

The Overlook

Spring 2021

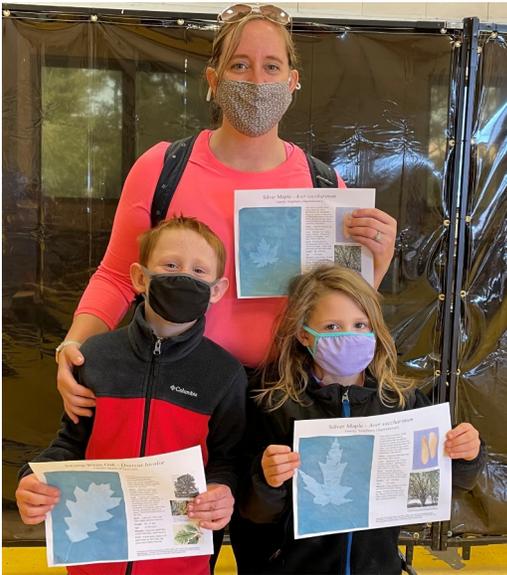
www.FINWR.org

Banner Image by Dan Curr

Spring Into Nature Springs Forth Again

On May 1st, Iroquois NWR welcomed spring and visitors back to the refuge with our annual (until 2020) Spring Into Nature festival. Family groups rotated through six different stations with 11 activities including, guided hikes, archery, casting games, animal origami, feather matching, tree and leaf ID and sun print art, aquatic I spy, pond studies, create/color fish, sunflower seed feeder building, and pollinator planting. A total of 94 participants were able to make their way around the stations during two sessions, while remaining socially distanced and masked. Visitors were grateful for the return of this (modified) day of learning and fun.

Photo Left: The Dresser family shows off their sun print art (Kate Brenner, USFWS)



Waterbird Nesting Colony Survey

On February 12th, Iroquois NWR staff and volunteers waited for a warm (20o F) day to visit the Refuge's waterbird nesting colony located in a large forested wetland on the refuge. Each year we count the nests during the winter when they are more visible. Knowing how many nests are in the colony from year to year tells us if the waterbird population is increasing or decreasing. This year we counted 622 nests, a 19 percent decrease over the previous count. Great Blue Herons are by far the most common nesting bird in the colony, but Great Egrets, Double-crested Cormorants, and Black-crowned Night-herons nest there too.

Photo Right: Staff and volunteers count nests on a beautiful winters day (Kate Brenner, USFWS)



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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)**

President's Message

It doesn't seem possible that 21 years ago Iroquois Observations became a reality. We were just a small group of volunteers with an idea to offer a variety of nature programs on the refuge. Some of those activities were; Scope Watch at Cayuga Pool, Birding By Car tours, Focus On guest speaker programs, Pond study, Nature hikes, Owl Prowls, Woodcock Walks, Secretive Birds of the Marsh walks, etc.

We didn't just show up one day and start offering these programs. A great deal of work went into preparation, planning, organizing and coordinating volunteers. The first few years were kind of rough. I remember being concerned about how many people attended our programs. With some time and experience, we began to realize that the number of people attending did not indicate our effectiveness.

I will use the Scope Watch (now Eagle Watch) as an example. We would set up our spotting scopes on the viewing platform at Cayuga Overlook and invite everyone to stop and take a look at the Eagles nest. Some days were better than others, early in the spring, the weather would most often be miserable. Our visitors at the Scope Watch varied in age from infants to senior citizens. We strived to offer everyone the opportunity to see a Bald Eagle. It is still heartwarming to recall people of all ages exclaiming that they'd never seen a Bald eagle before and that they'd never forget this experience. It is a personal highlight for me to have been instrumental in making this opportunity possible for so many people.

I hope as we continue offering many of these same nature programs that we never lose sight of how important the experience is to each person. The Friends of Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge (FINWR) sponsors and supports Iroquois Observations in every way. This last year was rough because we had to cancel most of our nature programs and events.

Please consider becoming a FINWR member now. We can use your time and talents, not just money. Your support helps to fund research, trail development, trail restoration, Iroquois Observations, and many other aspects of supporting and promoting Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge.

Sincerely,

Garner Light

President of FINWR
redstart@finwr.org



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.**

Support the Friends of Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge, Inc. 2021 Membership Levels:

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

Kestrels Have Competition-Continued

by Carl Zenger



Note the honey comb showing in the entrance hole of the box in the picture. The box appears to be full of honey comb from the top to the bottom.

In the last issue of the Newsletter I described a kestrel box we found on the Refuge last fall that was occupied with honey bees. Due to the fact that we support pollinators we did not harm the bees but did not want them in our nesting box. A Bee Keeper was contacted and they recommended that we leave the box alone until spring and see if the bees survive. So that was what we did. As you remember spring came early in March and we saw bee activity around the box entrance. So we called the Bee Keeper and he came out to survey the site. He was confident that he could capture the bees and we established a date and time when he would return. He wanted to come on a morning when it was cold before the bees got active. So when the next cold spell came he arrived at sunrise and removed the nest box from the pole. He placed mesh over the entrance and vent holes so that the bees could not escape. He placed the entire box in his vehicle and took it to his work shop. The next day he called me and reported that all of the bees in the hive were dead including the queen. The bees that were seen around the box in mid-March were what he called pirate bees that were there to steal the honey that was in the hive. He highly recommended that the box not be put back up as the scent of honey would draw another colony of bees. It would not matter how well you cleaned the box or how long you let it set the scent would remain and we would have problems. So on April 13th I put up a new box to replace it. We didn't have a happy ending but we did learn a lot from the

experience. It is not unusual for Bee Keepers to lose colonies during the winter in this area. And with the kestrel box exposed to the weather the way it was it was understandable why the bees did not survive. I'm sure that we will have some interesting things happen during this year's nesting season and I will let you know what they were. I hope that they turn out more positive than last year's did.

Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper Clean Sweep Day!

On April 24, in celebration of Earth Day the Iroquois NWR was host to volunteers from Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper during their annual Clean Sweep day! A total of 35 volunteers spent 1.5 hours each helping to pick up trash around the refuge. Teams were made of mainly of family groups and each team sent to a different location on the refuge. All in all they picked up about 3 cubic yards of trash, recyclables, and partially filled paint containers. This is the second time the Refuge has partnered with Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper on this event.



Photo Right: A portion of the trash removed from Iroquois NWR for Earth Day event (Tom Roster, USFWS)

Recommended Reading On The Web

- [What Scientists Have Learned from 100 Years of Bird Banding](https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/what-scientists-have-learned-from-100-years-of-bird-banding/)
- [Migratory Birds Are Shrinking As The World Heats Up](https://www.futurity.org/migratory-birds-shrinking-climate-change-2228192-2/)
- [Noisy Natural Gas Equipment Harms Bird Reproduction -](https://www.futurity.org/songbirds-reproductive-success-noise-2523992-2/)

Strategic Conservation: Annual Muskrat House Count



In February, refuge staff took to the ice to conduct our annual muskrat house survey. Twenty-six plots were surveyed across four refuge impoundments. A total of 131 houses were counted. This result is lower than the long-term count average, but not unexpected as one of the impoundments was drained throughout most of 2020 and two others are moving into the open lake stage of the wetland cycle and contain very little emergent vegetation. Muskrats need sufficient water and vegetation to allow for feeding and house building. We expect a steady increase in house counts over the next few years as wetland vegetation and muskrats respond to recent draw-downs in refuge impoundments.

Photo Left: Muskrats (USFWS)

Blue Feathers

by Gerry Rising

Quite a few bird species that are found on the Niagara Frontier have blue feathers. The list includes jays, bluebirds, kingfishers, great blue herons, tree and barn swallows, indigo buntings and even three warblers: black-throated blue, parula and cerulean. I note here that the cerulean warbler, my favorite on that list, is also the rarest on the list. And I find them year after year along the Onondaga Trail and in several other Refuge locations.

But my concern in this note is the source of that blue feather color. It turns out that birds get yellow and red coloration from their diets. That doesn't work for blue, however, as this color in foods is destroyed by the birds' digestive system. A jay may eat blueberries, for example, but it does not get its blue coloration from that food.



cerulean warbler

The answer is complex and, instead of my trying to rephrase it, I offer the explanation found by Yale ornithologist, Richard Prum, and reported in *Smithsonian Magazine*: "As a blue feather grows, something amazing happens. Inside each cell, stringy keratin molecules separate from water, like oil from vinegar. When the cell dies, the water dries away and is replaced by air, leaving a structure of keratin protein interspersed with air pockets, like a sponge or a box of spaghetti. When white light strikes a blue feather, the keratin pattern causes red and yellow wavelengths to cancel each other out, while blue wavelengths of light reinforce and amplify one another and reflect back to the beholder's eye. The result: blue, an example of what scientists call a structural color (as opposed to a pigmented color) because it's generated by light interacting with a feather's 3-D arrangement. And different shapes and sizes of these air pockets and keratin make different shades of blue."

Whether or not you follow the details of that complex process, I hope you gain a little more appreciation for that lovely blue that you see in a number of our most striking birds.

Judy Derry Thanked And Recognized!

Judy was a member of FINWR for many years as well as a long-time valuable member of The New York State and North American Bluebird Societies. She was an avid bluebird and cavity nesting bird enthusiast. In addition to arranging and giving workshops on bluebird ecology in WNY, she donated eight bluebird boxes to FINWR in 2019. FINWR wishes to thank Judy for her generous donation of \$1,000 this year as she moves on to her new home in Wisconsin!

The Snag

by Karin Johnson

Photos by Karin Johnson



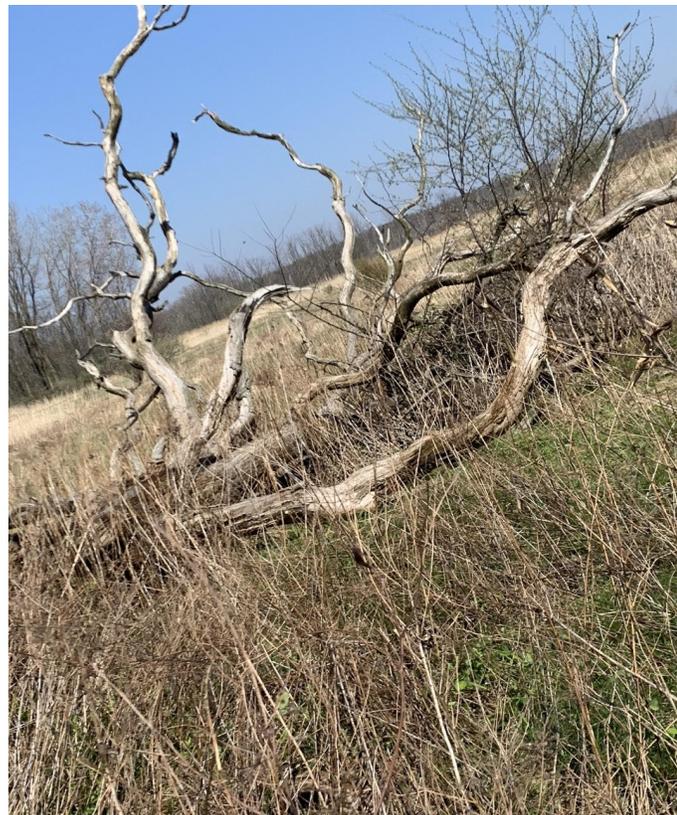
In March I visited the refuge headquarters to map out a hike for Spring Into Nature, our refuge event on May 1. As I rounded the corner to access the trail, I was shocked to see that the snag that marked the beginning of the Headquarters Trail had toppled over in a windstorm. To me, the snag was iconic....a symbol ... a dead tree standing, providing so many species with life. I took many photos of it in different seasons; its beauty and symmetry struck me as nearly perfect.

I never heard the forestry term snag, before going on a guided hike at INWR. A snag is a dead or dying tree often missing a top and smaller branches. Snags are allowed to decompose naturally in places like INWR, and it's a good thing. They provide many benefits for the land and wildlife. It is estimated that snags provide a habitat for more than 1,000 species of wildlife. Among them are bats, birds, squirrels, raccoons, and a variety of insects who nest in the cavities. Snags also serve as perches for hawks and raptors to watch for prey, or look for danger from predators. Squirrels use snag cavities as storage bins for their food. Not only do snags provide a habitat for wildlife, they provide food as well. Mosses, lichens, fungi and insects are plentiful on snags and many animals eat and snack on them. Snags act as a soil refresher by returning nutrients to the soil.

Well...the snag is down, but its value to the ecosystem continues. As it decays it becomes a habitat for new communities of plants and animals. It gives food and shelter to snakes, small mammals, bees, and other insects, and continues to provide a place where animals can cache food. Partially decaying logs decompose and make soil minerals usable as food for plants including trees. In the upland forests at INWR, fungi growing in enriched soil created by fallen snags and decaying wood help trees communicate and share food through the underground web they create with tree roots.

Scientists estimate that about one fifth of all plant and animal species depend on dead wood. But while scientists and land managers understand the importance of snags, research is still relatively sparse on the contributions of snags to the various ecosystems in the forest.

It made me sad to see the snag lying on the ground next to the refuge headquarters. But I'm glad to know it will continue to provide sustenance to the plants, animals and soil around it.



THE OVERLOOK NEWSLETTER
Friends of Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge
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FRIEND'S NAME
STREET ADDRESS
CITY, STATE 00000

Our 11th Year! The Submission Deadline is August 31st 2021.

Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge and the
Friends of Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge
announce their **Annual Amateur**



PHOTO CONTEST