

# River Talk

Newsletter of the Carantouan Greenway



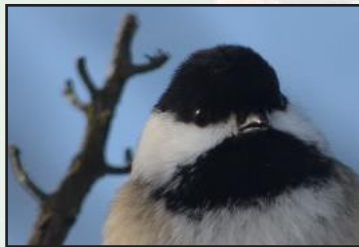
Spring 2021

## Guest writer

### Chickadee's Greeting

By Rich Hanlon

Hit the trails at Wildwood Reserve and it won't be long until you're welcomed by Chickadee's greeting. Some might ask "what good does it do to preserve special patches of wild nature like this one?" A quick response might include Wildwood's value as an essential link in a forested corridor



chain, or of the marsh's value for reducing the severity of local flooding. Chickadee's greeting welcomes awareness of a deeper emotional and psychological truth; that wild nature is also a gift for the human soul. With each visit, my friend Marty is faithful to bring a gift in return.

Several weeks ago I joined Marty for his morning walk along the trails. First, we made our way from the parking lot to the north side of the marsh, where ebony spleenwort grows on the south-facing slope of well-drained soil beneath the shade of the deciduous forest. Then, as we made our way along the grassy strips that cross the marsh, the snow-covered ground helped us take note of a variety of large and small mammals that

*Continued on page 2...Chickadee*



### Snowshoeing

February 4 was the first blue-sky day that followed 3 days of snow with a grand total of 18 or more inches. Donning snowshoes we walked the trails while the sun reflected the beauty of each flake and black-capped chickadees harassed me for more seed. It was a red letter day for birds having red in their names; red-tailed hawk, red-bellied woodpecker and red-breasted nuthatch.

*Continued on page 2...Snowshoeing*

### Natural History Hike

What a perfect day November 7th was for a hike at the Carantouan Greenway's nature preserve. Natural history is described by the Oxford Language Dictionary as "the scientific study of animals or plants, especially as concerned with observation rather than experiment, and presented in popular rather than

*Continued on page 2...Natural*



*Marty describes how a bird's flight feathers are attached to the bones of the wing.*

### In this issue

- Chickadee Greetings
- Natural History Hike
- Snowshoeing
- Stark Evidence of Climate Change
- What the Cat Dragged In

## Chickadee (continued from page 1)

have recently visited, including an otter slide bordering the pond! After that it was through the pine forest where a cryptically colored brown creeper made an appearance. On our way back across the marsh I noticed the birds behaving a little differently than they had earlier. Four black-capped chickadees watched Marty intently from the bushes along the field, and they followed us. As we neared the small white birch tree, a whole host of chickadees, nuthatches, woodpeckers, sparrows and jays were calling and flitting about in excitement even before Marty scattered his usual handful of sunflower seeds near the base of the birch tree. What great enthusiasm from the birds! What great joy for me to have been there! It seems that each day, these birds look forward to Marty's morning seed offering.

A few handfuls of black oil sunflower seed are not the only gifts he brings. Working in partnership with other members of Carantouan Greenway, marsh habitat is preserved here; and, as the pine forest fades new habitat is being created with the planting of birch trees for Chickadee and friends.

From the marsh and pond areas to fields bordered by birch and sumac, and from newly planted apple trees to vernal pools nestled within patches of hardwood forest, these are places of refuge for human and wildlife alike. These habitats of refuge are worthy of protecting. As I write this, I know I'm "preaching to the choir," because many of those who read this article support what Carantouan Greenway is doing at Wildwood Reserve as well as in other locations within the Valley.

Something happened in my heart between the beginning and the completion of this article's composition; I'm pleased to say that I've made



the decision that, not only is supporting the mission of Carantouan Greenway important in general, it is important to me. If you have yet to visit Carantouan Greenway's Wildwood Reserve, I encourage you to stop on by and check out the trails. I think you'll be glad you did.

Upon your every next visit, I hope your heart is warmed by Chickadee's greeting; reminding each of us that preserved patches of wild nature like this are a gift.

*You can enjoy more of Rich's nature writing on his website [Wild Neighbors Nature Connection](http://WildNeighborsNatureConnection.com) at [wnnc.net](http://wnnc.net).*

## Snowshoeing (from page 1)

The red-tail is the most common diurnal raptor in the State favoring a mix of open fields for feeding and adjacent woods for nesting. They usually nest in edge trees and search the fields for their favorite food, meadow mice.

The red-bellied woodpecker has been expanding its range north since the 80s. Its red belly is a light wash of color among its browner feathering. It is a year-round quite vocal resident at Wildwood.

## Natural (continued from page 1)

academic form." True to that definition naturalist Marty Borko led visitors along trails, stopping at spots and presenting specimens of bones and other clues left behind by inhabitants of the Greenway. One such mystery involved a great horned owl. While suspecting the owl was nesting in the pine woods, ground surveillance turned up an owl pellet. Marty described that an owl consumes its prey whole and since the owl's digestive system cannot process things like fur, bones, and feathers it is regurgitated in an oval-shaped pellet onto the forest floor below.

He further pointed out how a vine of bright red leaves signals to the alert hiker that any number of birds might be nearby as the vine is poison ivy and its fruits are tempting to many birds. Gnow marks in a small tibia tell the fatal story of a small animal. Learning to see and investigating these clues makes a good hike turn into a great, enriching hike. The Greenway regularly offers free guided hikes to the public. Upcoming events are listed on our website, Facebook page, and in the local newspapers. Trails are open daily from dawn to dusk



## Stark Evidence of Climate Change

Climate change has been evident in the Valley as witnessed by the recent deep snow followed by flooding rains. The photo of a hemlock tree on Chemung street in Waverly is similar evidence of change.

The south side (road side) of the tree has dead branches not exhibited on the north side. The south side gets more sun and has created a warmer microhabitat preferred by the exotic introduced wooly adelgid which is feeding on the needles sap, killing them. The north side is cooler and the process of death for the needles and the tree much slower. The hemlock trees that are growing on the northern slopes of Bradford and Tioga counties show the same pattern. It is the same as the theory of ski slopes; snow melts faster on the south and lasts longer on the cooler northern slopes. One of the best places to see this is on the steep south side of Rt. 17 as one approaches Owego. Here the cooler north-facing hemlocks are being given an extended life, but for how long?

## What the Cat Dragged In

Saturday, March 20, was the first day of spring, and it did not disappoint. A group of adventurous hikers joined Carantouan Greenways naturalist Marty Borko on a guided hike all about the little creatures your cat may drag in; mainly mice, moles, and shrews. As the hike progressed throughout the trails, Marty pointed out various telltale signs left behind by these little critters. For example, bark chewed off a tree, too far up to be a deer, was determined to have been eaten by a mouse, leaving its teeth marks behind as evidence. As the snow melted away many discovered tunnels in the grass of their lawns. One might assume they are made by moles, but in fact they are made by mice. By the way, the preserve has at least five different species of mice. He showed how the multiple mouse species that inhabit the preserve can be identified by their size, length of tail, and coloration. Fun fact: a meadow mouse can have up to as many as 17 litters of pups in a season and each pup reaches reproductive maturity in only three weeks. Science facts were interesting in their own right but the tour was illuminated with presentations of study skins he had collected previously from the preserve and prepared, giving people a chance to have an up-close look, and feel, of these little mammals.

A word that popped up several times when describing this group of inhabitants was the word fossorial. From the latin word fossa, which means “ditch”, fossorial animals refers to animals who are adapted for digging and living underground. Most fossorial animals have short tails, making it easier to back up in a tunnel if you need to.

As a result of the informative guided hike, attendees were now armed with more knowledge and able to identify what the cat dragged in.



**No annual meeting  
scheduled due to Covid.**

## Friends of the Carantouan Greenway

**Yes! Count me in! I believe in protecting farm and forestland, wildlife habitat and watersheds in the Penn-York Valley. I want to become a member of Carantouan Greenway!**

- Mighty Oak ..... \$500/year       Trailblazer ..... \$25/year  
 Golden Eagle..... \$75/year       Other ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Stargazer ..... \$50/year       **Renewing member**     **New member**
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