monoculture.*



# ■ Nature Professions

Interview a DeKalb Park Naturalist or someone else who works with nature (landscaper, arborist, zookeeper, etc.)

**Name, place of work, and job title of the person you interviewed:**

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**Interview questions:**

What do you do each day? \_\_\_\_\_

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What education or training did you need to do your job well? \_\_\_\_\_

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What is something you like about your job? \_\_\_\_\_

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What is one thing you learned about nature recently? \_\_\_\_\_

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## ■ Field Notes

Need extra space to finish another activity? Find something amazing that you just had to record? Here's some extra space, just in case.



# ■ The Junior Ranger Pledge



## **I promise to:**

Treat the Earth and all living things with care and respect.

Tell others about my discoveries.

Encourage my friends and family to protect special places and habitats.

Be a friend of nature and a champion of history.

Come back!

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SIGN HERE

Congratulations! You have finished the DeKalb County Junior Ranger Activity Journal. You are now an official DeKalb County Junior Ranger!

Contact a Park Naturalist to set up a time to take the Junior Ranger Pledge and get your official Junior Ranger badge: [junior-ranger@dekalbcountyga.gov](mailto:junior-ranger@dekalbcountyga.gov)



**DeKalb County**  
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