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Zoo to You: Exploring Nature in Any Season

It is easy to become caught up in your daily schedule and forget to take time to explore nature. With my job sharing the wonders of nature and exploring all it has to hold, even I need a reminder to get outdoors every now and again.

When you take time to explore our local ecosystems, or maybe a new one, you'll experience many benefits from your time outdoors. Physically, you'll gain the benefits of fresh air, sunlight, and exercise. You'll learn new things, and hopefully, gain a greater appreciation for the beauty our planet has to offer. This in turn, can inspire a deeper passion for the conservation of these resources; which will benefit the planet. There really are many benefits to taking a moment to stop and smell the flowers or watch a bird soar.

Many are already aware of these benefits and take advantage of exploring outside in fair weather. The challenge is to get out and explore nature in winter too! As fall arrives and the air changes to cool and crisp, people are still inclined to go outdoors, but when winter comes, many will choose to stay indoors. Now, don't get me wrong, I love curling up under the blankets on the couch with a movie to watch on a cold winter's day, but don't let the weather keep you indoors every weekend.

When going outdoors in the wintertime, make smart choices. If the wind-chill is dropping temperatures to below freezing, then choose that weekend to stay indoors. When the weather is more suitable for exploration, always dress in layers. By removing layers as you start to warm up, you can avoid sweating; this prevents your body from becoming chilled by your sweat freezing on your skin. Also, if you are going to be outdoors with children create a positive tone for the outing; avoid focusing on the weather and try not to talk about the cold temperatures in negative ways.

This weekend is the Great Backyard Bird Count, February 16th- 19th, and it's a great excuse to go outdoors and explore. This event encourages avian admirers of all ages to count the number and types of birds they see on one or more days of the weekend. The goal of this event is to create a picture of bird populations, across the globe, at this moment in time. If you

are a hobbyist birder, you might choose to participate from home while monitoring your bird feeder or other favorite birding location. If you take counts on your own, don't forget to add your numbers to the [gbbc.birdcount.org](http://gbbc.birdcount.org) website to contribute to the global results. If you're new to bird watching and want to learn more about what you are looking at, then visit the zoo throughout the weekend to join in on one of the many bird focused events. From Keeper Talks at the Duck Pond and Bald Eagle habitat to bird counts led by zoo staff, there is something for everyone each day of the event.

Looking for an activity for your little ones to experience the fun of birding? Then join us on Sunday the 18th, from 1:30 PM- 2:30 PM for a bird-focused Nature Play Pop-up at the Duck Pond. During this event staff and volunteers will be helping beginners test out their birding skills. There will be binoculars to try out, and we will use the ducks on the pond to practice our spotting and identification skills. Once guests are comfortable spotting the ducks, they can turn the binoculars to the sky to spot birds in the surrounding trees. There will also be a Discovery Cart at the event to allow guests a closer look at bird feathers or skulls. Even if it's a chilly weekend, we still hope to see you at the zoo for the Great Backyard Bird Count dressed in layers for warmth.