
THE MINNA ANTHONY COMMON NATURE CENTER

NEWSLETTER

Summer Issue • JULY 2020



A male red-winged blackbird in full breeding plumage near Eel Bay

REST TO THE NEST

While slow, steady change is always constant, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives drastically over the last few months – families separated, friends distanced, and the Nature Center closed. The current situation has left many anxious, frustrated, and exhausted. We all yearn for a return to “normalcy” and seek ways to recoup our spirit in an unprecedented situation.

While it is easy to dwell on the negative, we must remember to find joy and positivity in the world around us. A walk on your favorite trail, or, perhaps, discovering a new one, may give you the solace you seek. Minna’s article this month references how most birds leave the nest, never to return. Perhaps our current situation affords a brief “return” in order to recoup, reorganize, and reprioritize our lives.

Upon reflection, the Friends have found new ways to communicate our mission, new partnerships, and new means with which to connect during this situation. We have endured. We will persevere and we will be stronger as a result.

The Nature Center has reopened, and our mission continues. The trails are open. Our educators continue to communicate their knowledge and passion (with a new online presence). Please consult the website for information about new hours and sign-up for up-to-date emails. Hopefully we’ll see you on trails, from a safe distance.

Matt Elliott
Board President

THE MINNA ANTHONY COMMON SERIES

July: The Month for Baby Birds as They First Try Their Wings

by Minna Anthony Common

(The following is an excerpt from a column written by Minna Anthony Common. Reprinted by permission of the Watertown Daily Times)

This is the month of baby birds. Most of them have left their nest homes and are scooting about the gardens, swinging of the fences, floating on the water, sitting on the telegraph wires, running over the fields and wandering about our lawns. For the most part, they are unafraid and not very shy.

...If the martins are the acrobats, their cousins the tree swallows are the clowns in the Bird Circus. They too stay near their nest boxes for a week or so, going out and in the holes at will or swinging on the near-by perches making faces, teasing, sputtering, and trying stunts. When the parent birds approach the wires with mouths full, the babies reach and stretch out their necks with bills wide open until with one motion the whole group whirls about. Around and around they go until they must be dizzy. Or one may hang by one foot, wings spread, bill open, and they may all hop off in short flights. Their antics at feeding time will bring a smile to the grumpiest face...

Very few birds ever return, even for a night, to a nest which they have left. Instead they are apt to scatter in all directions. When they first leave, the parent birds may sometimes be seen feeding one baby at a time on a tree limb or branch, or be head coaxing a youngster to fly to a safer place. But as far as we can see, such birds as redstarts, vireos, yellow warblers song sparrows, wrens, once they are out of the nest, are on their very own soon.

With some birds one or two of the babies leave the nest first. In that case the father bird may take over the care of these. This is the case with the robin.

The father robin, who can be identified by his bright colors and black-capped head, wanders about the lawns with one or two fluffy, often tailless youngsters in tow. He shows them how to listen for worms and how to pull them out of the ground when found...



*Drawing of an American robin feeding its young
by Minna Anthony Common*

The babies of water birds grow up slowly. This means not only duck, gallinules, rails, coot, and heron. In most cases these birds are brooded until they can run about or swim easily. Then they are cared for much as chickens are, that is, not kept on the nest but called by the mother to be fed, preened or brooded....

Ducklings are apt to follow their mother in a long line. Bittern babies are funny as clowns with their ridiculously long legs and bills. They run about through the tall grasses learning how to spear things. By fall they will be so adept that no frog or fish can move quickly enough to escape them.

No doubt young birds learn by example, yet a good deal of their behavior comes entirely from their natural instincts.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

Phases – a word New Yorkers have come to associate with progress, recalls the journey the Nature Center has been on since March until today.

The Nature Center closed its doors to the public on March 17, and our staff started WFH (working from home) on March 18. We quickly adapted, and diverted all our environmental education efforts online. We developed Virtual Field Trip videos and activity guides for kindergarten through fourth grade.

We utilized Facebook, Instagram, and created a YouTube channel. We dubbed our social media campaign the *Outdoor Classroom*. We posted original daily content and co-hosted virtual programming with the Thousand Islands Art Center and St. Lawrence Eastern Lake Ontario-PRISM. From our popular Wild Wednesday videos to the meditative two-minute nature breaks, our content was designed to keep our online audience focused on the outdoors. The Outdoor Classroom became a community – we reached over 25,000 people during the period of March through June.

Additionally, many projects were accomplished by essential Parks' employees during the PAUSE. The front desk was

renovated. Thank you again to the Northern New York Community Foundation for your generous support of our capital improvement campaign. We are also happy about the completion of our terrace named in honor of past board member and Nature Center advocate C. Michael Elliott. Now our students and visitors will have a new place to sit, to make memories, and to enjoy nature.

We resumed outdoor programming on July 1, and the Nature Center building reopened July 8. July and August is our busy season, and while we've scaled back on programming compared to previous years, we still offer daily tours and talks.

The COVID-19 pandemic has proved that the natural world is a place of refuge from the torrent of information overload and the din of worry and anxiety. Fortunately, New York State Parks' hiking trails have remained open (and have seen record-breaking usage). Now, we welcome you back to the Nature Center.

Take care,



Gabriela Padewska
Nature Center Director

FOR YOUR CONSIDERATION

Activity Guides for the *Virtual Field Trips* can be downloaded from our website [here](#). These are great activities for parents to keep youngsters active and outdoors this summer!



We have launched a new [YouTube Channel](#)! It currently shares our Virtual Field Trip videos and new content will be added as we continue to grow. Please 'like' and 'subscribe' to stay up to date with the content on this new platform.

STUDENT CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION (SCA) MEMBER UPDATE

Our Environmental Educators have been keeping busy through the quiet spring.

Robin tackled an algae bloom in the turtle and fish tanks. With a little experimentation and a lot of elbow grease, she was able to get our tanks sparkling clean – Ajax the snapping turtle appreciates this most!

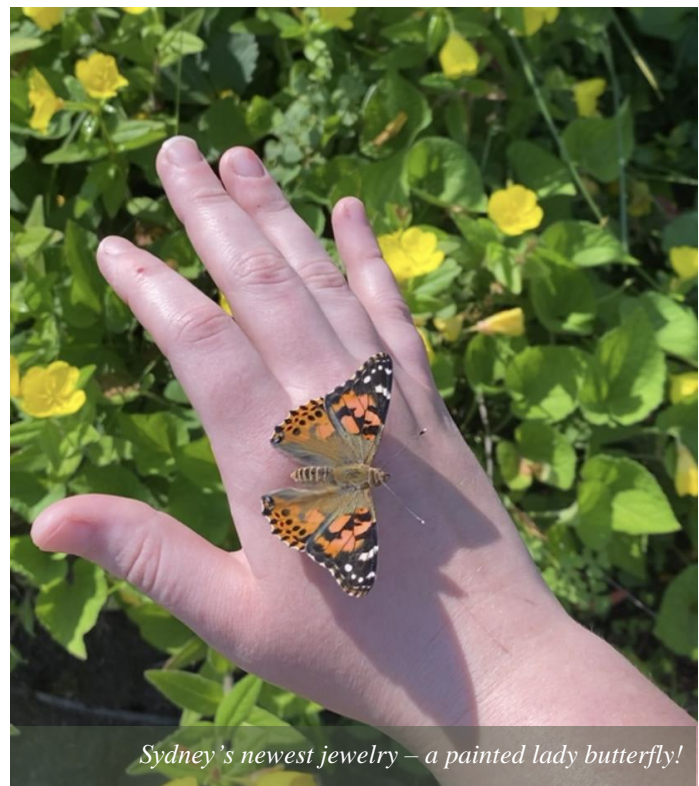
Sydney adopted an Emerald Ash Borer trap as part of SLELO-PRISM's monitoring program. She's been keeping a close eye on it – no positive identifications in our traps so far. She also raised her first successful generation of painted lady butterflies and recently released them into the butterfly house.



Robin scrubbing down one of our 250-gallon tanks



Sydney gets ready to release the first crop of painted ladies



Sydney's newest jewelry – a painted lady butterfly!



Veronica's porcupine photo is pretty sharp!



Dutchman's breeches found on Veronica's wildflower stroll

Veronica's work is seen daily online on our Facebook page and Instagram feed. She's most often found out on the trails with camera in tow, building our collection of digital photographs – she's captured pictures of many things, including hummingbird moths, porcupine, and beautiful river sunsets.

If you've been exploring North Field or Pond Loops, you've likely stepped on what the other half of the Thousand Islands SCA crew has been working on this spring. The Conservation Stewards have been building new bog bridges on our trails. Chelsea (a familiar face!), Sarah, Tommy, and Zeke (not pictured) can be spotted across the region pulling swallowwort, cutting down buckthorn, and improving the trails.

Lauren Eggleston
SCA Supervisor



Conservation stewards Sarah, Chelsea, and Tommy pose with their new constructed bog bridge

NEW MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE CHAIR

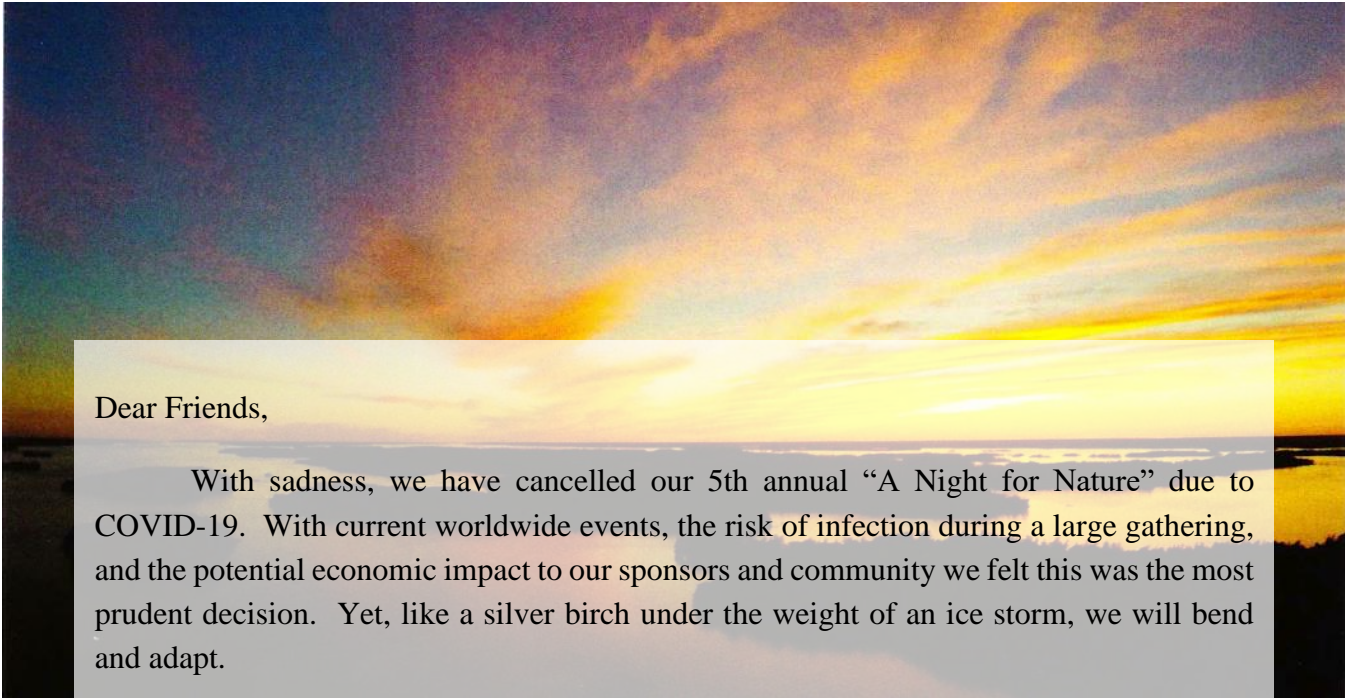


Hi, I'm Leslie Johnson! I joined the Friends of the Nature Center board in 2019 and have recently become the Chair of the Membership Committee. My goal for the Membership Committee is to share the love of nature, environmental conservation, and education that Minna Anthony Common, my great grandmother, was so dedicated to. I look forward to raising awareness and support for the Nature Center by spreading our unique mission throughout the local communities. I want to personally thank each of you for your support through your Friends of the Nature Center membership, and I hope to have the opportunity to meet you all soon. It is your continued support that lets this special spot continue to grow and flourish for future generations. See you on the trails!

THANK YOU TO THE FOLLOWING THIRTY FIVE MEMBERS FOR JOINING OR RENEWING THEIR COMMITMENT RECENTLY

Tom & Julie Tinney	Clayton, NY	Windsor & Kay Price	Wellesley Island, NY
Mary Hannah Arnot	Wellesley Island, NY	Linda McCullough	Dexter, NY
Bridget Elliott	Tucker, GA	Barbara & Trey Var	Wellesley Island, NY
Mike & Jean Kimber	Fayetteville, NY	Jackie Moll	Rochester, NY
Riveredge Resort	Alexandria Bay, NY	Benjamin & Margaret Coe	Watertown, NY
Rosemary Swedrock	Wellesley Island, NY	Bernard Forth	Fayetteville, NY
Don & Barb Rumpf	Wellesley Island, NY	Hunter Horton	Wellesley Island, NY
Bud & Ann Garlock	Alexandria Bay, NY	Mike & Amy Phelps	Naples, FL
Kathleen Hanna	Washington, DC	Kenneth Sachse	Wellesley Island, NY
Ron & Betsy Jacobs	Alexandria Bay, NY	Richard & Helen Fuhrman	Theresa, NY
Mary Beth Branche	Alexandria Bay, NY	Susanne Duclon	Wellesley Island, NY
James Tague	Alexandria Bay, NY	Erica Hoffman	Atl. Beach , FL
Richard Kavanaugh	Alexandria Bay, NY	Thomas Bierworth	Clayton, NY
John Bober & Leslie Snelling	New Canaan, CT	Dory Sheldon	Wellesley Island, NY
Mike & Julie Chavoustie	Alexandria Bay, NY	Jonathan & Heather White	Watertown, NY
Rob Nassau & Jessica Murray	Wellesley Island, NY	Jenny Spencer	Watertown, NY
James & Erin Lettiere	Clayton, NY	Bob & Diane Miron	Wellesley Island, NY
Sandra Geiss	Clayton, NY		

NIGHT FOR NATURE UPDATE



Dear Friends,

With sadness, we have cancelled our 5th annual “A Night for Nature” due to COVID-19. With current worldwide events, the risk of infection during a large gathering, and the potential economic impact to our sponsors and community we felt this was the most prudent decision. Yet, like a silver birch under the weight of an ice storm, we will bend and adapt.

“A Night for Nature” has become a signature summer event for the River community, and is also the primary fundraiser for our organization. With its cancellation, and the impacts of COVID-19 on public spaces, we must re-evaluate, adjust, and adapt. I am writing you to personally ask: *Will you still help support us?* In lieu of purchasing tickets for this year’s “A Night for Nature,” **please consider making a contribution to help support our mission through these unprecedented times.** If you are in a position to donate, your commitment is greatly needed.

These changing times reinforce the importance of our purpose, as new generations of outdoor enthusiasts connect with nature and find peace on the trails during life’s complexities. We are grateful for the opportunity to make a lasting impression on our landscape and our visitors. Now, more than ever, we realize we are all in this together.

Thank you for your generosity,

Erin Lettiere
A Night for Nature Committee Chair
Board Member, The Friends of the Nature Center, Inc.

July, August & September Events

Program size is limited. Pre-registration required.

Please call **(315) 482-2479**

between the hours of 8:00am—4:00pm,
Wednesday through Sunday to register.



VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

Fourth Saturday of the Month (July—September)

July 25, August 22, September 26

9:00am—Noon

Join us in beautifying the Nature Center grounds! There are many ways to help. Learn new skills while working on various site improvement projects. Develop your green thumb while sprucing up the gardens. Tasks may include cleaning, weeding, watering, planting and mulching. All skill levels welcome.



SPIDER'S FISHING CLINICS

Saturday, July 4, August 8, and September 5

Rod & Reel 11:00am—1:00pm // Fly Fishing 1:30—3:30pm

Hook some new fishing skills with expert fisherman Spider Rybaak! Eel Bay on the St. Lawrence River is a prime location to learn the basics of rod-and-reel sportfishing and fly fishing. Participants over 16 are required to have a freshwater fishing license for this event.

BYOT: Bring Your Own Tackle, limited supply available.

Program is free thanks to the Barbara & Daniel Butts Enrichment Fund



CHILDREN'S FISHING DERBY

Saturday, August 22, 9:00am—Noon

Prizes for: Longest, Heaviest, & Most Fish Caught. For children 15 and under. Participants over 16 are required to have a freshwater fishing license. Registration fee is \$2.

BYOT: Bring Your Own Tackle. Rod & Reel recommended. Bait will be provided.

Weekly programs in July & August

Program size is limited. Pre-registration required.

Please call **(315) 482-2479**

between the hours of 8:00am—4:00pm,
Wednesday through Sunday to register.

WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
Butterfly House Tour 9:00 am 10:00 am	Let's Talk Science! 10:00 am 11:00 am	Butterfly House Tour 9:00 am 10:00 am	What's Wild Around Here? 10:00 am 11:00 am	Butterfly House Tour 9:00 am 10:00 am



BUTTERFLY HOUSE TOUR
 Wednesdays, Fridays, and
 Sundays
9:00am and 10:00am.
 Have you ever seen a
 butterfly up close?
 Experience a butterfly's
 habitat and life cycle
 firsthand on a guided tour of
 our Butterfly House.



LET'S TALK SCIENCE!
 Thursdays
10:00am and 11:00am.
 Join our environmental
 educators for a talk about
 science! Learn about
 things like geology, trees,
 invasive species,
 decomposers, and
 outdoor ethics. Each talk
 delves into the study of
 our environment and
 encourages an
 appreciation for the
 outdoors.



WHAT'S WILD AROUND HERE?
 Saturdays
10:00am and 11:00am.
 What's wild around here?
 Discover fascinating facts and
 stories about the wildlife living
 on Wellesley Island.

NEW BOARD MEMBER



In April, Alysa Huizinga joined the Friends as a Board Member.

Alysa grew up in Illinois with a passion for the outdoors. She moved to Clayton with her husband and four children and instantly fell in the love with the Thousand Islands. She has enjoyed the opportunity to stay home and raise her family. Now that they are all in school, she works part-time locally in Alexandria Bay and at Guardino Elementary School. Along with hiking outdoors she loves to read, cook and bake. Her family regularly visits the Nature Center and its trails, and she is thrilled to join the Board at such an exciting time.

Welcome Alysa and family to the Friends!

DONOR SPOTLIGHT – *IN REMEMBRANCE*

June Noble Smith Larkin Gibson died peacefully at her home in Greenwich, Connecticut, on June 23, 2020, with her family by her side. Born June 17, 1922, she was ninety-eight years old, and lived on the property, which she loved. She outlived her three husbands: John M. Gibson, Frank Y. Larkin and David S. Smith. She is survived by three sons: Noble Smith (Maribeth), David Smith (Jordan) and Jeremy Smith, seven grandchildren: (Zeb, Sarah, Jay, Cali, Tate, Niva, and Eleanor), and two great grandchildren: (Posy Joe and Wilson Pope). A fourth son, Bradford Smith, pre-deceased her in 2008.

Her father, Edward J. Noble, was a well-known industrialist, who co-founded Lifesavers, a candy company, and later founded the American Broadcasting Company (ABC), as well as other companies.

Growing up, she spent her summers in the Thousand Islands. She only spoke of the happy times spent with her family in the North Country, riding horses and rowing her boats on the St. Lawrence River. Originally from Gouverneur, New York, Mr. Noble was always loyal to the North Country, establishing three hospitals, and he also served as Chairman of St. Lawrence University.

She served as Chairman and President (and Chairman Emeritus) of the Edward John Noble Foundation (founded in 1940). The Friends of the Nature Center have benefited from the Foundation's philanthropy over the years. We are grateful for her generosity as we honor and remember Mrs. June Noble Smith Larkin Gibson.



Excerpted from the Watertown Daily Times.



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.



**Parks, Recreation
and Historic Preservation**

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

•

Matthew Elliott, *President*
Stefanie Kring, *Vice President*
Susan Mowers, *Treasurer*
Jeffrey Hanna, *Secretary*
Jane Arras
Barb Eldridge
Leslie Johnson
Kerry Roberge
Jonathan White
Meredith Sullivan
Jeffrey Weldon
JR Miller
Erin Lettiere
Alysa Huizenga

NATURE CENTER STAFF

•

Gabriela Padewska, *Director*
Kimbrie Cullen, *Education Coordinator*
Lauren Eggleston, *SCA Supervisor*
Mary Jean Jones, *Bookkeeper*

WELLESLEY ISLAND STATE PARK STAFF

•

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

TAKE THE PARKS PLEDGE

**I PLEDGE TO:**

☐ Avoid crowded areas: if a park or trail is crowded, be ready to change plans. Also, steer clear of places people tend to congregate: parking lots, playgrounds, picnic areas, overlooks.

☐ Practice social distancing: stay 6 feet away from individuals outside of immediate household members

☐ Stay local: recreate close to home and keep visits short

And, if you're not feeling well or have any COVID-19 symptoms, please STAY HOME.

**Minna Anthony Common Nature Center**

Wellesley Island State Park

44927 Cross Island Road

Fineview, NY 13640

(315) 482-2479

Hours of Operation

Nature Center open Wednesday—Sunday

9:00am—3:00pm (closed noon—1pm)

Trails open sunrise to sunset daily