



NAI INTERPRETIVE  
NATURALIST SECTION

# *The Naturalist*



## Winter 2023-2024

December 21, 2023 - March 19, 2024

# A Winter Message

*“Winter is a glorious spectacle of glittering fractals complete with a soundscape and atmosphere entirely its own.”*

- Anders Swanson



## Our Mission

The National Association for Interpretation (NAI) mission is to inspire leadership and excellence to advance heritage interpretation as a profession.

Visit: [interpnet.com](http://interpnet.com) for more information on NAI.

## About *The Naturalist*

The Naturalist is published quarterly by the Interpretive Naturalist Section of NAI. It is published on each equinox and solstice.

## Share Your Content

Your content is welcome anytime. Send any articles, poems, photos, or news to Newsletter Editor, John Miller at [interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com](mailto:interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com).

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# Meet the Team

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### Northwest (Region 10)

Representative needed

## Get Involved!

If you are in the Northwest Region and you are good at networking, we need your help. You can help gather newsletter content such as news, articles, and photos from your Region. Contact John Miller [interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com](mailto:interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com).



# From the Trail

## Director Corner

*Mary Loan*



As winter approaches in the northern hemisphere—although it sure seems cold enough on some of these recent mornings to count as winter—I am thinking about my experiences doing interpretation in winter. I honestly haven't done much that involves being out in the snow for hours at a time, but I'm always

looking for new ways to bring nature—even that cold, snowy nature—to our visitors. One reason is that once my fingers and/or toes get cold, I am not a very happy person. All I can think about is my cold hands...or feet...and how to get them warm again. So, I have shied away from some of the programs that I could have done over the years.

There are so many fascinating things about winter that we can share with our visitors. Animal tracks in the snow. Ice crystals. Evergreen trees versus deciduous trees and how they are different but also similar. And who

can forget all the different snowflake patterns? So much to learn in the winter! I could use some help with programs for snow—who has something to share? I would love to learn from you all!

Speaking of learning, how many of you were able to attend the National Workshop in Little Rock last month? I thought it was great, full of great sessions, learning, sharing and kinship. I always leave our workshops—whether the National or Regional workshops—with a new appreciation for what all of us are doing to share our love of nature. We

were able to recognize several award winners at the National Workshop—including two of our own Interpretive Naturalists. But I know there is so much good work that we are all doing. So, I challenge you to think of someone who is doing outstanding naturalist work and nominate them for an award next year—either for our Section awards or one of NAI’s national awards. Think about a program you have seen (or heard about) that inspired you—could it be something that we could highlight on one of our Monthly Meet-ups, or at our Annual Virtual Workshop in August? I love

to hear about all the great things you are doing—let’s highlight them!

And don’t forget about our Virtual Workshop—it will be held once again in August of 2024. We are still finalizing the theme and details, but we would love to see your suggestions for presenters and virtual field trips. And if you have a topic you would like to share with the rest of us, let us know—we would love to hear/see it.

Finally, happy holidays to all of you—whatever holiday(s) you may or may not celebrate. I celebrate all of our Interpretive Naturalist Section members

and thank you for your hard work, both with the section and in your “normal” jobs/lives. You are our reason for having the section, so please let us know if there is something you like, dislike or would like to see from our group. We are always here for you and always open to improving.

:) Mary

## Expertise Directory Reminder

We are trying to build up the IN Section Expertise/Specialist/Interest Directory by getting more section members to send us their information. Remember, this is completely voluntary. We encourage you to participate in the development of this directory because it will be an effective way to build professional connections with your fellow Interpretive Naturalist Section members.

Our goal is to have at least 10% of our membership (that would be roughly 100 people) send their contact information and a summary of their expertise, specialties, and interests. Once we get some critical mass, we will post the list on the section website for members to access. For more information, email Lori Spencer at [spencerinterp@gmail.com](mailto:spencerinterp@gmail.com)



# Trivia Night!



## What is Trivia Night?

Trivia Night is a fun and refreshing way to interact with your fellow interpreters over nature-related presentations and trivia. This reoccurring event is conducted on the **FIRST THURSDAY** of each month. The event starts off with a 15 to 20-minute presentation and is followed by nature trivia. The highest scoring participants each evening receive fun swag from our Section leaders.

The best part is that by signing up through NAI and participating, you receive ½ hour of continuing education credits (CECs) towards your NAI recertification. If you have any questions about the IN Section Trivia night, please contact us at [interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com](mailto:interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com)

## Trivia Night Line Up

### January

**January 4, 2024**  
8:00 pm ET; 7:00 pm CT; 6:00 pm MT; 5:00 pm PT



#### Chat with NAI's Executive Director

Executive Director Paul Caputo will be our first presenter of 2024. Paul will give us an update on news and events from the past few months as well as what is on the horizon for NAI. You can also ask Paul questions about our amazing organization.

### February

**February 1, 2024**  
8:00 pm ET; 7:00 pm CT; 6:00 pm MT; 5:00 pm PT



#### Mindfulness in Nature

Monique Thompson will be our speaker. Take time to reduce stress and increase your joy! We will share 3 ways to incorporate mindful practices in your programs.

### March

**March 7, 2024**  
8:00 pm ET; 7:00 pm CT; 6:00 pm MT; 5:00 pm PT



#### K-12 Idea Share

Kathryn Borowicz will be our speaker. Join us for a thought-provoking discussion on K12 environmental programming to get ideas for the coming months from across the country. In both small and large groups, we will have time for sharing about our best programs and discuss ideas we may have to get feedback.

## 2024 Trivia Night Presenters Needed

Consider giving a 15 to 20-minute presentation about any aspect of nature. We would love to put you on the 2023 schedule. This is a great way to gain more experience and introduce yourself to our amazing IN Section members. Contact us at [interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com](mailto:interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com) for more information.

## Trivia Night Swag Sponsors

Want to share more about your company or organization and offer prizes to our worthy game night winners? Consider being a Trivia Night Swag Sponsor. Contact: Monique Thompson, [interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com](mailto:interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com)



## **Mark Your Calendar**

# **2024 Virtual Conference**

*August 7 & 8, 2024*

### **Climate Change Leads to Meaningful Interpretation**

The Interpretive Naturalist Section will host our 4th annual Virtual conference in August. We have chosen the theme of “Climate Change Leads to Meaningful Interpretation.”

Here is your chance to be a part of this conference by being a presenter or virtual field trip host. Presentations are the heart of our conference, and we hope you will be a part of it. Presentations related to any aspect of Nature are welcome. Presentation time slots of 45 and 90 minutes are available.

For more information on how you can be a conference presenter or a virtual field trip host, contact John Miller at [interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com](mailto:interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com).

### **IN Section 2024 Professional Scholarships**

The Interpretive Naturalists Section will again offer scholarships to attend the NAI National Conference. This year it will be in St. Augustine, Florida. Details of the scholarships will appear in the Summer newsletter. These scholarships are thanks to your participation in the annual virtual conferences and generous donations. We hope that you will consider applying for one of these scholarships and be able to enjoy the outstanding professional development of these conferences.

# Awards and Scholarships at the IN Section Meeting at the National Conference

We are happy to recognize two Thomas Say Award of Excellence winners at the IN Section Meeting in Little Rock, Arkansas

## Dorothy F. McLeer

Environmental Interpretive Center (EIC) at the University of Michigan-Dearborn  
(Photo of Dorothy McLeer)

Her ability to meaningfully teach our profession, often with a focus on the environmental and natural history aspects of interpretation, is not only recognized by the students who go through the program. Across the region, graduates from the UM-Dearborn program are seen as valuable additions to the staff of metroparks, county facilities, and other nature centers. Julie Champion, retired east district interpretive supervisor for the Huron-Clinton Metroparks, says, "I hired many former student guides from U of M-Dearborn Environmental Interpretive Center because they had a good background in natural sciences and experience and training to do interpretive programming," and she is not alone. Through Dorothy's mentorship and the practical experience, she offers in her course, the students finish the class with all the tools that they need to begin a career in interpretation.

For her undying commitment to our profession and the incredible and far-reaching impacts that her programming, training, and mentoring have had, Dorothy was recognized as the NAI Great Lakes Region's 2023 Distinguished Professional Interpreter, the region's highest honor.

In sum, Dorothy McLeer has shown unparalleled commitment to, and had a profound regional impact on, the interpretive profession over her 29 years of service. – nominated by Griffin S. Bray, CIG; Graduate Assistant at Schmeckle Reserve, University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point



Dorothy McLeer

## Howard Aprill

Wehr Nature Center at Milwaukee County Parks  
(photo: left to right; Mary Loan, Howard Aprill, Monique Thompson)

Howard Aprill is the embodiment of an interpretive naturalist no matter whether he is leading a general nature hike, training Master Naturalists on ecology of a deciduous forest or, in front of a T.V. camera answering questions about ticks.

Being a naturalist is Howard Aprill's passion. It shines through every program, event, training, and activity he leads or participates in. He can connect knowledge of nature with any audience because of his friendliness, vast knowledge and skill of making any subject relevant to his audience no matter who they might be. For over 30 years Howard has been an interpretive naturalist, working in state, county, non-profit, and recreational situations. Currently he is a naturalist at Wehr Nature Center (Milwaukee County Parks). He has been with Wehr Nature Center for over 25 years.

As Howard's manager for over 20 years, I have had the pleasure of watching him continually hone his naturalist and interpretive skills. He represents everything a naturalists should be- always seeking knowledge, ways to protect and preserve the natural world, and using his ability to inspire others to respect and care for the natural world. Watching Howard engage and inspire young people is pure joy. – Debra McRae, Wehr Nature Center



left to right; Mary Loan, Howard Aprill, Monique Thompson

## Scholarship Winners

### Kathy Miller & Abby Piccin

(photo: left to right; Mary Loan, Kathy Miller, Abby Piccin, Monique Thompson)

Thanks to your participation in the 2023 IN Section Virtual Conference, we were able to provide professional development for two section members. This year the recipients were:

#### Abby Piccin

previously with Colorado Parks & Wildlife, now with Arkansas State Parks

#### Kathy Miller

26 Year Volunteer

Missouri Department of Conservation

Reeds Spring, Missouri



Both have written articles about their Conference experience for this newsletter.

For more information about Section Awards or Professional Development Scholarships, contact Lori Spencer at [spencerinterp@gmail.com](mailto:spencerinterp@gmail.com).



# Best of Little Rock!

By Kathy Magruder Miller



Escape rooms, youth doing your projects, urban sketching, preplanning, Native Americans are still here, and several types of dialogue, expansion of LGBTQ+ were only some of my favorite experiences. What sessions would you have chosen?

I'm Kathy Magruder Miller, and sincerely thank you for the scholarship for me to attend NAI's nation conference in Little Rock. I sincerely would not have been able to otherwise. I'm a 28 year volunteer for the MO Dept of Conservation. What I learned at the conference is invaluable. I have plans to develop ways to implement these concepts in

my volunteer work developing and facilitating programs, in the trainings I assist with, and in the contract work I am doing with my husband John, Miller Interpretive Transformations.

On Preplanning, Chuck Lennox, Principal of Lennox Insites (see him in LinkedIn), offered many ideas of research to do BEFORE contracting to develop a plan. Of course as a session attendee (and host) I'm sharing the shades of my notes.

Briefly:

- Obtain visitor experiences using many methods
- Obtain and review ALL existing types of plans previously written
- Discuss issues with all internal departments
- Perhaps use a drone to see neighboring land
- Brainstorm with customer and list ALL the community, those neighbors, people(s), organizations, tribal nations, non-represented others, to learn community opinions (who "doesn't like you!") and impact on them

- Seek help from these groups in planning rather than ask for approval after the plan is made.
- Polish your charm and schmoozing skills for less challenging networking
- Learn and broaden future audiences to plan for the future
- Help customer seek grants related to parts of the contract, Visitor Studies Association, Humanities Council, data analysis, Tourism,
- Be specific on grant requirements, what customer wants to accomplish, creations, who to train, what and who to facilitate, social marketing, others in the contract.

My sincere thanks for the scholarship to attend the conference.

# IN Section Scholarship Experience

*By Abby Piccin previously with Colorado Parks & Wildlife, now with Arkansas State Parks*



My name is Abby, and I had the pleasure of attending this year's NAI National Conference in Little Rock, AR thanks to the Interpretive Naturalist Section scholarship.

Working as a seasonal interpretive naturalist for Colorado Parks and Wildlife for three years introduced me to the world of interpretation. I had an idea of what kind of work I wanted to pursue but had no idea my dream career field was

out there, thriving and awaiting me!

Attending the national conference for NAI was a goal of mine, but realistically out of reach as a recent graduate working seasonal jobs. That's when I came across the Bob Jennings Scholarship program. For any young professionals in this field, I highly recommend taking advantage of scholarship opportunities to get yourself to a conference. The overwhelming sense of belonging, companied with the fact that everyone in attendance is passionate doing similar work made this experience so valuable to me. From networking, to learning from each other in the sessions, the opportunities that arise from being together in one place are priceless.

We heard from the best

in the industry from all over on topics valuable to my work such as how to better integrate indigenous voices and how to break barriers when interpreting on public lands. I left with a full cup, ready to apply strategies learned to my next site.

I'm stoked to share that since the conference, I've accepted a full-time interpreter position at one of the many beautiful Arkansas State Parks! I'm so thankful for the exposure, knowledge, and inspiration from attending this year's conference and hope to be at many more!



## IN Section 2024 Professional Scholarships

The Interpretive Naturalists Section will again offer scholarships to attend the NAI National Conference. This year it will be in St. Augustine, Florida. Details of the scholarships will appear in the Summer newsletter. These scholarships are thanks to your participation in the annual virtual conferences and generous donations. We hope that you will consider applying for one of these scholarships and be able to enjoy the outstanding professional development of these conferences.



# Get Involved!



## What is it?!



Can you identify this bird?

**Hint:** It was featured as a means of mail delivery for Harry Potter.

*Photo credit by permission: MO Department of Conservation.*

## Tell Your Story

Interpreters come from all walks of life, and we take all sorts of unique paths to this career. Our “Faces of NAI” video series will highlight the diversity of backgrounds, career paths, and interests represented in the field of interpretation.

To see yourself featured in this series, which will be shared on social media and the NAI website, please send your video according to the following parameters to [pcaputo@interpnet.com](mailto:pcaputo@interpnet.com). Duration: 2 minutes Format: Digital video file such as .WMV, .MOV, and .MP4 (Phone cameras work well, but please shoot horizontally, not vertically—and be wary of the effects of wind on audio!)

**Please include the following:**

- Your name, title, and place of work
- How you got into interpretation
- What the field has meant to you
- Anything else that makes your story unique!

## Instagram

Follow us at [@naiinterpretivenaturalist](https://www.instagram.com/naiinterpretivenaturalist)

The Interpretive Naturalist Section would like to highlight your story and your work! Each month, our Instagram account features an ***Interpretive Naturalist of the Month***. Want to be our IN of the month? Email 3-4 photos and a brief bio: how you decided to go into the field, your favorite interpretive place or program, hopes for the future, and anything else you’d like to share to Sabrina Deschamps or Kathryn Borowicz at [interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com](mailto:interpretivenaturalist@gmail.com).

# Unveiling Winter Resilience: The Journey of a Tenacious Eastern Box Turtle

*By Lauren Connolly*

As winter descends upon Ohio, a quiet resilience thrives beneath the frozen earth—the Eastern Box Turtle. These elusive creatures slip into a state of brumation when cold bites and food becomes scarce, seeking refuge in soil, creating a burrow, and going into a period of dormancy. Eastern Box Turtles exhibit resilience not only in how they endure the harsh winter months but also when it comes to healing.

One remarkable male Eastern Box Turtle, in particular, was nursed back to health by the caring hands of Tiny Wonders Wildlife Rescue, an organization permitted by Ohio to rehabilitate injured native creatures. At the beginning of the Summer, he was struck by a metal weed wacker across his carapace, leaving a deep

wound. His journey toward recovery demanded meticulous care—deep wound flushing, silver honey applications, and alternating shots became his routine.

With each passing day, his determination grew evident as he attempted to hasten his return to the wild, his innate toughness shining through his attempts to escape his bathtime every day.

In just a few short weeks, a bloody red, raw flesh wound through its thick, tough shell had healed and almost completely blended in with the rest of his carapace. This joyous feat in healing could only mean one thing: it was time for Tiny Wonders Wildlife Rescue to release this animal back to the wilderness where he belongs.



*Back home in the wild. Released in approximately the same spot, he was found because a box turtle territory is only about a mile*

At the end of Summer, his bittersweet release day approached. Time is of the essence when releasing to give him enough time to orient himself to his surroundings to prepare for the cold months ahead. His resilience during his rehabilitation period reassures that he will thrive!

Winter's chill might keep us huddled by the fire with steaming cups of cocoa or cider, but it also conceals the silent resilience of these Box Turtles—beneath the frozen soil, patiently waiting for the warmth of spring to reemerge. Reflecting on the stoic resilience of Ohio's Eastern Box Turtles amidst the scarcity of winter, let their unseen but unwavering spirit inspire us during this season of quiet endurance.



*Fresh wound on the box turtle from a metal weed wacker compared to it just a few short weeks, the wound has healed!*

# Book Review

*By Madison Donohue; Tourism Manager with Guided Experiences in SE OH*

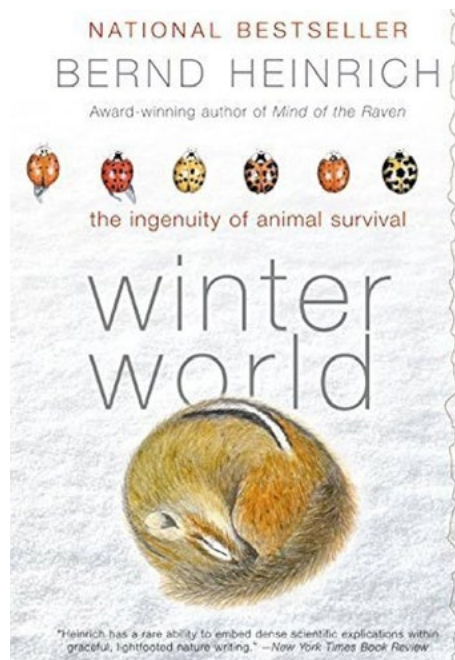
## Review of *Winter World* by Bernd Heinrich.

“Winter World” by Bernd Heinrich is a captivating exploration of the wonders and challenges that winter presents to the natural world. Renowned biologist and author, Heinrich takes readers on a scientific and poetic journey through the icy landscapes, unraveling the intricate strategies that various creatures employ to survive the harsh winter months.

Heinrich’s prose is both elegant and informative, seamlessly weaving together personal anecdotes and scientific observations. He brings to life the hidden dramas of the winter wilderness, revealing the remarkable adaptations that enable animals and plants to endure extreme cold and scarcity of resources. From the endurance of hibernating bears to the delicate balance of winter ecology, Heinrich paints a vivid picture of the interconnected web of life in freezing temperatures.

One of the book’s strengths is

Heinrich’s ability to blend his scientific expertise with a deep appreciation for the beauty of the natural world. His writing is infused with a sense of wonder, inviting readers to marvel at the ingenious strategies that evolution has forged in response to winter’s challenges.



Whether describing the intricate architecture of a snowflake or the resilience of a chickadee surviving frigid nights, Heinrich’s enthusiasm for the subject matter is contagious.

The book is not only an exploration of biological adaptations but also an examination of the author’s own experiences with winter. Heinrich seamlessly integrates personal stories from his life in the snowy woods of Maine, adding a layer of intimacy to the narrative. These anecdotes provide a human touch to the scientific exploration, making the book accessible to both seasoned naturalists and casual readers interested in the natural world.

Bernd Heinrich’s “Winter World” is a masterfully crafted exploration of the biological marvels of winter. It’s a book that not only educates but also inspires a deep appreciation for the intricate dance of life in the coldest season. Whether you’re a nature enthusiast or simply curious about the mysteries of winter, this book offers a delightful journey into the heart of icy landscapes and the resilient creatures that call them home.



# Effervescence of Moisture Tracks

*By Bill Sydor*

This morning with the rising sun  
Shining at my back,  
While out walking with a mind filled with  
thought,  
Mockingbird called to me:  
“Wake Up, Pay Attention, Be Aware!”  
A man and dog had just passed me by  
Going the other way...

The tracks they had just made  
Stood out in front of me in stark relief:  
Deepest black contrast forms against  
The pale lifeless grey of the pavement ahead.  
And further ahead I could see,  
Where they had left the moist,  
Dew covered grass,  
To join the pavement path  
Upon which I was now returning home.

Moisture tracks of deepest black  
Upon the otherwise dry, barren grey  
Of the path ahead.

Looking back,  
I could see the man and dog,  
But no tracks did they now leave,  
Or were their tracks now not visible  
On the sunlit shining path?

Kneeling down,  
Looking more closely where tracks should be,  
Right at my feet:  
“Are there tracks here or not?”  
And then the thought:  
“Why do I not see the tracks I know are  
here?”

After some time examining the ground,  
Standing, turning, looking  
Along the path towards home  
And seeing those tracks again  
Black against grey.

Yet, am I imaging?  
“Are they growing dimmer now, contrast less,  
As their image forming moisture  
Evaporates to the sky?”

*October 2nd, 2023*

*Bill Sydor*

# Winter Wings: Capturing the Beauty of Birds Through the lens

*Article and Photos by Mike Hensley*

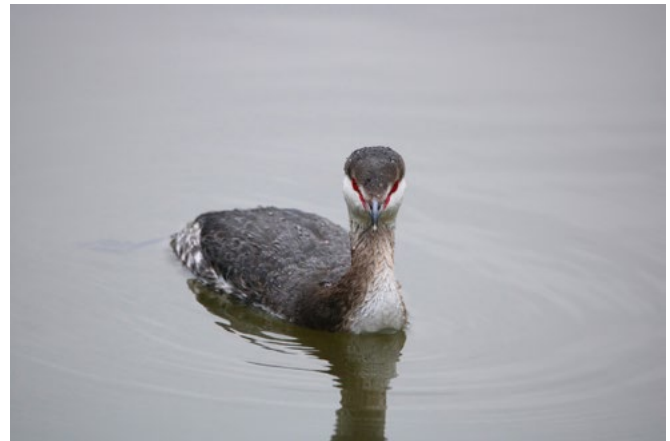
Winter is one of my favorite times to photograph wildlife, especially birds. While it can be difficult for you to find those birds, once you find them, they can tell an interesting story. Winter wildlife gives us an opportunity to see wildlife in a more vulnerable state. Struggling to survive the harsh winter that the great Lake Erie dishes out on the North Coast where I am located. Nestled almost equal distances from Cleveland and Toledo, the Sandusky Bay area is an exceptional birding spot for those who are willing to brave the cold and wind around Lake Erie during the winter months. With various stops on the Lake Erie birding trail, we are rarely short on birds or birding habitat.

Through photography, I have been fortunate to share some remarkable moment with wildlife. Every time a photograph a new species I feel a great sense of accomplishment, as if I had just completed a marathon. My favorite thing about wildlife photography is that I get to tell a story or better yet a triumph of how I was able to capture a species but only for a moment. Photography has given me an additional tool in my interpreter's tool belt that I didn't even realize, I had until recently. These photographs share stories and memories that I will carry with me for the rest of my life and career as an interpreter.



*White-winged Scoter, Melanitta deglandi. (female)*  
Location: Putnam Marsh

*Amidst the icy expanse, the White-winged scoter glided gracefully, its ebony plumage contrasting with the frozen landscape. As I slid across the ice of the Sandusky Bay to capture this photo a small though crossed my mind that had not arisen until I raised the camera. If the ice breaks, who will know I'm here?*



*Horned Grebe, Podiceps auratus*  
Location: Putnam Marsh

*As this Horned grebe emerged from the tranquil water of Lake Erie, it startled me, but I was just quick enough to snap two photos before it tilted its head and quickly swam under the water back into the mysteries beneath the surface.*



*Dark-eyed Junco, Junco hyemalis*  
Location: Community Foundation Preserve at Eagle Point



*American Tree Sparrow, Spizelloides arborea*  
Location: Community Foundation Preserve at Eagle Point

On a blistery winter afternoon this American tree sparrow decided to part from its fellow tree sparrows and investigate my “pish” call to grab its attention.



*Lapland Longspur, Calcarius lapponicus*  
A large flock of Lapland Longspur on at the Huron Pier.  
Location: Huron, Ohio



*Fox Sparrow, Passerella iliaca*  
A brave Fox Sparrow that spent the winter under the feeders at the Community Foundation Preserve at Eagle Point.  
Location: Sandusky, Ohio



*Immature American Bald Eagles, Haliaeetus leucocephalus*  
Two immature Bald Eagles quarreling for the best hunting perch. This photo was taken from Wyandot MetroPark looking out over Sheldon’s Marsh State Nature Preserve in Huron, Ohio.



*Ducks on the Sandusky Bay.*  
Sandusky, Ohio



# Book Review

## *Mama Mudbug's Look Book*

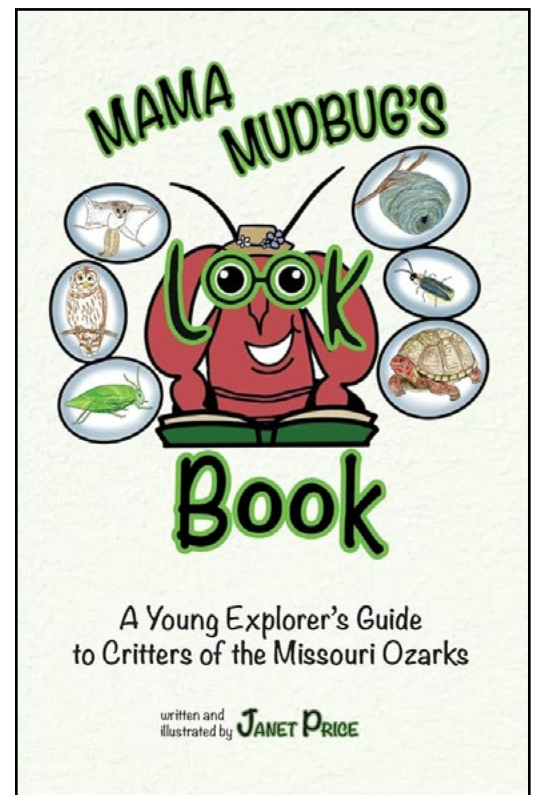
*Review by Cyndi Cogbill, Joplin MO*

Janet Price's "Mama Mudbug's Look Book" contains 70 pages packed with knowledge, fun, and illustrations. It is a field guide and so much more. It is all about exploring and learning about the insects, spiders, and other animals you may see. Although the book is sub-titled as "A Young Explorer's Guide to the Critters of the Missouri Ozarks," it suitable for the nature enthusiast of any age and is appropriate for most of the Midwest and eastern United States.

From the cover to the pages throughout, the book captures the eye of the reader. Janet's hand-drawn, large images make identifying creatures an easy process. The tips such as the "Look at," "Look for," "Look out," and "Try it," symbols provide key features for recognizing an animal, things to seek, safety warnings, and things to do. The book doesn't end there, but has several appendices with fun facts, animal families

and scientific names, and an alphabetical list and size guide.

I highly recommend this book as the perfect addition to any school, nature center, public, or personal library. "Mama Mudbug's Look Book" is available on Amazon or by contacting Janet Price at [moonshadowmomentsllc@gmail.com](mailto:moonshadowmomentsllc@gmail.com).





# 'Twas the night before Stressmas

*By Alan Goldstein with apologies to Clement Clarke Moore*

'Twas the night before Stressmas, when all through the house  
Mom was screaming, 'cause she saw a mouse;  
Dad was sitting on the couch, cradling a beer,  
He said, "I have the remote until early next year";

The children with Gameboys sat on their beds,  
While visions of higher levels danced in their heads.  
And grandma in her kitchen, and gramps with his nightcap,  
Were screaming and yelling "what a load of crap!"

When out on the lawn there arose such a clatter,  
I sprang from my bed in spite of my full bladder.  
Away to the window I flew in a dash,  
Yanked up the miniblind and put my nose to the glass.

The moon shining down on the new-fallen snow,  
Gave a luster of midday to what I saw below,  
When what to my wondering eyes did appear,  
But a car that took out our mailbox and reindeer,

With a little old driver so drunk and sick,  
I knew in a moment he must be Uncle Nick.  
More rapid than eagles he slipped and fell,  
And he whistled, and shouted, and screamed like hell:

"Who moved the mailbox? Why is there a deer?  
What in the world are they doing here?  
To the top of the porch! I don't think I can walk,  
Dash it! dash it! dash it!" he let out a squawk.

I watched the front door open, and Mom did fly,  
She wrung her hands, her eyes toward the sky;

She bent over and slapped her brother in the face,  
“You can’t drive when you’re drunk over to our place.”

With the trunk full of toys, Uncle Nick spoke out,  
“I’ve got loads of gifts for the kids, there’s no need to shout!”  
And then, with stars twinkling, I heard him pop open the trunk,  
The prancing and pawing as he got up with spunk.

As I drew on my fogged window, and then turned around,  
Down the hall to the front door, I ran with a bound.  
My uncle was dressed all in fur, from his head to his toe,  
And his clothes were all tarnished with dirt and wet snow;

I went to his car to steal the bundle of gifts from the back,  
And he looked at me like I was stealing his crack.  
His eyes—how they were bloodshot! his expression, not merry!  
His cheeks were like roses, his nose like a cherry!

His droll little mouth was drawn down in a frown,  
And his demeanor was like that of a retired clown.  
The stump of a pipe fell from the gap in his teeth,  
And his breath in the cold air circled his head like a wreath.

He had a pinched face and a little round belly  
That shook when he moved, like a bowl full of jelly.  
He was chubby and plump, his grumpy old self,  
I could not help but laugh when I saw him, in spite of myself;

A blink of his eye and a shake of his head  
Told me that I had nothing to dread;  
Nick gave a loud belch and let out a fart,  
He said, “Molly, sorry about your yard art.”

And laying his finger inside of his nose,  
And giving a nod, slowly up our steps he rose;  
He stumbled inside, to my family he did complain,  
“I drove all this way where’s my glass of champagne?”

But I heard him exclaim, as he collapsed with a peep —  
“Happy Christmas to all, I think I’m going to sleep!”

# My Monument to the Pigeon

By Glen Malast

Aldo Leopold is a near constant in years of homework, from high school to my graduate program even now. But with his monument to the passenger pigeon, his previously lively descriptions become somber. His tribute to an extinct animal brings me a welling grief, too big for the tiny words on the screen. I am not ashamed to say I teared up. To sit with the grief, to swallow it thoroughly, I step outside. It is my first winter on a wetland, which is not to say the first near water, as there is



a small creek in my childhood backyard. That creek is well loved by me, but it also has banks covered in escaped periwinkle and trash sticking up through water glistening with colorful salt pollution.

The wetland here is different, and yet the same, but mostly different. So many types of plants, all the same dead brown, but with seed heads of varying shapes and sizes. The ice across the water is strangely teal and clear, dotted by shapes, vein-like, branch-like, protrusions that are not frozen in the same way as the rest. I wonder at the unusual pattern, quite at a loss to explain what caused them, other than perhaps the fallen dead leaves at their centers. I am even more charmed by not understanding them.

It is good, I think, to be confused at times, and to have to ask nature a question that she, cheekily, does not deign to answer. I laugh with her, only halfway tempted by the possibility of a google search, which would likely be so unspecified as to return nothing



concrete, only the confused jumble of partially relevant words. Perhaps that is an answer all on its own, the internet's electric hand pointing at me and saying, what are you still doing here, silly? Get back outside, find another thing you do not understand, and this time, let yourself glory in it fully. I thank him, mentally, grateful for his wisdom of having no answer at all.

The winter I step out into opens dim, cold arms, welcoming me back

# Reba, the Avian Ambassador

*By Marty Calabrese, North Chagrin Nature Center*

For almost a decade, a red-shouldered hawk has been a recurring winter visitor to North Chagrin Nature Center. This raptor is likely a female, judging by her larger size. Her intricate feathers feature a warm, reddish-brown coloring on her shoulders and upper wings, contrasting beautifully with her paler underside. With her paparazzi-worthy plumage she graces the nature center trails, particularly around the pond and marsh, drawing eager guests in the morning hours. In the afternoons, she exhibits a curious affinity for the vicinity of our Nature Preschool outdoor classroom and Owl Aviary, which features several native owl species.

I have spent time observing her interactions with the nature center surroundings. It becomes evident that this magnificent raptor — affectionately known as Reba — has established a nuanced connection with the local environment. Her presence adds an intriguing layer to the natural backdrop of Cleveland Metroparks. While maintaining her

untamed essence, Reba displays a fascinating balance of awareness and tolerance towards hikers who share the trails with her.

Reba's regular appearances have transformed her into a cherished educational asset by us naturalists, embodying the wild spirit of North Chagrin Reservation. Her loyalty to North Chagrin Nature Center during the winter months enhances the allure of iconic

locations like Sunset Pond and Sanctuary Marsh during an otherwise quieter time of the year. As she graces the landscape with her near omnipresence, Reba is an apex powerhouse among the ecological interdependencies at Cleveland Metroparks — where the wild and the curated coexist in harmony.



# In Memoriam Paul Herald Risk II

*A Giant in Interpretation*

*May 28th 1937- October 22nd 2023*

*By Ray Novotny, Naturalist Emeritus Mill Creek MetroParks*

I attended my first-ever professional meeting way back in September 1982:

An Association of Interpretive Naturalists (AIN) workshop, hosted by Cleveland Metroparks.

I met so many wonderful people there and some continue to be friends today (facebook certainly helps!).

The most prominent were Bob Hinkle and Paul Risk, graduate school colleagues at Michigan State University. Dr. Hinkle, workshop chair, had recently left Johnson State College in Vermont to become Chief Naturalist at Cleveland Metroparks; Dr. Risk, then on the faculty at Penn State, traveled to serve as keynote speaker.

Although details about that talk escape me, I do vividly remember his style: compelling and amusing. I cherish my copy of Grant Sharpe's now classic textbook that Paul signed

(see photos below). And after AIN and WAI (Western Interpreters Association) merged to become NAI in 1988, I never missed his concurrent sessions at our annual National Interpreters Workshops.



Drs. Bob and Paul rented a car during NIW 1991 in Vail, Colorado to explore a bit. Guess

they wanted to fill their empty back seat, as they invited Bob's Cleveland Metroparks' naturalist Jenny Emery and me along. What a thrill to accompany these two giants of interpretation!

Early this century, I began to nominate beyond my inner circle, first with Bob Hinkle for NAI Fellow in 2002. Third time was the charm for Paul Risk and he again charmed his audience at 2005 NIW in Mobile, Alabama, in the NAI Region next to his final workplace, Steven F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, Texas.

Dr. Risk had retired by then and Mobile might have been the final time I saw him in person. We did exchange occasional emails over the years. After I informed him in summer 2022 that his

SFASU (best-ever) master's student Brenda Lackey would join him as NAI Fellow, he suggested we talk on phone. During our

chat, I reminded me about his long-standing newspaper column. He added me to his email list with his articles attached in pdf and those kept us in touch.

On October 27th, Bradley Risk, the eldest of three sons, used that list to share the sad news about his father's passing five days prior.

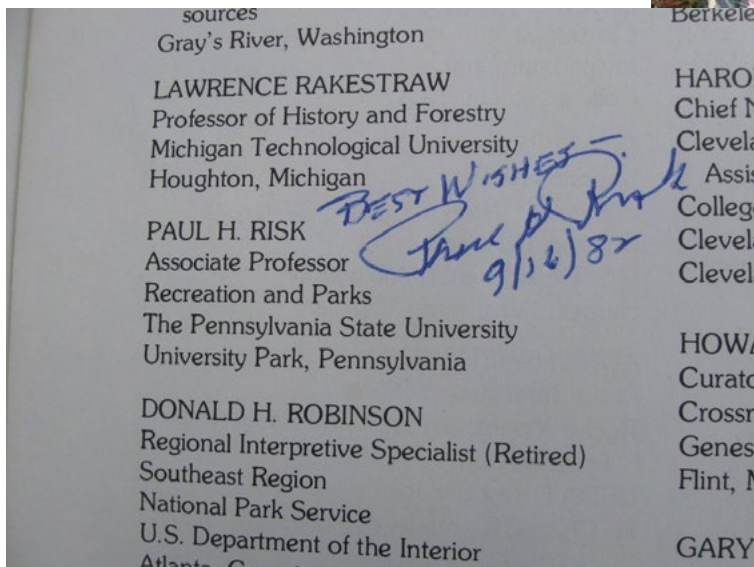
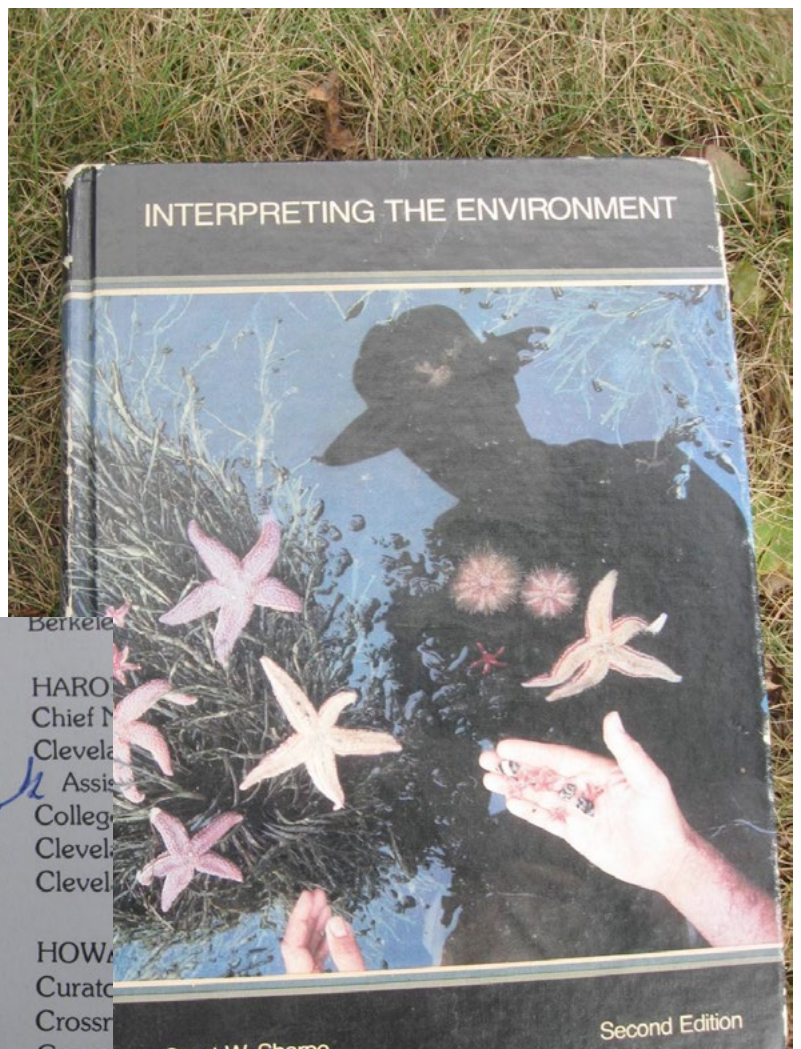
In his positions at four universities, Dr. Paul Risk contributed immensely to our profession via teaching, research, and service. He inspired and mentored hundreds of young minds. Many others were his "students" for brief times via NAI and other conferences. I count myself as one of those lucky ones.

Our profession is better because of Paul Risk. We owe him a debt of gratitude.

**Further reading:**

[https://www.dailysentinel.com/opinion/enjoy-the-fields-and-forests-in-memory-of-dr-paul-risk/article\\_8d6eeb76-1ff4-5ea5-892e-a5f056467b46.html](https://www.dailysentinel.com/opinion/enjoy-the-fields-and-forests-in-memory-of-dr-paul-risk/article_8d6eeb76-1ff4-5ea5-892e-a5f056467b46.html)

<https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/nacogdoches-tx/paul-risk-11507850>





# In Memoriam Paulina Ann Russell

*January 12, 1969 – November 30, 2023*

*By Ray Novotny, Naturalist Emeritus Mill Creek MetroParks*

Paulina grew up in Tennessee. Soon after high school, she switched from heels to boots...by joining the Marines! After her hitch, she earned a degree from Saint Leo University in Florida. Then she worked seasonally at National Park Service sites throughout our nation. That's how she became known as Ranger 'Lina. She attended NAI national workshops from at least 2003-2011. To stretch her dollars, she used her truck for travel and lodging, on the road and at our event.

During the last decade, Paulina hiked a portion of the Appalachian Trail, worked part-time, and volunteered.

She fought for her health... then for her life.

She left this Earth far too soon and is missed by many.

May She Rest in Peace.

Photo from facebook:

*Looking down on the tundra,  
just above Nome, Alaska, July  
9th 2009*





# Morrison Nature Center 20th Anniversary Celebration

*By David Footle, Natural Resources Technician, Aurora, CO*

Nestled within 250 acres of cottonwood wetland habitat, the Morrison Nature Center at Star K Ranch stands as a welcoming and wild haven in Aurora, Colorado. As one of the city's three nature centers, it has been a cherished destination for thousands of visitors over the years. In a jubilant commemoration of two decades of fostering nature appreciation and community connections, the Morrison Nature Center joyfully celebrated its 20th Anniversary on Saturday, October 21, 2023.

The atmosphere was filled with the infectious sounds of children's laughter, resonating as

they darted around the center with animal puppets adorning their hands. Meanwhile, the air buzzed with the delightful chatter of previous employees, city council members, and community members sharing special programming and wildlife sighting memories. The celebration marked a significant milestone, encapsulating the center's role as a welcoming hub where nature and community converge.

The Morrison Nature Center traces its roots to the late 19th century when it was under the ownership of private ranchers.

The Stark family, the last private owners, held the property before it transitioned into the stewardship of the City of Aurora's Open Space and Natural Resources Division. Witnessing a remarkable metamorphosis, the once ranch house underwent extensive restoration and transformation into a communal space that facilitates school field trips, public programs, community science projects, permanent and rotating exhibits, a full-time naturalist presence,



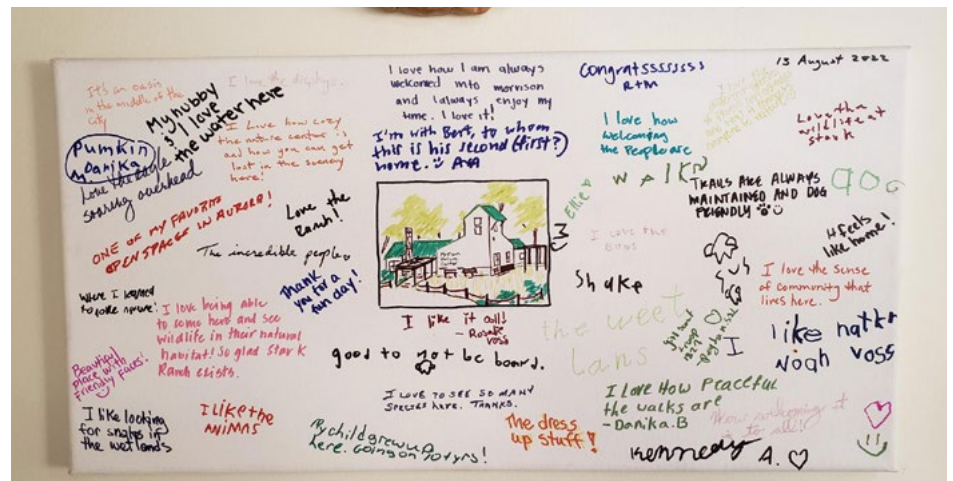


and serves as a comfortable exploration space and trail head for those passing through on foot, bike, or horse. In a momentous occasion, the Morrison Nature Center officially opened its doors to the public and was dedicated in October of 2003. Fast-forwarding to the present year, the journey from private ranch to a thriving community nature center was cause for celebration, prompting the organization to host a vibrant and memorable party. A pivotal element of visitors' experiences at the Morrison Nature Center revolves around close encounters with our ambassador animals. Notably, as part of our 20th-anniversary celebration, we honored the two-decade service of our bullsnake ambassador. This impressive serpent has been an integral part of the Morrison Nature Center almost since its inception. Liz Wickard, a previous Aurora naturalist and environmental educator, nurtured this snake from a year old. Taking up residence at the Morrison Nature Center, the bullsnake became a cornerstone of our community

outreach, engaging with new friends in schools, recreation centers, care facilities, and out on open space trails. Through careful handling and within the safe environment

created by our naturalists, many people experienced their first positive interaction with a snake. After two decades of inspiring snake enthusiasts, we made the decision to grant this seasoned ambassador a well-deserved retirement. While stepping back from public engagements, he will continue to reside at the nature center, receiving the care and attention he deserves. To mark this occasion, a gathering of community members and organizational partners witnessed an official proclamation from the City of Aurora's mayor pro tem. The 20-year anniversary celebration persisted with activities

such as a volunteer-led bird walk, encounters with other ambassador animals, and face-painting on the back patio. The Morrison Nature Center remains a must-visit destination in Aurora, Colorado—where nature, education, and community converge.



# Book Review

## *Why Fish Don't Exist: a story of loss, love and the hidden order of life*

*By Rhana Paris, Outreach Coordinator, North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island*

The protagonist of this book might also be considered the antagonist. David Starr Jordan was a taxonomist of the late 1800s. His dogged determination to find order within the chaos of the natural world sparked an interest in the author, Lulu Miller, a well-known NPR reporter. His methods and motives revealed a darker side to his “truth” that Miller discloses in this bestselling book.

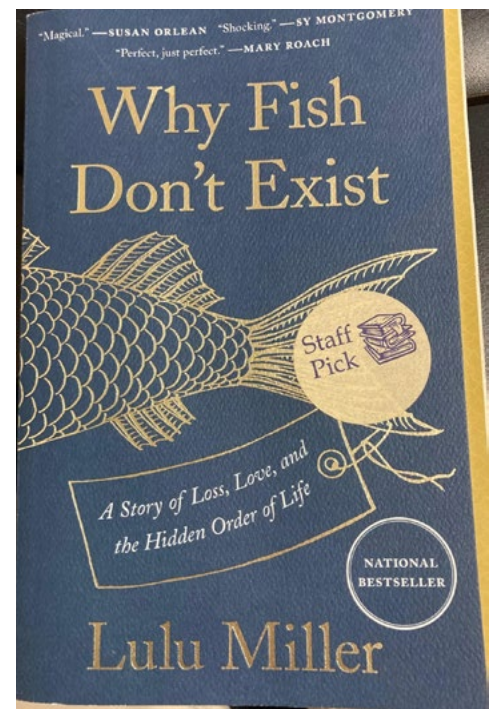
Miller was searching for answers and meaning in her own life when she discovered Jordan, a man who would stop at nothing to get what he wanted. On the surface, his determination to succeed was admirable. His dogged pursuit of collecting and describing every possible fish was legendary. And when his vast collection of glass-jarred fish was destroyed in the San Francisco earthquake, he immediately started putting the collection back together,

one fish, one label at a time. Miller saw this optimism attractive. Later she learned Jordan’s methods toward gaining fame and notoriety were literally murderous and unsavory. Eugenics and racism were integral to Jordan’s orderly ladder of life as he rose in stature in the scientific community.

But where does the question of the existence of fish come in? At the end of the book, Miller shows how scientists, specifically those using cladistics, could demonstrate that fish are a contrived grouping of animals and shouldn’t be separated out on their own. Fish are a blip here and there on the way to other animals. Jordan and his beloved fish could not provide the easy answers Miller sought.

I liked Miller’s writing style and this book was a fascinating read. I did,

however, find disjointed her personal journey weaving in and out of the description of Jordan’s life. Consider it a



## **News from Sunny Southeast Region**

### ***By Rhana Paris***

The Sunny Southeast will be holding their regional meeting in Birmingham, AL, on March 5-8, 2024. Entitled “Strength in Unity”, it is sure to have a lot to offer!

The North Carolina Aquarium on Roanoke Island is offering a CIG workshop on Feb 6-9, 2024. Come experience the beach in winter! Contact Rhana for more information at [Rhana.paris@ncaquariums.com](mailto:Rhana.paris@ncaquariums.com)

# All you really need for a Nature Program is Nature!

*By Kelly Blanchard, Volunteer Coordinator  
Friends of El Paso County Nature Centers*

In June 2023, an afternoon thunderstorm roared into Fountain, Colorado, flooding Fountain Creek Nature Center and throwing summer programs into a soggy situation. However, the nature center staff persevered and had one of their best summers yet!

In the aftermath of the storm, Fountain Creek Nature Center closed its doors to the public while floors were gutted, and exhibits displaced to repair significant water damage to the building. A closure that was initially only to last a few weeks eventually turned into 2.5 months. Nature center staff put their heads together to decide how to handle the slew of programs and nature camps planned for the summer. "The idea of not doing it was never an option," said Jessica Miller, nature center supervisor. Staff decided to pivot and adapt

their programs for an entirely outdoor experience for visitors until the nature center could reopen. Thanks to a flexible and creative team, Fountain Creek Nature Center was able to host 2,365 participants, 93 programs, and three weeks of nature camp during the closure.

Switching programs to "all-outdoors" presented many hurdles for staff. This summer was a wet one for Colorado, bringing mosquitos and humidity, making programs more challenging without an indoor air conditioning break. Staff provided fans in their outdoor classroom to cool participants off and keep bugs away. They adapted their puppet show theater for the outdoor space, continuing to provide a fun, interpretive aspect to their programs. Since indoor restroom facilities were closed to the public, staff arranged for

portable toilets to be installed temporarily in the parking lot, satisfying Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Staff also communicated needs to the visitors regarding expectations, enabling visitors to come prepared for any challenges. "It felt like a slumber party or pajama day at school. This feeling of, I'm at work but something is different and fun!" said Miller.

Fountain Creek Nature Center successfully reopened in September 2023 and normal programming has resumed. Staff's hard work and creativity during the closure paid off, especially when one child expressed that summer camp should be all-outdoors all the time. It turns out all you really need for a nature program is nature!



# What Is It? (ANSWER)

By John Miller

## Snowy Owl

*Nyctea scandiaca*

With characteristic white feathers, yellow eyes, feathered beak & legs, this is an iconic bird of the grasslands and tundra of the North American arctic circle. This large owl has a diet of lemmings, ptarmigan, and waterfowl, making it an important predator of the tundra. Snowy owls have an unusual migration behavior of 'irruptions' when there is a year of successful breeding due to abundant lemming populations. These

irruptions cause some owls to travel as far south as Oklahoma, Missouri, and Indiana. For Harry Potter fans, the snowy owl was featured as Hedwig, delivering owl to Harry in the books and movies. To learn more about snowy owls, visit <https://www.audubon.org/field-guide/bird/snowy-owl>. Use the photo of Snowy Owl Answer and Snowy Owl map Photo credit by permission: MO

Department of Conservation  
Map credit by permission: All About Birds



## NAI Shining Star Award

Have you witnessed a fellow interpreter going above and beyond the call of duty? We are looking to recognize NAI members with these qualities on a monthly basis. The NAI Shining Star Award will highlight the amazing interpretive work being done by members, like you, all across NAI.

This award is meant to highlight winners' efforts to the NAI interpretive community as well as the winners' supervisors and coworkers. To nominate someone for the NAI Shining Star Award email NAI Member Liaison Heather Manier at [hmanier@interpnet.com](mailto:hmanier@interpnet.com) with the following information:

- Contact information of the nominee (name, title, site, work address, work email, and work phone).
- Example(s) of how the nominee went above and beyond their routine duties.
- Example(s) of how the nominee's action made a positive impact on visitors, resources, or NAI.

These awards are independent of the NAI Professional Awards.