JOIN US FOR OUR WINTER SNOWSHOE BLITZ!

Ready to head out and enjoy the outdoors in winter? If you can walk, you can snowshoe! Snowshoeing is a fantastic way to explore the beauty of the winter landscape. Join Pfeiffer Nature Center and Foundation at the introduction to snowshoeing, Saturday, January 21 from 10 AM to 2 PM.

Instructors from Paths, Peaks, and Paddles will properly fit you in a pair of snowshoes followed by a practice session where you will learn the simple techniques to get around. Then it’s off to the woods to enjoy a 30-minute winter wonderland walk!

Foul Weather Feeding

According to National Audubon Society, one fourth of all American bird species are in decline! That concerns me, being a bird lover. Fortunately, many Americans are helping their local bird population through placing out feed for them throughout the tough winter months. Dr. David J. Horn, the director of the National Bird Feeding Society, states that approximately 55 million people over the age of 6 feed wild birds with that number increasing each year. Billions of dollars are spent each year on bird-related activities & bird watching is a sport enthralling literally millions of people all over the world. More & more, people are discovering the joys of backyard bird feeding.

Because birds are warm-blooded, they need to maintain their body temperature in an even range. Birds have a variety of survival skills that help them maintain their body temperature. Birds have down feathers under their outer feathers, which assists them in being warm.

This creates insulation that traps & holds warm air next to their skin. Their legs, toes, & beaks, which are their most exposed parts of their body, are not fleshy so they do not freeze easily. So you can forget the myth that birds feet can freeze to metal feeders. To warm their legs & feet they may tuck under their feathers or pull their body closer to their skin but these parts do not easily get cold. Also at night some birds, like the chickadee, conserve body heat by slowing down their body processes, or go into what is called nightly hypothermia. This means that they slow their breathing & can lower their body temperature 22 to 15 degrees (F) below their normal daytime temperature of 108 degrees (F). This helps them conserve large amounts of energy & greatly increase their chances of survival.

But saving body heat is only one part of a bird’s survival. Birds first need to produce heat & that requires food!

Because winter days are shorter, there is not as much time to find food. Small birds, especially, must eat constantly to get enough food to keep their body warm over night. Since birds digest their food quickly, (sparrows in just 1 ½ hours) & their body processes are so rapid, birds must eat enough to acquire & store a layer of fat each day to burn as fuel to create heat each night. You have probably heard the saying “she eats like a bird”. In truth, birds really have to eat large amounts each day. Consider this: multiply your weight by 4 – that is how many hamburgers you would have to eat per day to equal what some birds eat each day!!

This is where back yard bird feeding comes in. Although popular, summer feeding, which is a time when other food sources are plentiful, is not near as important to a bird’s survival as wintertime feeding. Especially during periods of extreme cold or heavy snow & ice, bird feeders can make the difference in a bird’s survival.

Many of you might be thinking will feeding wild birds spoil them & make them unable to fend for themselves. Actually, studies have shown that even birds living near bird feeders get only 20 to 30 percent of their daily intake from feeders. “The limited studies that have been done suggest that birds are not dependent on bird feeders & won’t become dependent by feeding the back yard”, Horn says.

To keep warm, birds need a balanced diet that includes a calorie-rich mix of fruit, nuts, & seed. In Western New York & the North America, the winter days are short, cold, & long. Much of the natural food supply is out of season or snow-covered.

Many Americans set up a feeder & fill it full of birdseed. Good choices of birdseed include: black-oil sunflower, white proso millet, gray-striped sunflower, sunflower kernels, Nyjer, & safflower seed, which some say discourages (Continued on page 7)
From the Director

Some people think of winter as a time of darkness & drear, when there’s little life to be found outdoors. While it’s true that there are many fewer hours of daylight in January than in June & fewer species to be identified on a casual walk, winter is far from dull or deathly. Here are just a few examples of the beauty & life that’s easy to find during the winter months.

• When I awoke on December 23, Mother Nature had painted everything like a Currier & Ives painting. An inch or so of wet, heavy snow clung to every little branch, & the solid gray blanket of snow made the air glow with light & beauty. I walked a few miles in the woods of this winter wonderland. None of the photos I took captured the loveliness of the day, I did mentally record seeing tracks of fox & coyote, deer & mouse, rabbit & turkey as they each made their own treks. Turkeys look like runway models as they walk-one foot almost directly in front of the other.

• Unlike our friends in nearby Buffalo & Rochester, we had a beautiful white Christmas here in the southern tier. Just enough snow to make everything look lovely; not enough to make it dangerous.

• On my walk up the hill on December 26, I heard what I think of as my raven calling overhead. Of course, the raven isn’t mine, but a pair often flies not far from my home. I love their hoarse calls. And the fact that it’s not uncommon that I can actually hear the whoosh of moving as they flap their strong wings just above the treetops.

• I haven’t had a bird feeder in years-not since the mama hawk took over the one I had near my window. No way should midges be hatching in December, regardless of temperature! I assume they didn’t last long, either feeding hungry predators or dying as the colder temps moved in. There are plenty of insects & other tiny creatures that live outdoors in the winter—I’m no expert & so won’t begin to tell you about them.

My point is this: life doesn’t stop during the winter. If you spend even just a few minutes outside, be still & really look at what’s around you, there’s plenty of real life adventure.

If you want to find smaller things, I’ve seen plenty of damsel bugs lately. (Yes, the ones I see are mostly in my house—till I gently move them outside.) It was only a few weeks ago when I came home on a warm afternoon to see what looked to my untrained eye to be a new hatch of midges by my window. No way should midges be hatching in December, regardless of temperature! I assume they didn’t last long, either feeding hungry predators or dying as the colder temps moved in. There are plenty of insects & other tiny creatures that live outdoors in the winter—I’m no expert & so won’t begin to tell you about them.

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Seasonal Stirrings & Nature Notes

JANUARY—Clear nights are coldest, as there is no cloud cover to keep the earth’s heat from rising into the sky. In winter, cold fronts move at speeds of 10 to 50 knots—2 to 3 times faster than in summer. The faster the wind draws heat from a surface the more energy is required to replace the heat.

FEBRUARY—Black bears are extremely cramped during hibernation—their dens generally measure 2-3 feet wide and only 2-3 feet high! However, during hibernation an adult bear can be expected to lose 15-30 percent of its body weight.

The Northern Hemisphere’s snowpack is usually at its maximum in mid to late February. If snowfall has been light in general, the average temperature is already below freezing temperature, the snow sticks. As more snow falls, it continues to pile up, until temperatures rise above freezing long enough for it to melt. The actual weight of snow depends upon a variety of conditions, including snow crystal structure, air temperature, and snowpack depth. On average, however, one inch of snow over one square foot of surface will weigh around 8.32 ounces.

MARCH—Snow fleas are small insects that come up to the surface of the snow around the bases of trees as temperatures warm up. Also called springtails, they are not flat at all—they simply hop around like fleas as they eat algae, bacteria, and fungi.

Margaret Shulock lives in Friendship, NY. Her “Sticks” cartoons can be seen in the Clean Times Herald. Visit her website, www.thesixchix.com to see more of her work.

Yes, I’d Like to Become a Member of Pfeiffer Nature Center

Membership Levels and Benefits

All members receive a subscription to The Overbird, our quarterly newsletter, delivered to your home.

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Additional Donation $10

Name:
Street Address:
City, State, Zip:
Phone:
E-mail:
Membership Level:
Is this a __new or ____ renewing membership? (Check one)
May we contact you about volunteering?  Yes  No, thank you.

Foul Weather Feeding (Cont.)

(Continued from page 1)

squirrels. Black-oil sunflower seed is a good starting place when choosing seeds. It has a thin shell that is easy for small birds to crack. Varieties of birds enjoy eating sunflower seeds, such as Cardinals, Black-Capped Chickadees, & the Tufted Titmouse.

In addition to seed, suet is a good winter supplement because it is a high-fat replacement for the insects that are dead or dormant. Suet is sure to attract birds such as woodpeckers, the Carolina wren, & even some Robins, if they have chosen to stay.

When placing your feeder you need to consider its location. A feeder should be about six feet from trees or shrubs, but not out in the open. Feeders placed close to low shrubs put birds at risk from cats & other animals lurking out of sight. Putting feeders too far out in the open, though, means birds cannot quickly escape to trees if a hawk swoops in. If you have more than one feeder, put some distance between them. Crowding, especially in winter causes stress.

Lastly, you might want to consider supplying water & a roosting place for your well fed feathered friends. Water can be another winter dilemma for birds because free-flowing water sources can ice over. Water is not just for drinking. It also lets birds keep their feathers clean & healthy. Birds love running or dripping water. It is like a magnet for them. Heated bird baths also work well for birds. After a warm bath, your birds will be looking for a place to spend the night. Roost boxes, which look like a birdhouse, they typically have a hole at the base instead of at the top, provide protection from rain, snow, & wind.

There are many benefits of feeding birds during the winter. Having the satisfaction of knowing you are helping birds survive is probably the best reason! You are reducing the time it takes birds to find food thereby conserving energy & heat. If your feeder is properly placed you are also reducing risk of predation since more time can be spent eating & better views to watch for predators.

There are many birds that stay in our snow prone area remain, so bird feeding becomes more than just a fun activity for us. It actually may make the difference between life & death for many of our over-wintering bird species. So keep the birds around your yard fed, watered, & sheltered this winter & they will return the favor by providing you with plenty of enjoyment.

Your contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowable by NYS Tax Law.

NAME:
STREET ADDRESS:
PHONE:
E-MAIL:
MEMBERSHIP LEVEL:
May we contact you about volunteering?
Yes  No, thank you.

Additional Donation $
Thank You To Our Financial Supporters

October 1, 2011 – December 31, 2011

Thank You To Our Financial Supporters

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Hank & Marcia Storch by Mike & Judy Patton

We are grateful for your generosity and support! Kind acts and thoughtful gifts such as these assist us in fulfilling our Mission. If we have inadvertently omitted your gift from these lists, please bring it to our attention and we will happily correct our oversight.

Pfeiffer Nature Center Mission

- To preserve the integrity of the old-growth forest
- To provide an area for scientific research
- To promote community-based nature study programs for grade school, high school, college and adult students
- To further natural resource stewardship

Thank you to everyone who helped support the Nature Center by purchasing a holiday wreath!

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Winter Hiking Fun & Safety

Winter in New York offers a lot of opportunities to get outside & explore Pfeiffer Nature Center in a new way.

In wooded habitats, that can be found at both of our properties, animals & people are protected from strong winter winds & wind chill. It’s sometimes easier to tangle in wooded areas, as the snow doesn’t drift, nor does it pile up as it does in open areas. Instead, a lot of snow sits on tree branches, especially in an evergreen forest, like the hemlocks found at our Lillibridge Property.

You can expect to see a wider variety of wildlife & plants in the woods. Animals can find more places to get out of the cold & hide from predators. Snow-covered evergreen shrubs (like junipers) create sheltered places for small mammals like rabbits, mice & voles. The woods are a great place to look for tracks, signs of nibbling, & scat (animal poop). Kids can check for blue spots in the snow, which are really urines from rabbits that have eaten buckthorn.

Moose, deer, red squirrels & snowshoe hares are among the creatures that live in coniferous forests. (Conifers are trees that produce cones, such as pine cones & can be found in abundance at our Lillibridge Property) Long-tails weasels, deer mice & ruffed grouse prefer other hardwoods, which a can be found at our Eshelman Property. Gray foxes, gray squirrels & blue jays live in sugar maple forests, while turkey & Cooper’s hawks prefer oak & hickory.

Knowing where you are going & how to get there is an important part of heading out into an unknown area. But you also have to be prepared to deal with health issues that can occur when enjoying the outdoors, especially in winter.

Dehydration is one concern when hiking during the winter. Dehydration occurs when you do not replace the fluid that your body loses through participating in outdoor activities or exercise. Make sure to drink water before you start an activity & continue to drink it at intervals while active.

Another concern of winter hiking is hypothermia. Hypothermia occurs when the body loses heat faster than it can produce it. Hypothermia is not just a concern in the winter. A cool, breezy spring or summer day can be more dangerous than a calm, dry winter day because wind & moisture draw heat away from the body quickly. Dress in layers, & wear a hat to avoid this life threatening condition.

When you dress in layers during cool weather, your clothing provides insulation to keep you from losing body heat. Sweating can be dangerous when the temperature drops, so you must layer your clothing. The first layer of clothing should be able to “wick” away moisture. Cotton is not a good choice because it traps the moisture close to your skin & makes you chilly. Polypropylene is a better material. When the temperature drops, so you must layer your clothing. The first layer of clothing should be able to “wick” away moisture. Cotton is not a good choice because it traps the moisture close to your skin & makes you chilly. Polypropylene is a better choice for the first layer. The second layer can be a blend of cotton & synthetic fabric. Finally, a layer of wool provides warmth even when wet. Add a waterproof/windproof jacket if the weather calls for it. Wear tow pairs of socks, a poly liners covered by wool socks.

Now that you know what to wear & what to look for when winter hiking, head out to those trails & enjoy winter!

Artificial Cave for Bats?

The deadly infection known as white-nose syndrome (WNS) has killed at least a million bats since it was first observed in 2006. In some areas more than 90 percent of bats have been wiped out. Scientists have been unable to protect bats from this mysterious disease. Each winter, as the bats hibernate, which disrupts the mammals’ ability to regulate their body temperature during hibernation. But now there are two good bits of news to share.

The other good piece of news, is a new idea that has slowly been taking shape in the hills of Tennessee, artificial caves for bats. The pilot project that is now being planned by The Nature Conservancy in partnership with the Bat Conservation International. The artificial cave will have walls that mimic natural limestone but which can easily be disinfected with antifungal agents. They will be building it next to an existing bat cave in hopes that the bats will switch homes. Past experience shows that bats are constantly seeking new habitats. They move from cave to cave, to tree, to past, always looking for new places that meet their needs for roosting and hibernating.

But if the bats just will not go in, then they plan to use the cave as an on-site laboratory to study bats that they bring in. Another option is to also use it for toxicity trials with anti-fungal agents and test them on cave micro-organisms that do not survive so well in traditional laboratories.
Is Mistletoe a Menace or a Source of Merriment?

Mistletoe is known for its power of producing a kiss, especially around the holidays. But there is much more to mistletoe than kissing and holiday merriment.

The American mistletoe, is the kind most associated with kissing and is one of 1,300 species of mistletoe found worldwide. American mistletoe is one of two that are native to the United States. The other is dwarf mistletoe. Of the species of mistletoe that are found worldwide, twenty are labeled endangered. So be careful what you pluck from the forest for your next holiday party.

Pharadendron is the scientific name for American mistletoe, and means "thief of the tree" in Greek. The plant sucks water and minerals through a sinister-sounding bump called a haustorium that forms on the host tree. Although not a true parasite in scientific terms, mistletoe comes close, sinking its roots into a host tree and leeching nutrition from the tree to supplement its own photosynthesis. Despite its parasitic tendencies, mistletoe has been a natural part of healthy forest ecosystems for millions of years.

Sadly the translation of the word "mistletoe" is not very romantic either. "Mistel" is an Anglo-Saxon word that means "dung" and "tan" means "twig," so mistletoe actually means "dung on a twig." A few centuries back, some people apparently observed that mistletoe tended to take root where birds had left their droppings. The viscous middle layer of the fruit is so sticky that the seeds get glued where they land post-digestion, which starts a new mistletoe plant. Mistletoe goo is so sticky that trappers used to smear it on tree branches to catch birds, which would then be unable to fly away.

The dwarf mistletoe, native to the United States does not need to rely solely on hitchhiking to find a host tree. The seeds of the dwarf mistletoe can explode from ripe fruit, and are considered toxic to people, it has been used through the ages to treat a variety of ailments, from leprosy, worms and labor pains to high blood pressure. In Europe, injections of mistletoe extract are often prescribed as a complementary treatment for cancer patients.

Even though mistletoe is considered toxic to people, the berries and leaves contain high protein food for many animals. Many bird species rely on mistletoe for food and nesting material. Butterflies lay their eggs on the plants and use the nectar as food. Mistletoe is also an important pollen and nectar plant for bees. Mistletoe might be important for insects like butterflies and bees but do not believe the candle companies when they try to see you holiday scents labeled "Mistletoe." Expert Jonathan Briggs, as the plant has not scent at all.

Through out history, mistletoe has been a part of a variety different ceremonies and celebrations. The Roman historian Pliny the Elder told how druids revered mistletoe, recounting a ceremony where they gathered it with a golden sickle, then sacrificed two white bulls. The ceremony still takes place each year, minus the bull-slaying, at the Tenbury Mistletoe Festival in England.

In Norse mythology, mistletoe is a go-killer. Balder, the son of Odin and Frigg, was killed by an arrow made of mistletoe, the only material that could hurt him. Oddly, this may have been the origin of the kissing tradition, as some retellings say that Frigg revived Balder and was so happy, she commanded anyone who stood under the plant to kiss as a reminder of how love conquered death.

In medieval times, mistletoe was not just a Christmas decoration, but one perhaps better suited to Halloween. It hung over doors to homes and stables, and was thought to prevent witches and ghosts from entering.

And a more recent tradition has evolved in the South of fetching mistletoe out of a tall tree by blasting it down with a shotgun. Let's just hope no one is kissing under it at the time!

So next year, when you head out to the woods, and was thought to prevent witches and ghosts from entering.

A big thanks goes out to everyone who helped sell and get the word out about our wreaths. We sold $383 wreaths this year! A record number of sales!

We would like to thank John MacRoy for spending the month of November, cleaning and repairing our butterfly and insect collection. He also added a few to the collection to replace ones that were beyond a repair and a few that are local to our area. The display cases are now looking wonderful! They currently are residing in our office so that they will experience more viewership. Feel free to stop in and take a look.

A big thanks goes out the Portville Free Library, who allowed us to use their facility to present our Make and Take workshop; Gifts for Birds, which was a sequel to our Migrating Biodiversity workshop that was held in November. Four students enjoyed learning how birds keep warm during the winter and how to make some delicious bird treats. They spent the evening playing with birdseed, peanut butter, and pinecones.

Overall, it was an enjoyable and messy night.

We would like to thank Barbara Johnston and Vicki Schmidt for helping with office work and mailings.

Adopt-A-Tree Sponsors

We would like to thank our recent Adopt-a-Tree Sponsors. The Adopt-a-Tree program is entirely dependent on the generosity of local sponsoring businesses & individuals. By being a sponsor of one of our local small businesses our sponsors are helping to ensure the continuation of this important educational program & encouraging elementary school children’s connection to & care of the environment.

Caretaker

Haskell Valley Veterinary Clinic

Steward

First Presbyterian Church of Portville Indek

Thank You to Our Dedicated Volunteers

Thank you to our Wreath Decorators!

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