

NEWSLETTER

Winter 2022 Issue • December 2021



Barred owl perches among barren branches above Middle Trail. Photo credit: Andrew Kane.

What a great turnout we had at the Autumn Festival! It was so nice to be able to see the children back to their playful selves as they pressed apple cider, created scarecrows, and played various games. Parents entered the raffles, enjoyed bird shows, ate various foods, and listened to great music. Best of all... there was no rain! This is the first Autumn Festival in quite a few years without a downpour! Thank you to everyone who came and enjoyed the day.

The leaves have fallen and the snow is beginning to fall as the cold of winter has arrived at the Nature Center. Although things turn white and the trees lose their beautiful leaves, it becomes a great time to see wildlife as birds and animals cannot hide behind leaves on trees and brush. It becomes easier to see between the trees as deer scatter when they hear you approach. Bald eagles hunt fish at the

ice edge of Eel Bay. It is in the winter when I hike the trails of the Nature Center looking for owls and I am usually pretty lucky at finding one almost every time.

If you are a bird lover like I am, you will really enjoy Minna's article within this newsletter. It is about owls and points out some very interesting facts and history about owls. Come out this winter and enjoy a stroll along our trails and keep an eye looking up for a pair of eyes looking down at you! In the meantime, I hope you enjoy my photograph of a Barred Owl taken in January of 2019 along the Middle Trail. You might be able to see the same owl this winter!

Andy Kane
Board President

The Minna Anthony Common Series

Owls Divided into Two General Groups

Barn Owls and Round-Faced Owls;
Traits Described

by *Mrs. James A. Common*

*Originally printed December 11, 1948.
Reprinted with permission of the
Watertown Daily Times.*

Owls are much the same, here, there, and everywhere; “circumpolar” and “cosmopolitan” being terms applied to many of them. There are several hundred kinds, all recognizable as owls by a glance at the feather ruffs encircling the eyes. An owl is the only bird spoken of as having a “face.” Every one of these birds is known as “owl” or the equivalent word in any country’s language. Here in America we say, screech owl, horned owl, barn owl, and so on; the word owl always being part of the name. It is derived from the sound the bird makes.

Owls are divided into two general groups: barn owls, only one of which inhabits the United States, with heart-shaped faces, round heads and smoothly feathered legs, and round-faced owls, with fluffy legs and often ear-tufts or “horns” on their heads.

As a rule, owls are not migratory and usually spend their lives in or about the same locality.

“We had a barn owl once that must have stayed here ten or twelve years,” a farmer once told me. “It used to sit up there in the peak of the

barn all day long. We weren’t bothered by rats or mice in those days.”

That we can well believe, for a barn owl is known to eat its own weight or more in food every night. One is worth a dozen cats to a farmer.

The barn owl is known also as the monkey-faced owl and the white owl. As with all owls, there are varying color phases, some being dark and some light. Perhaps in a nest of young, one fledgling will be totally different from all the others. The dark phase is brown and black speckled; the light phase is often immaculately white underneath with a snowy face-disc edged with orange.

There are several owls which may be met within this locality, though being birds of the night we often miss seeing them. The barn owl and the barred owl are the least common; the screech owl and the great-horned owl are the most numerous. Sometimes in winter the snowy owl comes to us from its Arctic home.

The great-horned owl is found in suitable wooded spots all over the nation. It has an enormous appetite and becomes a power for good or evil, depending upon where it makes its home. When near poultry farms, it may take a big toll unless the birds are shut in at night. With that precaution observed, the owl becomes most beneficial since it keeps the mice, shrew, and rats in check; these creatures being also abroad at night. If its home is in the woods far from hen coops, it is wholly beneficial since it restricts itself by hunting a half-mile radius from its nest site and dining table. The great-horned owl takes its catch home to eat it. After the digestible parts have been assimilated, the bird spits out the fur, feathers, and bones, it wrapped up in neat, clean little pellets. These are quite often found in the woods and by examining them it may be ascertained exactly what that bird has been eating over a long period of time. Some great-horned owls develop a taste for birds; others never touch them. No one should condemn any one of the birds until it has proven a “black sheep.”

The Minna Anthony Common Series *cont.*

Everything about an owl is adapted to the life it leads. Its eyes are very large and the iris can open to fill the full size, thus enabling the bird to see by night even better than by day. When it winks it is slow-motion, like a moon going into an eclipse. An owl's eyes are fixed to the front so that if the bird wishes to see what is behind it, it must turn its whole head. This it can do most rapidly, and more than that, it can turn its head half-way around so that it looks directly behind itself. It is really startling to look at an owl sitting on a branch facing you, then to walk behind it and see it still looking you squarely at you over its back without having twisted its shoulders in the least.

The beak of an owl is absurdly like a Roman nose, and with its big round eyes and mouth which opens up and down like an expansive yawn, the bird almost appears human; it even wears a look of wisdom.

“A wise old owl sat in an oak
The more he saw the less he spoke,
The less he spoke, the more he heard,
Why can't we be like that old bird?”

Legends and folklore tales of every land have grown up about owls, and almost always they are pictured as birds of wisdom and learning in one way or another. The owl was the bird of Athena, the Grecian goddess of wisdom and learning, to whom the Parthenon was dedicated. Coins, sculptures, and vases portraying Athena with the head of an owl have been found on the site of ancient Troy.

As we read we find owl legends in almost every country. Little though is said about its voice. Yet, to us one of the most fascinating sounds to be heard at night in the woods is the call of the little screech owl. It is outstanding not for its music, but because of the chills it sends up and down the spine of the listeners. Such a weird, long-drawn-out, quavering wail would curdle the

blood of any but a calm creature; no wonder the mouse is too scared to move. All through the performance the sound is emphasized by a snapping of the beak, like the accompaniment of miniature castanets.

An owl's feet are fitted to grasp and to hold its prey. Like most birds it has four toes, but its outer one can be moved to the front or the back as the need arises. No other bird can do that.

An owl's hearing is most acute. Its ear is no mere hole as is a human's, but it is a fold of skin in a channel which reaches all the way from the eye to the side of the throat. No wonder the bird can hear the least rustle and can locate a mouse under leaves and bushes. There is no known relation between the ear tufts on an owl's head and its true ears. The feathers are for ornament solely; some species do not have any.

The plumage of an owl is especially soft and fluffy to aid it in the noiselessness of its flight. The wing feathers are not stiff, but have soft, downy fringes along the edges. A person standing in the woods may feel the rush of air as the owl flies past in the dark, but not a sound can he hear---and neither can the mouse.

Mice form by far the greatest part of any owl's diet. It eats beetles, caterpillars and grasshoppers, rats, rabbits, shrews, moles, gophers and squirrels. It has been proven that birds are seldom taken, which must be because birds naturally sleep at the hours in which owls are abroad. The only owls accused of taking birds to any great extent are the great-horned and snowy, both of which hunt in daylight hours.

“Hearing a strange night-piercing sound
Of owl that strove to sing,
I followed where it hid, and found
A small, soft-throated thing,
As feathered handful of gray grief,
Perched by last year's withered leaf.”

—Wetherald ■

From the Director

Dear Friends and Colleagues,

We had a fruitful fall. Our *Autumn Festival* was one of the most successful on record – in terms of attendance and weather. We had a brilliantly sunny day and over 1,700 event participants! Autumn Fest is truly a community effort – it would not be possible without dedicated volunteers, local businesses who sponsor and donate, State Park staff, and nonprofit partners. We are grateful for over 60 volunteers who made the 42nd Annual Autumn Festival possible. Thank you to all who attended – we appreciate all those who continue to make Autumn Festival a family tradition. We hope everyone had a great time! See event highlights on pages 5-7.

In November, we said goodbye to our 2021 SCA members Jasmine Garrett, Julia Runkle, and Nadia Durante. They made a large impact during their short time with the Nature Center, and have built a firm foundation for their future careers. See their reflections on the next page.

As days grow colder, local populations get sparser, and bald eagles return, it feels like this is when Wellesley Island, and the North Country, is in its full glory. The invisible (or hard to see) natural world is made visible – owls exposed in leafless trees, animal tracks cast in snow, aloof birds flocking to nearby feeders. The air is silent – and I am silent, observing. It's a welcome time.



Ice fishermen tracks mirror clouds during an Eel Bay sunset

While the sun sets on another year, I can't help but feel excited for the threshold ahead. Wishing you and your loved ones glad tidings in 2022.

Gabriela Padewska
Nature Center Director

For Your Consideration

Uninvited: The Spread of Invasive Species

Uninvited is a new 55-minute documentary by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Division of Lands and Forests (NYS DEC) and Westfield Production Company. It tells the story of invasive species in New York and the innovative ways the DEC and partners are tackling their impacts. It is available to view [on YouTube here](#).

Student Conservation Corps (SCA) Members' Reflections

Hello everyone,

We just want to thank you all for making our SCA internship at the Minna Anthony Common Nature Center such a great experience! We have really enjoyed being able to develop and execute educational programs at the Nature Center and in the greater Thousand Islands region. Some of our favorite memories from this experience include watching snapping turtles hatch and leave their nest underneath the terrace behind the Nature Center, hiking all of the trails, and participating in Autumn Festival. We hope to see you all again when we come back to visit in the future!

Sincerely,
Julia, Nadia, and Jasmine



AUTUMN FESTIVAL



NIGHT FOR NATURE



BABY SNAPPING TURTLE
RECENTLY HATCHED



WADING IN EEL BAY



EXPLORING
ROCK
ISLAND
WITH THE
TRAIL
STEWARDS

Highlights from the 42nd Annual *Autumn Festival*



Birds of prey demonstration featuring an Eastern Screech-Owl



Right-sized pumpkins in our patch



Kair siblings build their scarecrows



Work in progress



Andy on the apple cider press



Vintage tractor photo-op



Hay rides were a hit!



Schendera family with their contest entry



L-R: Dave Knapp, Nancy Boynton, Joe Leskoske



2021 Trailblazer award presented to Lynn Morgan



10th Mountain Division Band from Fort Drum



Nature Center table



Alpaca!



Thousand Islands Art Center: spinning wheel, loom, and pottery demonstrations



Lynn Morgan receives the 2021 Minna Anthony Common Trailblazer Award

Left to right: Board President Andy Kane, Lynn Morgan, and Nature Center Director Gaby Padewska



Lynn leading a school fieldtrip on our trails

Congratulations to Lynn Morgan, the recipient of the 2021 Minna Anthony Common Trailblazer Award! Lynn is a long-standing volunteer of the Nature Center. She has previously served on the Friends of the Nature Center's board and was chair of the Autumn Festival committee. From her integral role as a volunteer fieldtrip educator, to her dynamic storytelling programs (see photos of her retelling Dr. Seuss' classic "How the Grinch Stole Christmas"), to her assistance with the Friends' Capital Campaign, and everything in between – Lynn's support of the Nature Center has been invaluable! Always thinking of the Nature Center, Lynn recently crafted and donated a quilt for our Holiday Bonanza. We are lucky to have you on our volunteer team! Thank you Lynn!

Highlights from Holiday Bonanza



Storyteller Lynn Morgan retelling Dr. Seuss' "How the Grinch Stole Christmas"



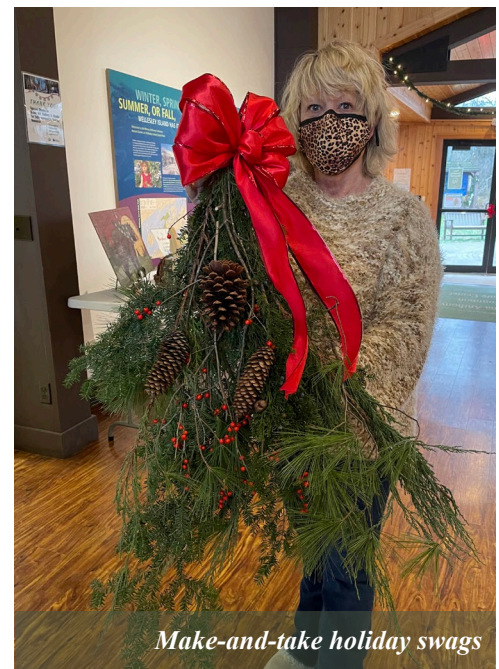
Meredith (right) and Kim help with kids' holiday crafts



Anne Marie Gianfagna vending her artisan soaps



Music by Phil DuMond



Make-and-take holiday swags

HOLIDAY BONANZA



**THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSOR
AND DONORS!**

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Alexandria Bay, NY

Alexandria Bay: Dockside Pub, Jreck Subs,
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Watertown: Hannafords, Runnings.

Wellesley Island: Leskoske, Swedrock,
and Hearn Families.

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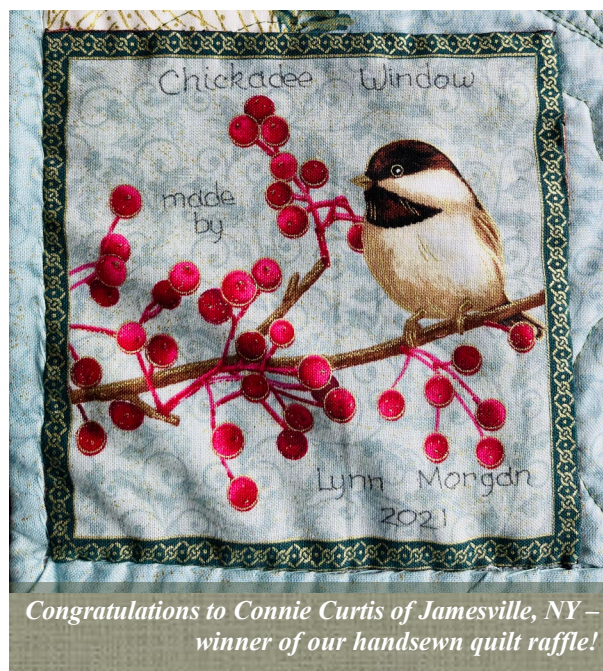
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*Rick Gefell, Friends board member and volunteer,
serves baked goods, donated from Hannafords,
to new members Hardik and Joey Patel*



*Raffle items donated by Joe Leskoske
and Cranberry Boggs*



*Congratulations to Connie Curtis of Jamesville, NY –
winner of our handsewn quilt raffle!*



Winter Events

Program size may be limited.
Preregistration recommended.
Please call **(315) 482-2479** to register.
Face covering required when indoors.

FREE SNOWSHOE DAYS

Second Saturday of the Month: January 8, February 12, and March 12

Gear up – for free! Take a pair of snowshoes out on our trails and explore winter! Weather permitting: seven inches of snow is needed to take our snowshoes out on the trail. Please call for conditions. Visit the Nature Center during open hours to sign out your shoes.

BIRD FEEDER PROGRAMS

Saturdays: February 19 and March 19

PROJECT FEEDER WATCH 10:00am—11:00am

Become a citizen scientist and help us identify and count birds at our feeders! All data will be submitted to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology's *Project Feeder Watch*.

FEATHERED FRIENDS 11:00am—Noon

Every winter the Nature Center builds a bird feeder station to help the wintering bird population. Birdseed will be provided. Our feathered friends may even land and take seed from your hand, or your head! All ages are welcome.

JANUARY

FIRST DAY HIKE

Saturday, January 1 // 10:00am—2:00pm

Kick off the New Year in the outdoors! Join us for this annual event held across New York State. Hikes are self-guided – choose your own adventure! Snowshoes will be provided if conditions allow.

NATURE DETECTIVES

Saturday, January 8 // 10:00am—11:00am

Ever wonder who made those tracks you passed in the woods? Let's be Nature Detectives! We'll explore and learn about the animals that are active during the winter months. Children and adults welcome. Snowshoes will be provided if there is enough snow.

BARN QUILT WORKSHOP

Saturday, January 15 // 9:00am—Noon

Have you ever seen quilt patterns painted on wood? Even if you don't have a barn to hang one on, join us to learn this regional artform! Quilter Barb Hearn will lead you step-by-step to make your own. Class size is limited. Preregistration required. Workshop fee including materials is \$30.

BALD EAGLE WATCHING

Saturday, January 22 // 10:00am—Noon

The bald eagles are here! Wellesley Island is one of the best places in New York State to see these magnificent birds. We'll search for these cold weather visitors along frozen waterbodies and in the treetops overhead. BYO binoculars and dress for cold, windy weather.

THE BEAR SNORES ON

Saturday, January 29 // 10:30am—11:30am

Bring your snow gear for a fun day outside! Come listen to a fun story about a bear and his friends spending time together during the winter. After our story, we will explore and build what you think might be a good shelter for the winter. Creativity, imagination, and snow gear required.

FEBRUARY

ICE FISHING CLINIC

Saturday, February 5 // 10:00am—Noon

Join local fishing guide Aziel Snyder for a step-by-step instruction of ice fishing on Eel Bay! Augering the ice, tip-up setup, and baiting will be demonstrated. Meet at Eel Bay boat launch, near Campsite Area H. No restrooms on site, Nature Center is a 2 minute drive away.

WINTER EXPLORATIONS

Saturday, February 12 // 1:00pm—2:00pm

The winter months provide some of the best opportunities for viewing wildlife along our trails. Come brave the cold and the wind and learn about plant and animal adaptations to winter, winter tree identification, and more! Snowshoes will be provided if there is enough snow.

TRAILS TALES

Saturday, February 26 // 1:30pm—2:30pm

Perfect for pre-school aged children (3-5 years old), accompanied by an adult. A naturalist will first read two stories to the children and then lead the group in an activity (weather dependent: hike or craft) themed to match the stories.

MARCH

NATURE'S PAINTBRUSH

Saturday, March 5 // 10:30am—11:30am

Pine boughs, acorns, icicles, oh my! Come make a beautiful painting using natural materials as paintbrushes. All ages and abilities are welcome, bring your imagination and creativity.

SCAT & SKULLS

Saturday, March 12 // 10:00am—11:00am.

Have you ever wondered how to identify scat (animal poop) or asked whose skull is that? Try our interactive scat and skull game. Guess what animal it is and learn how to identify it.

LITTLE HANDS, WILD!

Saturday, March 26 // 2:00pm—3:00pm.

Explore the spring! We'll be outside investigating this muddy season. The snow might still be around, so be prepared for all kinds of conditions! Recommended for Pre-K and under, but all ages welcome.



THANK YOU to the following 28 members for joining or renewing their commitment recently

Charles Reynolds	Scarborough, ME
Stewart Dutfield	Delmar, NY
Tracy Agnello	Tonawanda, NY
Jennifer Smathers	Farmington, NY
Leslie Johnson & Alex Carmen	Pound Ridge, NY
Ann & David Hertzog	Yardley, PA
Chris Murray	Syracuse, NY
Shari Hogan	Dexter, NY
Meredith & Rob Lamb	Pittsford, NY
Joanne LaFontaine	Clayton, NY
Mary Beth Vay	Rochester, NY
Melinda Iketau	Carthage, NY
Gifford Lewis	Webster, NY
Meredith Stone	Hopkinton, MA
Michael Parkes	Endicott, NY

Jeffrey & Elle Hanna	Fayetteville, NY
Daniel & Lauran Throop	Tequesta, FL
Michael & Jennie Moore	Needham, MA
Dan & Julie Shaver	Clayton, NY
Charlotte Wellins	Wellesley Island, NY
Bruce Alexander	Dexter, NY
Lloyd & Carolyn Martin	Jamesville, NY
Mike Burns	Manlius, NY
Joe & Rachael Gianfagna	Watertown, NY
Hardik & Joey Patel	Wellesley Island, NY
Bob & Beth Weldon	Watertown, NY
Art Mack & Mary Jo Champion	Clayton, NY
Harold & Jean Pray	Wellesley Island, NY

In Memory of John Durand

The Nature Center is deeply saddened by the loss of our friend John Durand. He was a great community figure and supporter of the Nature Center. John was co-owner of Wellesley Island Building Supply on Wellesley Island. He was an avid waterfowler, fisherman, and deer hunter, and loved being of the St. Lawrence River. John will be sorely missed. Our sincerest condolences are with his wife Lori, WIBS staff, and his family.



MISSION STATEMENT

The Friends of the Minna Anthony Common Nature Center support environmental education programming that fosters conservation of local ecosystems, encourages outdoor recreation, and inspires our visitors to develop an increased respect for the natural world.

The Friends of the Nature Center, Inc. works in partnership with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation.



New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation

BOARD OF DIRECTORS THE FRIENDS OF THE NATURE CENTER, INC.

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Mary Jean Jones, *Bookkeeper*

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Steven Cline, *Park Manager*
Bill Carr, *Assistant Park Manager*

It's Snowshoeing Season!**FREE SNOWSHOE DAYS**

Second Saturday of the Month:

January 8, February 12, and March 12

Gear up – for free! Take a pair of snowshoes out on our trails and explore winter! Weather permitting: seven inches of snow is needed to take our snowshoes out on the trail. Please call for conditions. Visit the Nature Center during open hours to sign out your shoes.

Snowshoes are also available to rent (conditions permitting) whenever we are open! We carry sizes ranging from toddler (3-6 years old), children's (4-8 years old), youth (8-12 years old), adult women's, and adult men's. All rentals are \$3 per day. Snowshoes must be returned by 2:30pm.

FRIENDLY REMINDER: Most membership levels include free snowshoe rentals. Become a Friends' member this winter!



New York State
Parks, Recreation and
Historic Preservation

**Minna Anthony Common Nature Center**

Wellesley Island State Park

44927 Cross Island Road

Fineview, NY 13640

(315) 482-2479

HOURS OF OPERATION

October–May (off-season):

Nature Center open Wednesday–Sunday

9:00am—3:00pm

Closed Mondays and Tuesdays

Trails open sunrise to sunset daily



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