

## Commune with nature in Tacoma

The Olympian

- What: The Tacoma Nature Center.
- Where: 1919 S. Tyler Street. The center is near Cheney Stadium and Foss High School.
- To do: This is a wonderful place for a nice - or crummy - winter day. If it's stormy, stay inside the center and check out the wonderful displays of the plants and animals that live in Western Washington's wetlands. You can see a live king snake, a live three-toed box turtle, a northwestern garter snake and a northern alligator lizard. One of the largest bluegill sunfish in Western Washington fins in a large aquarium.

Another aquarium has a cluster of eyed coho salmon eggs. The eggs are about to hatch into tiny salmon.

Easy-to-understand displays show adults and children how the wetland is the center of a web of life that includes fish, reptiles, birds, deer, foxes, raccoons and other animals - all within a few hundred yards of a city street. Children can try on full-size animal costumes.

The center has a full slate of programs that range from avalanche awareness and nature classes for young children to science club meetings for older kids.

Outside, the Nature Center has miles of trails in the forest and along Snake Lake. Workers are repairing two bridges across the lake, so some sections of trail could be closed during the next few weeks. The trails are easy to hike, and there are great chances to see deer, raccoons, foxes and many kinds of birds. Dozens of chickadees flitted through the woods Tuesday afternoon. The little birds were looking for food under the bark of cedar, Douglas fir, maple and alder trees. After a while, you forget that you're in the middle of a city - and even the traffic noise disappears.

- Directions: Take Interstate 5 north to Exit 132 - and get ready to merge onto state Route 16 toward Gig Harbor. Get onto westbound Route 16. Take the South 19th Street East exit. Turn right at the top of the ramp onto South 19th Street. Turn right onto South Tyler Street. The nature center is on your left.
- Equipment: Raingear, waterproof shoes or boots, cameras and warm clothes.

- Safety: The trails can be muddy - and stay away from bridge construction.
- Comforts: The nature center has restrooms and a water fountain. Tacoma is just a few yards away.
- Hours: The trails are open every day from 8 a.m. to dusk. The nature center is open from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Tuesdays through Fridays, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Saturdays. The center is closed on Sundays and Mondays.
- Parking: There is plenty of parking.
- For more information on the Tacoma Nature Center or programs, call 253-591-6439 or go to [www.metroparkstacoma.org](http://www.metroparkstacoma.org).



A mother and her son walk the trails near Snake Lake . The trails put walkers close to deer, birds, raccoons, squirrels and other animals. It's common to spot lots of animals -- if you walk slowly and quietly -- and pause every now and then. If it's too rainy or windy to go outside, head inside to see the Tacoma Nature Center's displays. (Chester Allen/The Olympian)



Chickadees scramble and skitter around on trees near Snake Lake. The chickadees are looking for seeds, nuts and other food under the bark and moss. If you stand very still on the trail, the chickadees will land on a branch right next to your face and check you out. (Chester Allen/The Olympian)

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