



Banner Photo (2019 First-Place Wildlife) by William Major

Oak Orchard Christmas Bird Count 2019

On December 27, 2019, 21 volunteers participated in the 52nd annual Oak Orchard Swamp Christmas Bird Count. The National Audubon Society, in collaboration with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, sponsor Christmas Bird Counts annually throughout the country and beyond in the Americas. Each count consists of a tally of all birds seen within a fifteen-mile diameter circle on one day that falls within a 15-day period at the end of December and the beginning of January. Audubon Christmas Counts have been taking place for 119 years and provide valuable information on the range expansion or narrowing of wintering bird populations.

The center for the Oak Orchard count is the point at which the Genesee-Orleans County line crosses Route 63. The 15-mile diameter circle includes the Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, Oak Orchard and Tonawanda State Wildlife Management Areas, the Tonawanda Native American Reservation, the Townships of Alabama and Shelby, the villages of Indian Falls, Medina and Wolcottsville and portions of Middleport and Oakfield.

Count hours were warm and mild, with a low of 39F and high of 57F. both above the average daily temperature for the date of 34F. Both morning and afternoon were essentially precipitation free.

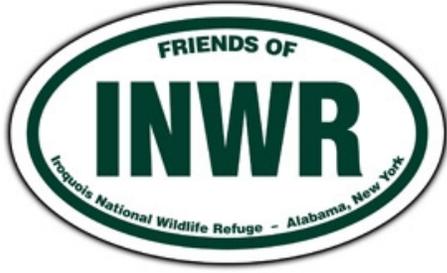
Our observers were afield in fourteen parties from 6:30 AM until 5:50 PM, and in 322.5 total hours covered 35 miles on foot and 504 miles by car! One observer counted birds at home feeders. Participants also clocked 4 nocturnal hours and 37 miles searching for owls. In total, these observers tallied 62 species. 13,248 individual birds were counted, which is an improvement over last year. Despite this year’s open water, because of a hard freeze in November most waterfowl had left the region by count day. For the second year in a row, counters commented on difficulty finding sparrow species including low numbers of wintering Dark-eyed Juncos, American Tree Sparrows and other common sparrows. With the lack of snow, participants reported that birds were difficult to see in fields and were not present at the roadsides. No irruptive species (those that visit in winter from the boreal forest when cone crops there are low) were noted this year, except for a few Red-breasted Nuthatches. Two notable highest counts ever were of 20 Bald Eagles (!) and 493 Herring Gulls. Turkey Vulture was the one ‘new to the count’ species this year. A Ruby-crowned Kinglet, a Hermit Thrush, and a Yellow-rumped Warbler were all found lingering in the count area by our sharp-eyed participants. Count week birds seen in the three days before or after the count date were Tundra Swan, Hooded Merganser, Short-eared Owl, Savannah Sparrow and Turkey Vulture.

The Friends of Iroquois, Inc. sponsored evening refreshments at the refuge. The INWR Staff contribute time and effort in covering the refuge areas. The NYS DEC staff volunteered to report birds while on duty and conducted their winter raptor survey on count afternoon. Many thanks go out to everyone who participated! We rely on volunteer support every year to continue this important tradition. A list of species follows on page 4.

Celeste Morien
Count Compiler

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President's Message

Happy New Year!

During the recent Oak Orchard Swamp Christmas Bird Count, I was reminded of the importance of Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge to wintering animals and birds. It only takes a glance at a map of Western New York to notice that Iroquois and the surrounding state Wildlife Management Areas provide the largest sanctuary of least disturbed habitats in the region. Come out to the refuge this winter to walk, view wildlife and rekindle your appreciation for the natural beauty of the "swamps."

In this year's winter *Overlook* issue, you will read how the Friends of Iroquois is coordinating with the dedicated Iroquois staff members Tom, Paul, Kate, Sasha, Mike, Eric and Brian and staff from the Fisheries office that we work closely with. Don't forget to check out our Friends Website and the popular Friends of Iroquois and Iroquois Observations Facebook pages for pop-up activities.

FINWR continues to support the high-quality [Iroquois Observations](#) program which is taking shape for 2020 and will offer many in-the-field educational and recreational experiences. It's a special year for Iroquois Observations! It's our 20th year and we plan to kick it off with an all-day **IO Palooza** on **February 1st**, starting with **Birding by Car** and ending with an **Owl Prowl**. For attendees of the greatest number of 2020 IO activities, this year we will be offering a chance to win something special! As usual, the Friends and the Refuge will bring you snowshoeing, an opt-outside walk, invasive species education, Purple Martin banding, the ever-popular Bald Eagle Watch, birdwatching, nature walks, canoeing, bugs, bats and stars and much, much more! These events are always free of charge and are scheduled year-round on weekends. The *Iroquois Observations* printable schedule is provided on the FINWR and INWR websites and Facebook pages and of course, is available at INWR Headquarters during open hours.

We are planning once again to participate in [Plantasia](#), WNY's premier garden and landscape show, where we aim to inform the public about native plants that benefit both people and wildlife. You will find us in the Artisan Hall at the Erie County Fairgrounds Event Center, March 19-22, so stop by and say hello!

Spring Into Nature, our signature family-friendly festival, will be held on **May 2nd** at the Refuge, and is free of charge. A line up of interesting exhibitors, speakers, vendors and lots of hands-on activities are planned for everyone, **so mark your calendars for an exciting time on the first Saturday in May!**

At our Annual Meeting in November 2019, newly elected officers were welcomed to the Friends' Board of Directors. Please help me congratulate new board members Dorothy Rapp, Dawn Borchert, Ann Bunch and George Rockey. Board officers for the year are Celeste Morien President; Ann Fournier, Vice-President; Steve Bunch, Treasurer; Jocelyn Welton, Secretary. Dwight Kauppi and Kofi-Fynn Aikens will fill the Nominating Committee positions. Thank you to all our current BOD members for their dedication and support. Additional thanks go out to retiring board member Pete Warn for his past service on the board, including the Presidency. **[Our 2019 Iroquois NWR Photo Contest Winners](#)** were announced at our annual meeting in November and winning photos are featured on our website. We love to help people see the Refuge from different viewpoints, so keep up the good work and send us your favorite photos for our 2020 photo contest! [Submission information is online at our website](#). Photos from all seasons are welcome, so remember, winter is waiting for you at Iroquois! Wishing you all a very happy and healthy 2020.

Celeste Morien,
FINWR President

Support the Friends of Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, Inc. in 2020 Membership Levels:

		Please send contribution to:
Family	\$25.00	Friends of Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, Inc.
Raccoon	\$50.00	1101 Casey Road
Otter/Red Fox	\$75.00	Basom, NY 14013
Bluebird	\$100.00	
Heron	\$200.00	We can use your volunteer time also!!
Bald Eagle	\$500.00	
Double Eagle	\$1,000.00	Contributions are tax deductible

FINWR Board of Directors

Officers:

Celeste Morien (President)
Ann Fournier (Vice Pres.)
Steve Bunch (Treasurer)
Jocelyn Welton (Secretary)

Board Members:

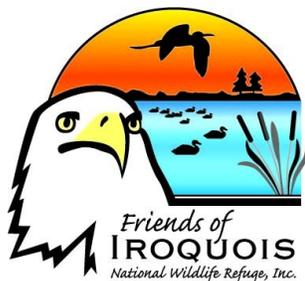
Dawn Borchert
Ann Bunch
Mike Gales
Karin Johnson
Kris Kieber
Bill Lathrop
Garner Light
Sandra Mendel
John Michalovic
David O'Donnell
Dorothy Rapp
Gerry Rising
George Rockey
Lauren Tingco
Carl Zenger

INWR Staff:

Thomas Roster
Refuge Manager
Paul Hess
Wildlife Biologist
Mike Senske
Maintenance Worker
Kate Brenner
Wildlife Refuge Specialist
Eric Schaertl
Park Ranger

Refuge Contact Info

www.fws.gov/refuge/iroquois/
E-mail: Iroquois@fws.gov
Phone: (585) 948-5445



Overlook Newsletter

is provided 4 times per year.
Article submissions for each newsletter are the second Friday of:
* **January (Winter)**
* **May (Spring)**
* **August (Summer)**
* **October (Fall)**

Congratulations To The Award Winners In Our 9th Annual Amateur Photo Contest



Wildlife-1st Place: William Major



Wildlife-2nd Place: Kathy Robinson



Wildlife-3rd Place: Dianna Harris



*Wildlife-Honorable Mention:
Jennifer Cummings*



Habitat-1st Place: Jennifer Cummings



*Habitat-2nd Place:
Evelyn Meadows*



Habitat-3rd Place: William Major



*Habitat-Honorable Mention:
Kathy Robinson*



*Youth-1st Place:
Paul Miserantino*



Youth-2nd Place: Ava Shiff



Youth-3rd Place: Evelyn Welton



Youth-Honorable Mention: Owen Welton

Oak Orchard Christmas Bird Count

Mute Swan-----	2
Tundra Swan-----	cw
Trumpeter Swan-----	
Greater White-fronted Goose-----	
Snow Goose-----	
Ross's Goose-----	
Cackling Goose-----	
Canada Goose-----	4447
Wood Duck-----	
Gadwall-----	
American Wigeon-----	
American Black Duck-----	31
American Black Duck x Mallard-----	
Domestic Mallard x Mallard-----	
Mallard-----	327
Northern Shoveler-----	
Northern Pintail-----	
Blue-winged Teal-----	
Green-winged Teal-----	
Canvasback-----	
Redhead-----	
Ring-necked Duck-----	
Greater Scaup-----	
Lesser Scaup-----	
Bufflehead-----	
Common Goldeneye-----	
Hooded Merganser-----	cw
Common Merganser-----	2
Red-breasted Merganser-----	
Ring-necked Pheasant-----	3
Ruffed Grouse-----	
Wild Turkey-----	48
Common Loon-----	
Pied-billed Grebe-----	
Horned Grebe-----	
American Bittern-----	
Great Blue Heron-----	3
Great Egret-----	
Black-crowned Night-Heron-----	
Turkey Vulture-----	cw
Northern Harrier-----	4
Sharp-shinned Hawk-----	3
Cooper's Hawk-----	5

Bald Eagle-----	20
Northern Goshawk-----	
Red-shouldered Hawk-----	
Red-tailed Hawk-----	47
Rough-legged Hawk-----	cw
Virginia Rail-----	
Sora-----	
American Coot-----	
Sandhill Crane-----	
Wilson's Snipe-----	
Ring-billed Gull-----	307
Herring Gull-----	493
Great Black-backed Gull-----	
Bonaparte's Gull-----	
Rock Pigeon (Feral Pigeon)-----	499
Mourning Dove-----	173
Eastern Screech-Owl-----	5
Great Horned Owl-----	2
Snowy Owl-----	
Barred Owl-----	1
Long-eared Owl-----	
Short-eared Owl-----	cw
Northern Saw-whet Owl-----	
Belted Kingfisher-----	
Red-headed Woodpecker-----	
Red-bellied Woodpecker-----	46
Yellow-bellied Sapsucker-----	
Downy Woodpecker-----	83
Hairy Woodpecker-----	30
Northern Flicker-----	29
Pileated Woodpecker-----	8
American Kestrel-----	3
Merlin-----	2
Peregrine Falcon-----	
Eastern Phoebe-----	
Northern Shrike-----	1
Blue Jay-----	102
American Crow-----	270
Common Raven-----	2
Horned Lark-----	10
Black-capped Chickadee-----	287
Tufted Titmouse-----	17
Red-breasted Nuthatch-----	3
White-breasted Nuthatch-----	73
Brown Creeper-----	9
Carolina Wren-----	2
Winter Wren-----	

Marsh Wren-----	
Golden-crowned Kinglet-----	5
Ruby-crowned Kinglet-----	1
Eastern Bluebird-----	48
Hermit Thrush-----	1
American Robin-----	22
Gray Catbird-----	
Northern Mockingbird-----	
European Starling-----	4105
American Pipit-----	
Cedar Waxwing-----	85
Yellow-rumped Warbler-----	1
Common Yellowthroat-----	
American Tree Sparrow-----	142
Chipping Sparrow-----	
Field Sparrow-----	
Savannah Sparrow-----	cw
Song Sparrow-----	9
Swamp Sparrow-----	
White-throated Sparrow-----	21
White-crowned Sparrow-----	
Dark-eyed Junco-----	140
Dark-eyed (Pink-sided) Junco-----	
Lapland Longspur-----	
Snow Bunting-----	
Northern Cardinal-----	109
Red-winged Blackbird-----	151
Eastern Meadowlark-----	
Yellow-headed Blackbird-----	
Rusty Blackbird-----	
Brewer's Blackbird-----	
Common Grackle-----	
Brown-headed Cowbird-----	139
Pine Grosbeak-----	
Purple Finch-----	
House Finch-----	62
White-winged Crossbill-----	
Common Redpoll-----	
Pine Siskin-----	
American Goldfinch-----	127
Evening Grosbeak-----	
House Sparrow-----	690

cw= species seen in count week but not on count day (Photos below by Celeste Morien)



Tundra Swans at Mohawk (South) Pool



Black-capped Chickadee



Downy Woodpecker

FINWR Annual Meeting Summary

by Celeste Morien

The Friends of Iroquois NWR, Inc. full membership Annual Meeting took place on November 2, 2019. Forty-seven people attended at the Refuge Headquarters. Outgoing Board Member Peter Warn was thanked for his service and three new Board Members were appointed: Dawn Borchert, Dorothy Rapp and George Rockey. Treasurer Chuck Fournier reported sound finances with memberships and store revenues up. The annual budget was presented and a review of Friends accomplishments and this year's projects were presented. For 2019, the Friends have committed to collaborate with the refuge on projects for education, interpretation, migratory bird research and special events. Refuge Manager Tom Roster then introduced new Refuge staff and presented a review of the year's many accomplishments. Manager Roster thanked all the Refuge volunteers and Friends of Iroquois members who contributed 6,260 hours this year alone! Manager Roster also noted that the educational trailer, which publicizes the Friends of Iroquois, Fisheries and Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge and promotes conservation and protection of our environment, will have internal kiosks arriving this fall. The 9th Annual FINWR Photo Contest winners in three categories accepted their awards. This year's Photo Contest is dedicated to the memory of Kathy Owen. Election results were announced with thirty-one ballots cast. After a question and answer period, refreshments were served. The meeting provided a satisfying end to a year's hard work!

The FINWR's First Annual Big Sit

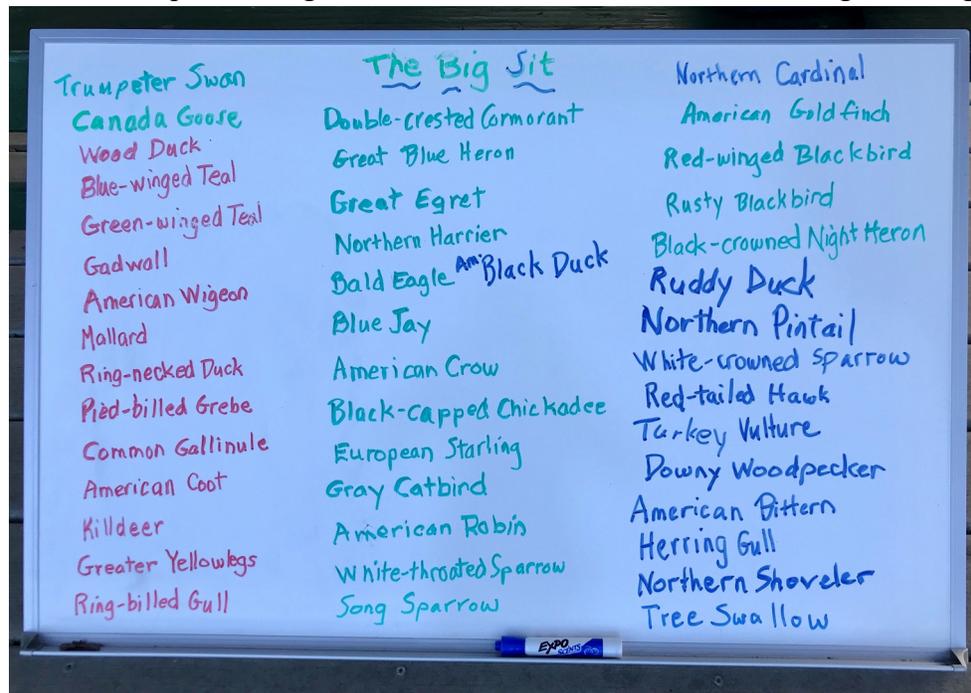
by Celeste Morien



The First Annual Big Sit!™ fundraising bird counting day sponsored by the Friends of Iroquois NWR, Inc. was held on October 13, 2019. The day started off with a very chilly 36 degrees Fahrenheit during the first hour of pre-dawn and ended with sunny, jacket-weather conditions and 65 degrees Fahrenheit. We set up our circle on the kiosk at Cayuga Pool, which had an open area (conveniently about 17 feet by 17 feet) meeting the requirement to have a 17-foot circle boundary. **Within this boundary all birds seen and heard were tallied for a total of 45 species for the day.** We made some early morning recordings of bird song

to increase our chances of finding migrating birds. Highlights included a flight of 102 Great Egrets leaving Tonawanda Wildlife Management Area heading east over Cayuga Pool. Visitors were pleased with the Bald Eagle flyovers and Northern Harriers hunting over the marsh. Waterfowl was abundant with 13 species in the Swan, Goose and Duck category. We had 30 visitors and many gave donations toward Friends of Iroquois bird-related projects to be completed with the Iroquois Refuge staff. For more information on The Big Sit!™ go to [the Birdwatcher's Digest website](#). Many

thanks to all who supported, volunteered and attended this fun activity!



The Big Sit

- | | | |
|--------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| Trumpeter Swan | Double-crested Cormorant | Northern Cardinal |
| Canada Goose | Great Blue Heron | American Goldfinch |
| Wood Duck | Great Egret | Red-winged Blackbird |
| Blue-winged Teal | Northern Harrier | Rusty Blackbird |
| Green-winged Teal | Bald Eagle | Black-crowned Night Heron |
| Gadwall | American Black Duck | Ruddy Duck |
| American Wigeon | Blue Jay | Northern Pintail |
| Mallard | American Crow | White-crowned Sparrow |
| Ring-necked Duck | Black-capped Chickadee | Red-tailed Hawk |
| Pied-billed Grebe | European Starling | Turkey Vulture |
| Common Gallinule | Gray Catbird | Downy Woodpecker |
| American Coot | American Robin | American Bittern |
| Killdeer | White-throated Sparrow | Herring Gull |
| Greater Yellowlegs | Song Sparrow | Northern Shoveler |
| Ring-billed Gull | | Tree Swallow |



Honoring Mike Noonan

The Friends of Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge will honor former board member Mike Noonan by building and dedicating a bench on the reserve in his name. This action recognizes Mike's many contributions to INWR, the most evident of them his sponsorship through his [Canisius Ambassadors for Conservation](#) of an educational program taught by his Canisius students. This program introduced well over *18 thousand* school children from this region to the wildlife along the Swallow Hollow Trail. **Contributions to this project will be welcomed and should be directed to INWR Friends at 1101 Casey Road, Basom, NY 14013, identified as "Noonan Project."**

Got a couple of hours to spare each week?

The Flyway Nature Store is looking for additional volunteers to help staff the store. Please contact Garner Light at redstart1@hotmail.com if interested.



While we know you will continue to remember us with your generous donations, we encourage you to use **Amazon Smile**. The Amazon Smile website donates 0.5% of the price of your eligible purchases to the charitable organization of your choice when you shop securely at <https://smile.amazon.com/>. **Every 0.5% counts! That means we receive \$1 for every \$200 spent.**

Burdock

by Gerry Rising

This afternoon when I returned from hiking, I found my heavy wool socks strewn with unwanted souvenirs. They were covered with burrs and I had to spend five minutes pulling off the tenacious seed pods.

Most often I find this an irritating task and grouse about the time wasted, but this once I thought about the special role of these carriers of life. It made the job much easier.

I find burrs remarkably opportunistic. Opportunistic? Surely not. That word implies volition, the burrs acting on their own initiative. And yet it is almost on the mark. They do seem at times to carry out purposeful actions. For example, when I pulled off several burrs that were embedded in my sock, one flipped up out of my hand to stick to the felt inside my parka hood next to my ear.

Even if such tricks aren't performed by design, the burrs are certainly engineering marvels. The inventor of Velcro must have been led to his discovery by an enlightening experience with these natural hitchhikers. It is amazing that anything so weightless can adhere so well.

Now at my desk I pull apart one of the spherical burrs. There is virtually no central body, the entire structure made up of half-inch needle-like bristles. Each bract is flattened at one end and has a tiny hook at the other, the hook so small that I have to use a hand lens to see it clearly.

When each needle is separated from the burr, the action releases a microscopic seed from its flat base. Even with the magnifying lens I can see these seeds only as tiny dots against the white paper on which I place them.

It seems at first as though there are thousands of these little crochet needles in each burr but a count shows that there are less than 200. Still for every burr that I have carried a few yards hiking and many miles driving home, I am now freeing in a new location some 150 seeds, 150 potential new plants. Thus I witness an extraordinary means of plant dispersal, another exhibit drawn from nature's overflowing bag of tricks.

(continued on next page)

In this region there are three species of burdock, the plant that bears these burrs. This morning I found an eight-foot-tall great burdock, twice the height of its cousin, [the common burdock](#), this one broken at its base and lying in the snow like a leafless fallen tree. Common burdock burrs are only a half inch in diameter, those of this great burdock three times as large. The less common wooly burdock is intermediate in size between the other two. It takes its name from a difference in its burr needles: they are covered with fine hairs.

All these burdocks are biennials, that is their lives span two years. Through the first they are low lying plants with large leathery leaves. Only during their second year do the tall stems grow and produce rather attractive lavender flowers atop green clover-like balls. November cold erases those colors, the lavender florets falling away, the green balls turning to winter's brown burrs.

It is then that we wanderers across fields aid in their seed dispersal.

Nature can play mean tricks in this process as well. I once found a dead mourning dove lying in my path. Otherwise uninjured, it had a burr stuck between one wing and its body. This had effectively prevented it from flying and it had struggled its life away unable to free itself from those tiny but tenacious hooks.

NATURE MATTERS

by Chris Kieber

Consider the humble woodchuck with its many endearing folk names: groundhog, whistle pig, land beaver, mouse bear and *Marmota monax* for the scientific types. This largest member of the squirrel family is very common, and often despised for their voracious herbivorous appetite. Their diet includes not only wild grasses, dandelion, chickweed and goldenrod, but they also can't seem to resist vegetable garden plants particularly peas, beans, corn and carrot tops, as well as orchard apples. The extensive burrows, often 6 feet deep and continuing underground for 20 feet or more are the groundhogs chief means of escaping enemies. Those tunnels also sometimes undermine the foundations of outbuildings, injure farm animals that might step into burrow openings and damage farm equipment as it drops into a collapsed burrow.

Hated, destructive, and at best, pesky, yet woodchucks are the only wild animal that has its own special day. Groundhog Day is celebrated each year on February 2nd, when it is widely believed that this animal rivals the National Weather Service by being able to forecast the coming of spring. This story of prognostication likely originated with early Dutch settlers who believed that badgers and hedgehogs could provide clues about the future. Lacking those species on this continent, they substituted the local animal that seemed most similar. Finally, in 1886, the editor of a western Pennsylvania newspaper published the report that groundhogs had not seen their shadow that day, signaling an early spring and the start of the Groundhog Day phenomena.

As remarkable as having a giant squirrel foretell weather, this pales when compared to the woodchuck's (derived from its Native American name) other amazing abilities. They are among the few true hibernators that fatten up, getting quite plump (hence the name groundHOG) in the season of abundant food in order to snooze for most of the winter. During hibernation – about 150 days without food – the whistle pig's (sound of alarm call) body temperature drops from about 99oF to as low as 37oF. Their breathing rate plummets from 16 breaths/minute to 2, while heart rate is reduced to 5 beats/minute from a normal of 80-100. During this time the land beaver (because of its resemblance to that rodent) will lose only about a ¼ of its body weight since it saved so much energy with the lower metabolism. When male mouse bears (looks like a mini bear when standing upright) emerge from hibernation in early February they visit female burrows to seek out prospective mates and perhaps spend the night. Research suggests that mating does not take place at this time, but it is courtship. Breeding occurs in March when they emerge for the summer.



Woodchucks are important ecologically. They are herbivores and therefore a prey species particularly for sustaining red fox. The extensive burrows may be utilized by opossums, raccoons, skunks, chipmunks, weasels, snakes, and some mice. Foxes may take over a burrow, enlarging it for their own use as a den. There is also evidence that the population of cottontail rabbits is tied to the number of woodchuck burrows, which are used for emergency shelters.

Currently there is interest in using woodchucks as a biological model in the study of viral liver tumors. Woodchucks contract a hepatitis virus which produces similar liver tumors in humans.

So, whatever name you choose to refer to this amazing animal (careful here...it needs to be fit to print), it is fitting that they have their own special holiday!



FRIEND'S NAME
STREET ADDRESS
CITY, STATE 00000

Presentation To The East Pembroke Grange

Friends of Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, Inc. (FINWR) President Celeste Morien and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Assistant Manager Kate Brenner were invited by the East Pembroke Grange to speak about the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and FINWR, Inc. Twenty people were in attendance at the dinner meeting on Tuesday, October 22, 2019. A lively PowerPoint presentation explained the history of the refuge, refuge habitats, habitat management, biological monitoring, public use and how the volunteerism of the Friends supports the refuge mission. We thank the East Pembroke Grange for inviting us to spread the word about the interesting work Refuge staff accomplish and the support FINWR volunteers provide!

Presentation To The Medina, NY Lions Club



Friends of Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, Inc. (FINWR) President Celeste Morien and United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Visitor Services Specialist Eric Schaertl were invited by the Medina, NY Lions Club to speak about the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System and FINWR, Inc. Twenty five people were in attendance at the dinner meeting on Tuesday, January 7. A lively PowerPoint presentation explained the history of the refuge, refuge habitats, habitat management, biological monitoring, public use and how the volunteerism of the Friends supports the refuge mission. Eric and Celeste learned that there is a great deal of curiosity in how the refuge supports wildlife, fights invasive species and intermeshes with the local community. We thank the Lions Club for their interest!