



ECOS NEWS

ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse



The purpose of ECOS is to provide environmental experiences and education for youth and adults in order to develop an appreciation and understanding of the natural world and the impact of human activities upon it.

Celebrating Our 49th Year in Environmental Education

Volume XLIX

Number 6

December/January 2021



ECOS Ski & Snowshoe Trips 2021

First Outing Tuesday, January 5

We will be running the trips differently from the past couple of years. The major difference is, because of COVID restrictions (masks, socially distancing), we are limiting carpooling to family and 10 to 12 participants per leader. Thus, in order to attend an outing, you will need to contact the leader of the day. The leader's name, email address, and phone number will be sent to all who are on our Trip Outing email list. Contact information will also be posted on the ECOS answering machine at 518-370-4125 after 3:00 pm the day before the trip and the ECOS Facebook page.

At this point we have volunteers for January 5, 12, 19, 26, and February 2. Please volunteer for the open Tuesdays in February. Outings will be at locations within the Capital District similar to what has been on our outings list for many years. This location list has been included in this newsletter. Outing locations are chosen based on what we can learn about snow conditions each week. Last year we had many "traction gear" outings when the snow did not cooperate. ECOS participants **MUST** stay with the group. Bring your own water & snack and dress in layers. To be included on our ski/snowshoe email list contact Roy and Sue at royskipaddle@gmail.com or 518-466-8544.



ECOS VIRTUAL SPEAKER SERIES AND HOLIDAY CELEBRATION

Due to COVID-19, social distancing, and limits on number of attendees, we are currently unable to hold live events. Therefore, ECOS is excited to offer a series of guest speakers while we await the time when we can once again provide live programs.

Our first live program was November 19th, with speaker Don Rittner presenting on the Pine Bush.

The December holiday presentation will feature a slide show depicting previous ECOS events and various pictures of local natural beauty. We will award the winners of the book raffle "**All We Can Save: Truth, Courage and Solutions for the Climate Crisis**," by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine K. Wilkinson. (See page 7 for more details about the book and the insert for raffle ticket purchase.)

Our January speaker will be David Gibson, who will speak about his efforts with Adirondack conservation.

The series will be broadcast on the third Thursday of the month at 7 p.m. and continue until Spring. We will have programs varying from composting to environmental protection to homesteading. There will be an opportunity for questions at the end of each program.

Specific details and Zoom invitation will be available our website, ecosny.org, and emailed to all members for whom we have email addresses.

ECOS NEWS

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So, I am rooting cuttings from plants that will flower during the winter. I bought myself an amaryllis bulb which will bloom a cheerful bright red and I'll force some paperwhite narcissus bulbs. I'm going to plan a pollinator garden to put in in the Spring. And I'll figure out better lighting and more space for starting my tomato and pepper seeds inside.

Yesterday I bought two bird feeders and assorted bird seed. It was one of my small joys, before I moved, to watch birds coming to my feeders. I decided this is the winter to set up feeders again. I'm already looking forward to eating breakfast with cardinals, chickadees and finches...and maybe some more exotic birds will visit too. I also decided to participate in Project FeederWatch!

Project FeederWatch (Feederwatch.org) is a survey of the birds that visit backyards and other locales in North America from November to April conducted by "citizen-scientists". Children, families, individuals and groups can participate. The schedule is completely flexible. Participants' observations contribute to a continental data set of bird distribution and abundance being developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and BirdsCanada. It sounds like something I can do from the comfort of my dining room.

But I also bought new warm waterproof boots and am resolved to dust off my snowshoes...and use them. I might even try a porch party with hot cocoa and some very warmly dressed friends.

I wish you many small joys this season. Brighter days are ahead!

PRESIDENT'S PIECE

—*Ruth Bonn*

There are dark days ahead ..quite literally; this is the darkest time of the year. Days are short; nights are long...and it's cold. For millennia, people in the Northern hemisphere have marked the winter solstice, the point in the year when the North Pole is at its greatest tilt away from the sun and the day is shortest, with rituals to encourage and celebrate the return of the sun. From Yule logs, bonfires, torches and candles, to strings of bright Christmas lights festooning trees and houses, fire and light are traditional in rituals to banish dark and evil, and bring light and goodness.

This year, without the customary gatherings of family and friends, and without my usual winter trip, due to Covid restrictions, the long, dark days of winter ahead loom darker and longer than usual. So I decided that I needed to plan a survival strategy...to find little things to give me occasional sparks of joy.

SEEING THE BEAUTIFUL

The following is an excerpt from an email from Peg Reich who ventured out on an early morning walk inspired by an article in the NY Times.

"Further along, I realized I was hearing an unusual number of bird calls—the urgent honking of geese, the incessant gossiping of chickadees, the shrill warning calls of blue jays, the tapping of woodpeckers, and random chatter of small birds I couldn't see."

Watch for the full message and photos on our website.



RACHEL CARSON DINNER RECAP

We did it! The Rachel Carson Dinner was our first Zoom meeting with a large audience and dinner. By most reports it went flawlessly (almost). We started planning in July by looking for a way to broadcast the speaker. August was dedicated to working with SUNY—so many details to manage, the menu, pick-up times, number of dinners that could be prepared and more. September brought our attention to managing the Zoom presentation.

The response was tremendous! There were 106 reservations. Our volunteers were on hand to assist with handing out the dinners as people arrived. The added bonus was enjoying seeing each other in person. Many thanks to Cindy Elsenbeck, Sarah Celik, and Mike Howard.

The broadcast can be viewed on the website: ecosny.org and clicking on Rachel Carson's picture.

JOHN MCKEEBY, THE 2020 RACHEL CARSON AWARD RECIPIENT

—*Ruth Bonn*

The 19th annual Rachel Carson Award was presented to John McKeeby, the founder and Executive Director of the Schoharie River Center, at the virtual Rachel Carson event on October 27th. The award is given to an individual who exemplifies the values of Rachel Carson: fosters awareness of environment and environmental issues; acts as a steward of the environment, and embodies the characteristics of courage, perseverance, tenacity and vigilance.

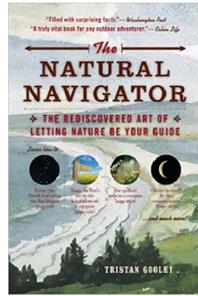
John founded the Schoharie River Center in 1999 with the vision of helping at-risk teens and the environment by engaging the youth actively in the outdoors. and exploring their local environment. This led to his creation of the Environmental Study Team (EST) Youth Development Program in Schenectady, a year-round, multi-year, youth skill development program for youth ages 12-18 years old. Youth in EST learn how to assess important environmental factors such as local water quality through conducting their own scientific research. Utilizing standard scientific practices and protocols, Schenectady youth have been conducting water chemistry testing, benthic macroinvertebrate studies, and bacterial testing of local freshwater streams, lakes and rivers in the City of Schenectady and the surrounding area. In EST, youth learn how to collect and analyze data, interpret and understand their results and present their findings to the public. Teams have presented their projects at Union's Mohawk River Symposium since 2009.

Environmental Study Teams now operate in four counties and nine school districts in the Schoharie/ Mohawk watershed. Their research has led to important environmental and quality-of-life improvements as teams have, on several occasions, identified and documented local environmental pollution threats that have led to enforcement action by local and state authorities.

- 2004 - 2005 EST youth program members documented raw sewage discharges into the Schoharie Creek on the Schenectady county line from a local trailer park, leading to enforcement actions by NYS DEC.
- 2008-2009 EST youth documented and raised the alarm about leachate from a closed landfill in Schenectady County discharging into the Normanskill. Their research led to DEC enforcement action and the locality responsible for the landfill signed an Order of Consent and addressed the issue.
- 2012 The SRC in partnership with the Schenectady County Job Training agency conducted a six week job placement program for 20 Schenectady High School Youth who spent the summer working to assess and document water quality and environmental conditions throughout the City parks of Schenectady.
- In 2019 the SRC's EST programs from Schenectady, Amsterdam and Fort Plain had their video submissions accepted by the Smithsonian Institution's Museum on Main Street Digital Storytelling Project, Their videos appear on the Smithsonian's website.
- Videos may be viewed also on the Center's website: www.schoharierivercenter.org

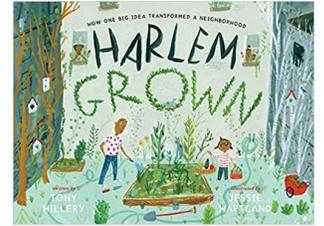
BOOKS FOR WINTER READING

The Natural Navigator: The Rediscovered Art of Letting Nature Be Your Guide - Tristan Gooley
Before GPS, before the compass, and even before cartography, humankind was navigating. Now this singular guide helps us rediscover what our ancestors long understood—that a windswept tree, the depth of a puddle, or a trill of birdsong can help us find our way, if we know what to look and listen for. *The Natural Navigator* will help keep you on course and open your eyes to the wonders, large and small, of the natural world.

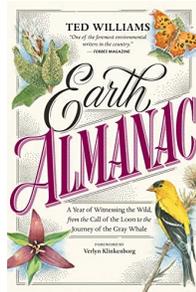


Harlem Grown: How One Big Idea Transformed A Neighborhood - Tony Hillery and illustrated by Jessie Hartland.

Based on a true story, this book tells the story of Tony Hillery, founder and director of Harlem Grown, a community garden based in Harlem. Beautifully illustrated, I love this story of how "Mr. Tony" brought a group of children together to help transform an empty lot into a thriving community garden. There is also information in the back of the book on how to start a community garden.

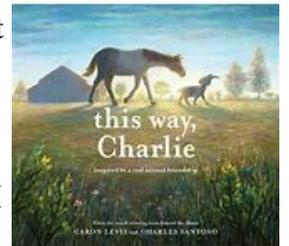


Earth Almanac: A Year of Witnessing the Wild - Ted Williams
Noted nature writer Ted Williams invites readers along on a year-long immersion in the wild and fleeting moments of the natural world, from winter candy and spring quackers to summer's scarlet farewell and autumn reveilles. This beautifully crafted collection of short, seasonal essays combines in-depth information with evocative descriptions of nature's marvels and mysteries. Williams explains the weather conditions that bring out the brightest reds in autumn leaves, how hungry wolf spiders catch their prey, and why American goldfinches wait until late July or August to build their nests.



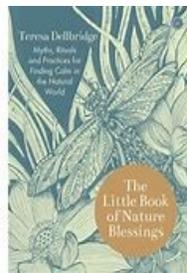
This Way Charlie: Inspired by a real animal friendship - Caron Levis and Charles Santoso.

This is a sweet story of the friendship between a partially blind horse, Charlie, and Jack, a goat, who both live at an animal sanctuary. Together they learn the meaning of friendship through working together and helping one another overcome their own challenges. I love this gentle book of acceptance and understanding written against the backdrop of the animal sanctuary.



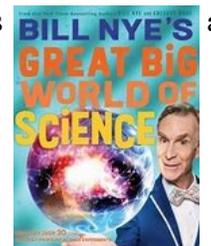
The Little Book of Nature Blessings - Teresa Dellbridge

Nature helps us still the mind, feel connected, find calm and allows us to be more consciously present – these are simple things that many of us are searching for. In this little book, Theresa Dellbridge provides practices based on the elements, seasons; sun and moon that will help you to release the stress of everyday life.



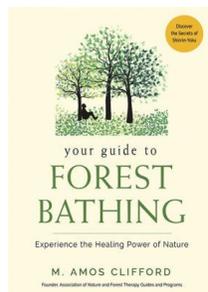
Bill Nye's Great Big World of Science - This book is excellent! It's a compilation of various scientific topics; DIY experiments; and important points about climate, evolution, and more. Bill Nye is always reliable and makes science fun!

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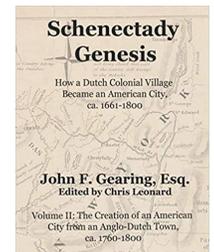
Your Guide to Forest Bathing: Experience the Healing Power of Nature - M. Amos Clifford

Simply being present in the natural world - with all our senses fully alive - can have a remarkably healing effect. It can also awaken in us our latent but profound connection with all living things. This is "forest bathing", a practice inspired by the Japanese tradition of shinrin-yoku. It is a gentle, meditative approach to being with nature and an antidote to our nature-starved lives that can heal our relationship with the more-than-human world.



Schenectady Genesis, Volume II, - John Gearing

deftly covers the region's tense struggles during the American Revolution, a conflict more akin to a civil war than two oppositional nations. It is no stretch to state that soldiers and militia from Schenectady, Albany, and Tryon counties played significant roles in securing the borders from invasion and helped turn the tide at the Battle of Saratoga. The work powerfully captures the state of anxiety that enveloped the region as fears of invasion from the north and west echoed throughout the valley.



All books are available at Open Door Bookstore.

Fall Nature Exploration with Children

—*Rebekka Henriksen*

We have officially seen the first dusting of snow in our region, although as I write we are coming out of an early November that is more reminiscent of early May. Warm weather or no, we are hard into the fall, with winter soon to follow. This is the time of year when children might be tempted to retreat indoors, thinking that nothing much is happening outside. But now is a time of great activity in both cultivated garden and wild spaces, with lots of opportunities to explore our natural world.

One of my favorite things to do with children this time of year is seed collecting. After the hard frosts, many plants have seed heads easy to harvest. Grab a paper bag and head out into the backyard or meadows and see what you find. Marigolds, calendula, squashes left on the vine, bean pods, oregano, dill, lettuces or kale that were allowed to flower in late summer – all are wonderful to collect seeds from now. If you are on a hike, keep your eyes open for wild asters, blue lobelia, rudbeckia, golden rod and milkweed seeds. These last ones, so beautiful in their pods, are fun for children to help disperse, blowing the fluff into the wind. This is a good opportunity to talk about the importance of milkweed plants to Monarchs, and how golden rod and aster are crucial for late pollinators.



Milkweed and Marigold seeds

Watch for goldfinches in their winter plumage as they pluck seeds from dried grasses. Hunt for snake dens, plentiful in our area around our many creeks and pocked shale formations, and try to spy what logs might be large enough to accommodate some local hibernators. With many trees bare, this is a great time for spying bird nests and attempting to identify what bird might have constructed it. The forest floor provides tons of leaves now for identification purposes – just how many

different oak leaves can we find, and what clues do they give us about what type of oak they might be from? There are still some acorns and black walnuts around that the animals haven't found yet – these could be collected and boiled to make ink, just as the early Colonists did. The many white pine trees in our area shed dead needles this time of year – these can be wonderful for weaving small baskets as the nights get longer.



Another important tree in our area of course is the maple, and it can be identified even without its leaves. If it is on your property and you are inspired, circle it with a ribbon for tapping in the spring if that is something you want to try. Any maple sap can be turned into syrup, not just sugar maple! Sometimes if you are lucky, you might spot an honest to gosh American Chestnut sapling this time of year. Chances are that blight will get it within a short time, but it still provides an opportunity for learning about native species and the challenges they face.

If children are into creepy crawlies, encourage them to peek under decomposing logs or leaves to see if they can spot decomposers busy at work, or the wonderful woolly bear caterpillar. Maybe they will find a spider nest, carefully woven tight against winter winds. If you find yourselves near some dead dill or wild carrot, carefully look for swallowtail chrysalides. These overwinter, looking just like a small, folded dead leaf and will eclose in the spring. So many opportunities to see how nature prepares for the long cold months ahead.

If you have collected some seeds, a fun activity is to make origami seed envelopes to store them until spring. These can be made from paper scraps, without need for glue or tape. You can find complete instructions online. This is an easy activity to do, even with younger children.

These are just a few activities that keep children engaged outdoors in late fall, and get them outside when screens tempt them.



Schenectady County Forest

—*Holly Hawkes*

The Schenectady County Forest affords a lovely walk through lands which were farmed in the 18th and 19th centuries; stone walls and a small cemetery remain from those days. A beautiful stand of red pines was planted in the 1930s. The stream which runs through the property was dammed in 1982, with a small pond forming behind the dam.



The longest trail, the blue trail, is about a mile and a half in length; it is a loop, and the other (yellow and red) trails are cross trails which may be taken if a shorter walk is preferred.

Walking is mostly flat although there is a hill leading down to the pond and the majority of the preserve. If you take the blue trail in a clockwise direction, the hill is not steep; it is quite skiable in winter. Taking the blue trail in a counterclockwise direction brings you to the red pines and the cemetery and then to a steeper hill. The steeper hill may be avoided by going clockwise and then returning via the red trail.

While all trails have markers, there are no signs at intersections, so a careful eye may be needed to find the yellow and red trails. There are two side trails leading down to the pond, one off the blue trail and one off the red trail; the one off the blue trail leads to a bench overlooking the pond. About halfway along the blue trail there is a side trail which connects to trails on land owned by the town of Duanesburg.

This is a very pleasant spot for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing; due to its higher elevation, it may have snow when other parts of the Capital District do not. It is open for hunting from November 15 – December 15.

The preserve is located on Lake Road in the town of Duanesburg, 2.9 miles south of Rt. 159 (Mariaville Road). There is an accurate map at the parking lot.

And, at Featherstonehaugh State Forest . . .

A band of masked superheroes gathered to clear the trails for cross-country skiing and snowshoeing. (Notice the Force emanating from them.)



They were challenged by a season's unrestricted growth and acts of nature.

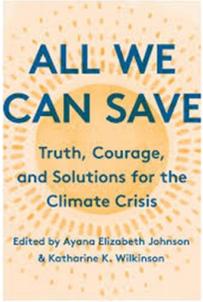


And sometimes by human acts.

← Garbage

Their super powers prevailed and all is ready for the first snow.

HOLIDAY RAFFLE



“All We Can Save: Truth, Courage and Solutions for the Climate Crisis.” by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine K. Wilkinson. Curated by two climate leaders, the book is a collection and celebration of visionaries who are leading us on a path toward all we can save.

It illuminates the expertise and insights of dozens of diverse women leading on climate in the United States and aims to advance a more representative, nuanced, and solution-oriented public conversation on the climate crisis.

Five lucky raffle winners will be chosen at the Holiday Zoom gathering. See insert to purchase tickets

Shopping from Home?

One Step Closer

You can help support ECOS through Amazon Join Amazon Smile where a portion of your purchase will go to the non-profit of your choice.

Simply go to smile.amazon.com and type in ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse as your non-profit. Follow the simple instructions and .05% of your purchase of eligible goods will be credited to ECOS.



A big Thank You to the team of ECOS volunteers who gathered details on ten Saratoga County trails for the Guide to Accessible Natural Areas. Carole Fraser is looking for someone with computer skills to put together the “tip strip” type image for each chapter, and help transfer trail access data to spreadsheets. Contact her at 4.cafraser@gmail.com.



MEMBERSHIP FORM

ECOS Membership

ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse

Please check your membership contribution level.

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- \$50 Family \$100 Supporter \$250 Benefactor
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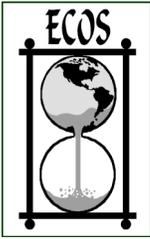
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UPDATE ON ECOS’ ACTIVITIES DURING “PAUSE” 2021



Seven Preserve Challenge

Winter is on its way but don't let that stop you... bundle up and get outside! Challenge yourself with the Seven Preserve Challenge! Or look through one of our Guides to Natural Areas...(you can buy them at the Open Door or on our website: www.ecosny.org)

Download the forms at www.ecosny.org to participate in the Challenge and receive a patch.

Want to be involved? Here are some suggestions:

- Write your own book recommendation
- Recommend a walk you enjoyed with a photo if you can
- Plan on joining the ski and snowshoe outings beginning in January
- Watch the Speaker Series on the third Thursday of each month
- Watch the Holiday Celebration on December 17th at 7 PM
- Explore nature with your children or grandchildren see page 5 for suggestions
- Contact Carole Fraser at 4cafraser@gmail.com to help with the Guide to Accessible Natural Areas
- Cindy Elsenbeck is looking for slides for the Holiday slide show. Contact: rickandcindy@gmail.com

ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse is a non-political, not-for-profit organization. Our mission is to provide environmental information and educational opportunities that enhance appreciation of the natural world, build a community that is aware and knowledgeable about environmental issues, and advocate informed action to preserve our natural resources. ECOS is funded through the support of our members and the community.