



# Rice Creek Associates Newsletter

Spring 2021

## Remembering John Weeks

**(Editor's note: John Weeks passed away on March 17, 2021)**



It was my profound pleasure to have known John for over 30 years, during which time I came to admire him for our shared interests and his many accomplishments.

John is credited with developing over 80 nature centers in NYS including Rice Creek Field Station (RCFS), Beaver Lake & Sterling Nature Centers. John was also the founding director of the Rogers Nature Center in Sherburne and was director of the Centers for Nature Education at Baltimore Woods in Marcellus.

John came to SUNY Oswego from a position in the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), at that time called ENCON, in 1957 (to 1966) to join the biology faculty. At the DEC, John was influential in creating ponds around CNY, especially in Oswego Co. I quizzed John on many occasions on the ponds he built and the ones he did not. Interestingly, DEC recently uncovered an Oswego County record of John's documenting a bog turtle at a site we now know of as one of the best bog turtle sites in NYS. This is a testament to John's attention to detail and of nature.

According to John, when he got to Oswego, he asked, "Where's the field station?" and upon finding out there wasn't one, he proceeded to conceptualize and build one at Rice Creek. Astute in designing and creating wetlands, part of the plan was to dam up Rice Creek to create Rice Pond.

While many were involved, Rice Creek Field Station was the brain-child of John, along with Professors Leland Marsh and Donald Cox, who were also biology faculty in the day. Don was field station director when I arrived on the scene

in 1985 and Leland tutored me in many aspects of faculty governance.

Anyway, Cox, Marsh and Weeks, along with many others, envisioned Rice Creek Field Station (RCFS) as a place to teach environmental science to teachers, students and the public. So it became and continues to this day.

One of my fondest recollections of spending time with John was a cold December day when we were out by the garage selling birdseed to help raise funds for Rice Creek Associates (RCA). This was not a very lucrative enterprise, so we abandoned it after that year. Anyway a customer came to pick up their seed and said, "I know that voice—you're John Weeks." For those of you that remember, John did a weekly radio programs from 1982-2006 on WRVO entitled "The Nature of Things"

(<https://www.npr.org/podcasts/381444523/the-nature-of-things>). John also wrote a weekly column on nature that appeared in the Palladium Times while he was an RCA Board member and beyond.

John's efforts were pivotal, working with the original steering committee that led to the creation of RCA.

On behalf of all of us at RCFS and RCA we send our sincere condolences to John's family and many friends.

**-Peter Rosenbaum**

I've known John since the early 1980s. His "On the Nature of Things" was also published every week for a few years in the Syracuse Post-Standard. Many of his essays were compiled in a book called "Nature's Quiet Conversations," published in 2006. The essays were among those he prepared for his radio broadcasts on WRVO. My personal favorite was "The Calico Fields." I first heard it on WRVO; it is included in his book.

His closing lines for his broadcasts were words to the effect "Well, that's all I have for now. See you next week. In the meantime, keep it natural."

When Don Cox first conceived of a public support group for the field station, John joined Peter, Shirley Peron, Julia Brush, Ruth Sachidanadan, Kathy Spaulding and me on the steering committee (Board of Directors) for what eventually became Rice Creek Associates.

At the field station I would on occasion see John in the space next to the lecture area taping his next radio program. Later on, he told me that WRVO insisted he tape his presentations at the radio station, where the sound equipment would make his words much clearer.

There are many people I admire but John was at the top of the list. I think it was because I felt a strong connection with the way he would go out "into the field" and observe first hand the dynamics of both flora and fauna, something I believe I do with my butterfly studies. Despite that connection, I don't think I could ever achieve the heights that he achieved, especially with his unassuming humbleness, characteristics becoming for the true lover of nature that he was. These and other first-hand memories will remain forever with me.

I grieve deeply for his loss, and was in utter shock when I finally heard of his passing during our March 17 Board meeting.

We can all do our part to carry on John's legacy by adhering to what I consider his signature phrase: "Keep it natural."

**-Mike Holy**

## President's Comments

As I sit and type I keep hearing in my mind John Denver singing "Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy..." I readily admit I need the sun. I am convinced that seasonal affective disorder is something very real in my life. Winter seems to drag on, but when the sun starts making appearances, I am a new person. Endless energy comes from some hidden depth and I feel my happiness meter rise way up. So when I get to use one of these wonderful sunny days to go for a walk at Rice Creek, I am really a happy camper! Some pictures from my most recent hike are in this newsletter.

Even with little sunshine, we have been very busy with RCA this winter. We are in the midst of a special fundraising campaign to help support our Small Grants Research Program. Thank you so much to everyone who generously gave during our first round of fund raising, with letters sent to you, our RCA members. Next we will be approaching our alumni for donations.

As I have been working on this campaign, the word research kept echoing in my mind. Walking around Rice Creek there are many signs of ongoing observations and measurements. You will see trail cameras, flags marking research sites, signs and labels about ongoing projects, a weather station, and even a telescope observatory. It got me thinking about what exactly is research? According to the online Oxford Languages Dictionary, it serves two purposes:

**Noun: 1.** *the systematic investigation into and study of materials and sources in order to establish facts and reach new conclusions.*

**Verb: 1.** *investigate systematically.*

Then I reflected on my own early research experiences. As a student of the Campus School in the 60s and 70s, we not only were observational guinea pigs for many college students, but we did our own yearly research projects to be presented at a science fair for

grades 6-8. Much of 6<sup>th</sup> grade science with Dr. John Knapp was spent observing life cycles, mystery powders, and the effects of decomposition in recycling. We put our lunch leftovers in a bathtub he had placed in the classroom. I am not sure if the garbage odor or the scent from the so-called air freshener was more pungent! You had to hold your breath in the hallway just to pass by the room.

Many of us had pet mice and rats at home and in school for months while we prepared for the science fair. We would go to Piez Hall to acquire the rodents. Being used to handling rats came in handy when I got to college. I was a psychology minor and had to work with rats in my psychology class lab with Dr. Helen Daly. No one else wanted to touch them! (If you recognize these names, you know that I had some wonderful teachers thanks to SUNY Oswego.)

These were simple events, but they helped shape the teacher I became. Soon RCA will be selecting the next round of recipients of the grants. These real research opportunities are crucial to helping young scientists establish themselves and put their academic knowledge to practical use. In the fall we host an event for the researchers to share their findings and projects. While this past year we had to share virtually, hopefully this coming fall we can meet in person again, giving these student and faculty researchers a chance to share what they have discovered. It is exciting to see this learning in real time and know that you had a part in helping create the opportunities.

I hope this spring finds you enjoying the new season, longer amounts of daylight, and energy from that wonderful golden orb. Come and do some observing and research of your own on the trails! Or come sit and relax on our new garden benches. Take a few minutes to observe all the changes that will soon occur in the Herb Garden. Happy Spring!

- Laurel Artz

## Assistant Director's Update

One full year after the COVID-19 pandemic closed our doors to the public, it feels in some ways like not much has changed: per campus policy, we are still closed to the public. And yet, we are beginning to see a glimmer of light at the end of the tunnel. Month by month, small changes are returning us ever closer to normal operations.

Last year at this time, classes were 100% remote and campus was emptied of students. Now, we have four class sections meeting at Rice Creek all or part of the time. Many faculty members and students have resumed in-person field research at the station. Student workers, interns, and student volunteers are also regulars at the field station these days.

Recently, for the first-ever campus Wellness Day on February 24, we welcomed 60 students to Rice Creek to participate in creative and nature-themed programs and activities offered in partnership with the SUNY Oswego Counseling Services Center. For once, the station felt almost normal, with students gamboling about on snowshoes or enjoying a peaceful watercolor and cocoa paint and sip in the building. The second Wellness Day of the semester is on March 23, and we hope to welcome a similar number of students for outdoor art activities and nature walks.

Looking ahead to summer, Rice Creek has the green light to hire two students to help with invasive species removal and other grounds projects, an exciting development after last year's hiring freeze. We also expect to have an intern on-station part of the time caring for the Canal Forest trees and assisting with contact-free pickup.

Perhaps most exciting, there are good indications that our Exploring Nature program for children will be allowed to run in-person this summer! We know how many families are eager to find safe

and enriching summer activities for their children, preferably outdoors and away from screens, and we are hopeful that we will once again be able to offer this long-standing program to our community. Updates will be posted to our website and social media accounts.

While we wait to open our doors to the general public, we are still doing our best to provide virtual educational programming. We have a growing base of subscribers to our Nature Ed Newsletter and are about to release our fourth issue, focusing on spring wildflowers. RCA board member Paul Knittel has joined the ranks of those contributing content.

Additionally, one of our curatorial assistants, Alyssa Kleppinger, has started a new series for Facebook and Instagram, highlighting a new specimen from our collections each week. So far she has covered Indigo Bunting and Madagascan Sunset Moth specimens.

Finally, I have been updating our student research spotlights on our Science in Action webpage (<https://www.oswego.edu/rice-creek/research-and-academics/science-action>). Three from 2020 are now posted, with two more in the pipeline.

With regard to the **Canal Forest Restoration Project**, intern Piper Warren and I are hard at work planning another National Arbor Day webinar series on Friday, April 30, 2021, so please save the date! Details will be shared in early April on our website and social media pages, as well as in local news outlets. In late April or May, we'll be resuming contact-free tree pickups and will share information over the same channels.

Thank you for your ongoing support and interest! Take care, relish in the spring, and hopefully we will be seeing you again in person before too long.

## Science in Action

Sample snapshots from *Science in Action* page, with new student spotlights



**Nicole Rose 2020**

**Long-term mammal monitoring at Rice Creek**



**Miryam Makutonin 2020**

**Effects of Atrazine on freshwater mussels**



**Brooke Goodman 2020**

**Comparing song repertoires in urban vs. rural Northern Cardinals**



The Madagascar Sunset Moth, the second specimen highlighted by curatorial assistant and Zoology undergrad Alyssa Kleppinger. Videos are available on Facebook (including to those without accounts) at [www.facebook.com/ozricecreek](http://www.facebook.com/ozricecreek)

**-Kristen Haynes**

## A Mindful Walk

Over the past year we have seen more people out walking than in previous years. Some are walking around their neighborhood. Some are venturing to nearby parks. While others, like myself, head to woods, fields, or streams.

When I walk, I walk like a child. When they walk, their minds are set on whatever is before them. Their senses take in everything. It's the same for me. I see the birds, hear the slithering of a snake, and feel the breezes on my face. Most adults focus on getting from point A to point B with as little distraction as possible. It's as if they have turned off all their senses except for their sight as they keep their eyes on point B.

Years ago, I would go for walks at all times of the year in the same woods to witness the changing landscape. My friends were not of like mind and



had no interest in nature. I recall one time telling my roommates that I was headed out for a walk in the woods. They asked me, “Why?” “What are you going to do there?” I told them I just wanted to see what was out there. They were dumbfounded. To them, my time spent in nature was a waste of time. I could be watching a football game or a movie.

“I have met but one or two persons in the course of my life,” said Thoreau, “who understood the art of walking.” I think I know how he felt. When I was a little kid and walking somewhere, I’d walk with my head down. I would see all kinds of things that others right next to me never saw. Ants and beetles, worms, and butterflies - all kinds of things squiggling, scurrying and fluttering about.

People would tell me to pick up my head and watch where I was going. I’d pick my head up, smile, and put it back down. I didn’t try to explain to them that I WAS watching where I was going.

The qualifications for a good walk, according to Emerson, include “endurance, plain clothes, old shoes, an eye for nature, good humor, vast curiosity, good speech, good silence and nothing too much.

I like to keep in mind the words of the turn-of-the-century naturalist John Lubbock, “All those who love nature she loves in return, and will richly reward, not perhaps with the good things as they are commonly called, but with the best things, of this world – not with money and titles, horses and carriages, but with bright happy thoughts, contentment and peace of mind.

Enjoy your walk.

**-Paul Knittel**

## **New Benches at Herb Garden**



With grateful thanks to a generous donor, we now have four new benches in the center of our herb garden.



## ***Rice Creek Reflections***

**Our team of Vice Presidents, Pat and Sheri, had planned a great series of speakers and presentations for 2020. But like everything else, these were put on hold. As we think about being able to meet again, please let us know if you have a suggestion for a topic or a speaker. We are always looking for new ideas.**

## **Thank you, Thank you, Thank you!**

The RCA Board would like to express its eternal thanks for all who have come forward with generous donations to support our ongoing programs and improvements. The list here includes donations received from 18 Nov. 2020 to the present. (Editor’s note: I apologize if any names were omitted. It was sincerely unintentional (**Mike**)).

### **Small Grants**

Barbara Bartholomew  
Vincent Ambrosio  
Laurel and Don Artz  
Philip and Elizabeth Clift  
Rosalie Costello  
Patrick and Rebecca Devendorf  
Lisa Drake  
John and Patricia Familo  
Robert Foster  
Michael Holy  
Eleanor Filburn  
William Finck and Mary McGowan  
Robert and Anne Morgan  
Richard Kaulfuss  
Paul Knittel  
Kenneth and Anne Krapf  
Thomas and Mary Loe  
Patricia and Ernest Mears  
John Mincher  
Kamal Mohamed  
Mark and Sharon Morey  
Andrew Nelson and Mary Anne Hogan  
Michael and Edie Nupuf  
Ronald and Gail Opanhoske  
Shirley Peron  
Evonne Petrella  
Jeffrey and Wendy Purdy  
Gal Sussman and Elizabeth McTiernan  
Chandra Vincent

### **Exploring Nature**

Barbara Bartholomew  
Vincent Ambrosio  
Joseph Brown  
Jodi Cary  
Paulia Bates and Frank Meeks  
Stephen and Christine Skubis

### **Trail Improvements**

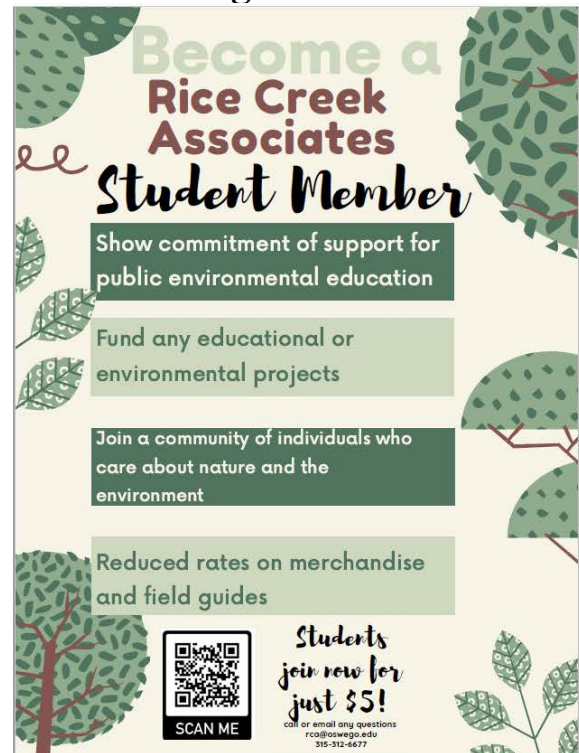
Vincent Ambrosio  
Edward Currier  
Mike and Wendy Fragale  
George and Heike Koenig  
Richard Kaulfuss  
Sheri and Mark Morey

Gail Opanhoske

### **General Fund**

Mary Dineen  
Marian Chermack  
Andy Nelson  
Andrew McElwain  
James and Lynne Keefer  
Rick and Inga Back

### **RCA seeking student members:**



### **Membership Renewal Reminder**

Our yearly membership runs from March 1 to February 28 to prevent renewals from coinciding with the Christmas season. Renewal category rates have not changed, despite our ever-increasing costs. If you have any questions concerning your current RCA membership, contact **Mike** at [fordlep@yahoo.com](mailto:fordlep@yahoo.com) or 315-622-1774 (leave message).

**We consider all member information confidential and will not share it with any other groups or businesses.**

**Please notify us of any changes to your address, email, phone or name. We strive to send our newsletter and event notifications to you in a timely manner. Contact Mike at [fordlep@yahoo.com](mailto:fordlep@yahoo.com) to update your contact information.**

Our Board of Directors thanks you for your support and looks forward to bringing you the best that Rice Creek has to offer.

**On your address label is a number that corresponds to the year through the month of February for which your membership dues are currently paid. If you have not yet renewed for the March 2020 through Feb. 2021 membership year, please do so at your earliest convenience. Better yet, combine it with your upcoming March 2021- Feb. 2022 membership dues. We appreciate your support!**

**Membership renewal can now be done online!**

**Renew your membership online via link:**  
<https://alumni.oswego.edu/RCAmembership>  
(donations link can be found at end of membership form)

**or renew via QR CODE  
scanned from your phone:**



**To Members Who Donate through SUNY System Payroll:**

Thank you to our members who donate through SUNY system payroll deductions. In the past these donations have been directly applied to RCA general funds. If you wish your donation to be applied to your annual membership or any other RCA specific program please email us at [rca@oswego.edu](mailto:rca@oswego.edu)

**Join/renew RCA membership**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

**All memberships are Mar. 1 – Feb. 28**

\_\_\_ New Membership

\_\_\_ Membership renewal

Level:

___ Student	5.00
___ Individual	10.00
___ Family/Couple	15.00
___ Contributing	25.00
___ Sustaining	50.00
___ Life	250.00
___ Corporate	500.00

I/We would like to make a **tax-deductible contribution in addition to membership fees** to the

\_\_\_ General Fund  
\_\_\_ Trail improvement  
\_\_\_ Exploring Nature Program for Children  
\_\_\_ Small Grants Program

in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_.

**Total enclosed (membership + contribution)**

\$ \_\_\_\_\_. Date \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to:

**Oswego College Foundation/RCA**

Return to:

**Rice Creek Field Station #23**

**SUNY Oswego**

**Oswego, New York 13126**



## Important RCA Newsletter Delivery Change

As a consequence of trying to reduce operating costs, the RCA Board has decided that starting with the Summer 2021 edition, **members who have provided us with email addresses will be automatically opted in to receive an electronic copy of the newsletter only**, but may opt out for a mailed copy at any time by notifying our newsletter editor, Mike Holy at [fordlep@yahoo.com](mailto:fordlep@yahoo.com).

**Members without email addresses will still receive a mailed copy.**

We always appreciate your support and want to continue to serve you in the most convenient manner. Thank you!

## Rice Creek is on Facebook



## Rice Creek Field Station

Rice Creek Field Station is a part of the State University of New York at Oswego. While its primary function is to provide facilities for field-oriented research and courses in the natural sciences taught at the college, facilities are also available for public education and recreation.

The field station houses superb collections, field equipment, and laboratories. It is surrounded by several hundred acres of forest, fields, trails and wetlands, including Rice Pond. School children visit the field station and many individuals and

groups use the area for hiking and cross-country skiing.

Rice Creek welcomes dogs. However, to protect sensitive natural features and as a courtesy to other visitors, dogs should be on a six foot leash. Also, please be kind and clean up after your pet. Thank you.

Directions: To get to Rice Creek Field Station take Route 104, turn south on Thompson Rd., located 100 yards west of the College's main entrance. The field station is 1.4 miles on the right.

Hours:

Monday to Friday 9:00 am -- 4:30 pm

Saturday 9:00 am -- 3:00 pm

Trails are open dawn to dusk daily.

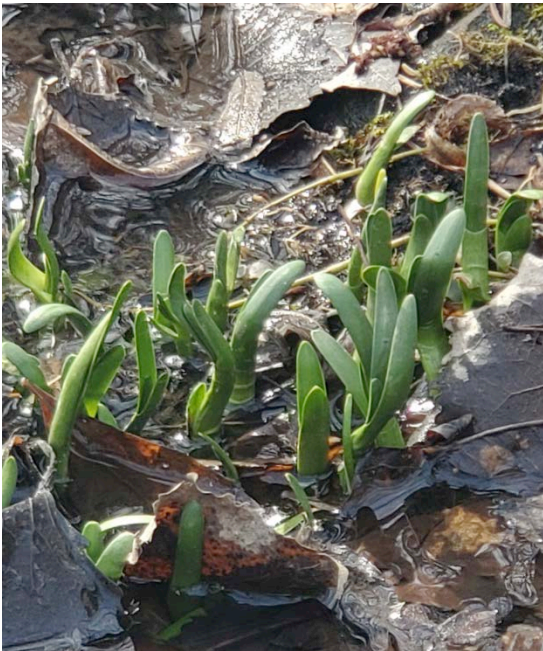
When visiting Rice Creek, please sign in and out at one of the brown registration boxes.

## March Scenes at Rice Creek

**These photos by Laurel Artz were taken on a visit to Rice Creek on March 10.**









**Spring photos taken last year by  
Kristen Haynes**



Rice Creek Associates  
RCFS #23  
SUNY Oswego  
Oswego, New York 13126

To: