



Rice Creek Associates Newsletter

Winter 2020-21

Director's Report

A Special Visitor to the Field Station.

On Tuesday November 3, 2020, Rice Creek Field Station was honored by an important visit from a very special person. John Weeks, the founder of Rice Creek Field Station and its first Director and founder of Rice Pond. The pond itself is important landmark at the Field Station.

It's hard to define John by just one job. He is a naturalist, a wildlife biologist, an ornithologist, a conservationist, an architect, and a very skillful and talented painter. John painted countless nature sceneries and arts displaying wildlife, many of which are now residing at the Field Station and at several other places where John worked. Likewise, John was the founder of many other education centers, nature centers, and ecological wildlife sanctuaries.

Accompanying John was his son, Gary, and Robert Foster, the previous President of Rice Creek Associates. Gary mentioned that at his father's request, he is accompanying him to visit several places where he worked. Among them is our Field Station, which John named as his most favorite site. At 96, John is in very good health and was able to complete a 90-minute tour of the Field Station without break.

He told wonderful stories about the early days of Rice Creek and made very informative remarks about his artwork displayed all around the building. Among those are the history and story of John Week's diorama of the original field station building and surrounding grounds and the four seasons paintings displayed in the main lobby. John mentioned that he saw all the animals depicted in the four paintings from his office window at one time or another. It was a real treat to have John, Gary, and Robert. John promised to be back for his 100 birthday, and we are looking forward to that visit.



Gary, John, Kamal: Welcoming John in the main lobby. Photo by Robert Foster.



Diorama: John Weeks (center) explaining the history and story of the diorama of the original field station building and surrounding grounds. Photo by Robert Foster.

To Our Sponsors:

On behalf of the staff of Rice Creek Field Station I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge and sincerely extend my gratitude to the current and previous RCA Presidents, Board members, RCA members at large, and all volunteers for their continuous support whether it be monetary or time spent working for the Station. RCA members are always in the front taking the burden of planning and organizing all public events at the Field Station. The monetary support of RCA members is key in supporting the public programs and research conducted at the Filed Station. I wish you all peace, good health, and prosperity. I pray that 2021 be a year of the end of the pandemic and the return to normalcy again.

- Kamal Mohamed



John and Others: John Weeks and son Gary, behind them is Robert Foster, previous President of RCA. Photo by Kamal Mohamed.

President's Comments

When I first took notes for this newsletter we were experiencing a heat wave. Then when I next jotted some ideas I was beginning to think I would be writing about the winter that wasn't. However, in true Oswego fashion, we now have a lovely blanket of snow and, as I type this, more is gently falling. So maybe in this case procrastination was good!

I recently read something about how the space between the individual snowflakes acts as an insulator, causing sound to be muffled. That would certainly help explain why a hike in winter seems so quiet, yet you clearly hear the crunch of icy snow when out walking. That got me thinking about how other senses are altered by the snow. Surely the greens and reds of the season show up vividly in contrast to the white. You can easily understand how they came to be representative of the season, not only for their ancient symbolism, but their beauty.

Scents of the season are often brought indoors, but I feel like the air is just so crisp, fresh, and clean in winter. I must add here though that growing up in Oswego, we knew if we could smell the chocolate from Nestles in Fulton that snow was on the way!

As for the sense of sight, well one must be careful to not go snow blind from the glare of the sun. I remember, years ago, taking my boys to the museum in Rochester to learn about woolly mammoths, and they taught a brief lesson about the people of the last ice age. The boys then made an eye mask with just a narrow slit for sight that protected the eyes from the glare of the sun. We had smart ancestors apparently. So you see, sunglasses are not just for summer!

During this pandemic we have had a noticeable increase of people out on the trails at RCFS and we are so pleased to provide an outdoor space for getting some exercise and enjoying nature during this difficult and sometimes emotional time. Nature does a world of good for the soul! As the snow piles up, please be sure to remain on the trails. Be especially cautious in areas where the trail beds were recently raised, as on the blue trail near what used to be known as the Willow Grove. You are welcome to snowshoe; in fact it is the preferred method for hiking. It prevents holes being created and allows for a better track for cross-country skiing.

Please be sure to sign in when you come to the RCFS. There are boxes at the parking area off Thompson Road, and also near the Herb Garden. We are trying to get an accurate count of visitors and are looking at ways to have visitors sign in electronically. We are also considering some sort of "Check-in Challenge" for our frequent visitors, more about that in the spring.

We are very grateful to have the bridge reopened near Fallbrook. It has made commuting to the station much faster for so many. There was a special ceremony held to celebrate the reopening which some of the board members and Director

Mohammed attended. It was nice to be part of the historical moment.

As you will read in this newsletter, the RCFS has remained active throughout this very different year, and I am very grateful for the board members that helped keep things moving along. Here is to hoping for some kind of new normal in 2021 where we can again meet and learn from each other in person. Happy New Year!

- Laurel Artz

Assistant Director's Update

For quite some time, we have been in touch with several local homeschool families who are interested in establishing an outdoor education program at Rice Creek. While this cannot occur in person at the moment, we still wanted to address our community's desire for educational programming connecting kids with nature. This month, the Rice Creek nature education staff released our first online "Nature Ed Newsletter," containing short videos featuring nature facts and activities spanning science, literature, and art. This month's theme was owls! A link to the newsletter is available at the Rice Creek Field Station Facebook page (www.facebook.com/ozricecreek).

Another project under development is a new "Virtual Visit Portal" on the Rice Creek Field Station website. Rice Creek student intern Shane DuBois has been working with me and with members from the SUNY Oswego Counseling Services Center, putting together new digital outreach content related to Rice Creek. The portal, accessed at <https://www.oswego.edu/rice-creek/visit-rice-creek/virtual-visit-portal>, currently contains two guided meditations featuring video footage from Rice Creek. Keep your eye on this portal page in the coming semester as we add more material!

We also have exciting progress to report for the Canal Forest Restoration Project. Thanks to assistance from field station staff, CFRP interns Piper Warren and Delaney Krasner, the SUNY Oswego Grounds Department, the Oswego Department of Public Works (who donated compost), the Pauk family, and several volunteers, we have almost 4,000 seeds and all remaining saplings prepped for winter in our tree enclosure. We also want to thank the many people who have adopted trees from our project and are providing them with a good home.



Kamal, adding compost to seed buckets



Piper and Delaney, adding seeds to buckets

Art **Natural Owl Ornaments**

Half the fun of making these ornaments is finding the natural materials! You will need: pine cones, milkweed pods, dried beans, acorn caps, glue gun, wire or string to hang.



Naturalist Linda Knowles demonstrates an easy and fun way to make owl ornaments using natural, sustainable materials.

Example from the Nature Ed Newsletter



Science at Rice Creek:

The middle field Red trail: an occasional oasis

While covering my butterfly transects on the field station grounds, the change of seasons (spring, summer, fall) presents unique opportunities to observe nature in all its majesty. As the blooming flowers change through those times, so do the butterfly species that are attracted to them.

Observing them over many years, one begins to see patterns that become more or less predictable.

One factor that can affect what I see during any given season is the mowing of the trails that go through the three main fields. Depending primarily on the amount of rainfall, the vegetation that provides the “carpet” of those trails finds itself in various stages of growth.

Occasionally, stunted plants from mowing produce their flowers directly on trail paths and the interfaces where the trails and field borders meet. The Red trail within the field station’s middle field can be particularly productive when these flowers bloom there.

The Red trail in the middle field is a relatively steep one. The trail originates from a relatively wooded section just to the right of the herb garden and the Blue trail entrance. As it leaves the woods it begins a steady uphill walk through the middle field until it reaches the upper field. The rise in elevation provides an opportunity for a butterfly phenomenon known as hill topping. Male butterflies will patrol that area of the trail in search of receptive females. A good example of this behavior has been observed in male Black Swallowtails, particularly over the early years of the survey.

Among the plants that may bloom on the trail are Birds-foot Trefoil, Red and White Clover, Knapweed, Prunella, New England Aster, and Queen Anne’s Lace. These attract Silver Spotted, Least, Little Glassy Wing, Dun and Pecks Skippers, Eastern Tailed Blues, Cabbage Whites, Clouded and Orange Sulphurs, Pearl Crescents, Great Spangled Fritillaries, Eastern Tiger Swallowtails, Eastern Commas, Grey Commas, Red Admirals, Painted Ladies and occasional others. Obviously, this small stretch of trail, under the right conditions, can serve as an oasis when other areas of the station grounds are not very florally productive.

To be fair, each section of the field station has its productive moments. Add to that the regular mowing regimen of the fields, which gives a turnover of plants that dominate those cut areas from year to year and ultimately give rise to growth that eventually must be leveled once again.

In my opinion, this variety from year to year promotes additional incentive to visit the field station trails and grounds. Discovery dynamics, indeed!

Mike

The Joy of Chickadees

I enjoy the company of winter birds - especially the chickadees. These little black and white birds are frequent visitors to my feeder. They get their name from the sound they make: “Chick-a-dee-dee-dee”.

The chickadee is a favorite among people who set up bird feeders. Its antics are entertaining and at times, humorous. The chickadee sits on a nearby branch waiting for the right opportunity to approach the feeder. It will make a mad dash, grab a seed, and speed away to the safety of a tree or bush. It will do somersaults around a tree limb in search of food.

Recently, I put up a feeder filled with sunflower seeds just outside my kitchen window to watch these high-octane bundles of energy up close. Over several days, they checked out the new buffet in town and grew accustomed to the noises and movements coming from inside my kitchen.

The other day I had a visitor, a little four-year-old girl. We were in the kitchen and I pointed out the window toward the feeder. There was only one bird on the feeder. As it immediately flew off, I

told her that it was a chickadee. Because my back was to the window, I instructed her to let me know when she saw another chickadee.

Soon a chickadee landed on the feeder and she shouted, "There's a chickadee at the feeder!" Knowing that it would disappear as quickly as it arrived, I curiously asked, "Are you sure there's a chickadee there?" Nearly jumping out of her seat, she shouted to me to turn around and look! As I turned, the chickadee flew off. I said, "I don't see a chickadee." Looking at her with a smile, I asked, "Are you sure you saw a chickadee?" "You're too slow! You missed it!" She said, as she giggled and laughed.

We – the chickadee, my friend and I - played that game several times until I finally saw a chickadee steal away another seed.

When you're outdoors and there are chickadees nearby, they can be enticed to come within inches of you by simply making a couple of high-pitched squeaks. These are curious, brave little birds that will investigate everything out of the ordinary.

To make the squeaky sound, purse your lips together and draw in a mouthful of air. It's like a reverse whistle, but with the lips tightly together. Chickadees won't be the only curious birds that you will attract. But others will only venture in a wee little bit. The chickadee will be right on top of you.

If you are patient enough, you can even have chickadees eating right out of your hand! Do yourself and the winter birds a favor - put up a feeder.

- Paul Knittel

Tracks and Traces in the Snow

After a light snowfall I like to take a walk outside to see what my neighbors have been up to. Their tracks and traces in the snow are stories waiting to be told.

Most of the winter animal tracks that I know, I learned from books or by following the tracks and observing the remains of the animal's activities along the way – like chewed bark, nibbled brambles and fecal droppings.

For instance, in my backyard I followed a set of tracks and discovered that the blackberry brambles had been nibbled on. I also found several small, round, brown pellets alongside the tracks. That strongly suggested to me, that I had been on the trail of a cottontail rabbit. They love to snack on the thorny stems and often defecate along the way.

In the woods or field, the tracks of the white-footed mouse (also called the deer mouse) are easy to detect in a light blanket of snow. By looking closely around patches of tall, dried field grass or fallen tree limbs, you can often find the tiny footprints of this little beady-eyed mouse. At first, the tracks may look like a faint dotted line in the snow. Looking more closely, you may even detect the slight imprint of the mouse's tail between its footprints.

The greatest discovery I had ever made following a set of tracks in the snow was when I came across a set of footprints I had committed to memory. I discovered the set of tracks on a snow-covered dirt road. They didn't belong to a dog because the paw prints were in a single file line. Dogs walk with their paws slightly off to the side. And I knew it wasn't a cat because of the stride and the shape of the paw prints. I followed the tracks around a bend. Then I looked up the road and to my great surprise I saw a red fox about 30 yards ahead of me curled up in a ball on the snow soaking in the warm sunshine. Its long bushy tail was wrapped around its body and covering its face. I was thrilled! Not only had I found the tracks of a red fox as I thought I had, but I got to see it too!

As I moved closer to get a better look, it suddenly sprang to its feet. It just stood there staring at me

as I stared back at it. Neither of us knew what to do next. In that moment I took in the beauty of its colorful red and tan fur coat. It slowly walked two steps, then bolted away.

Following the tracks and traces of animals is a great excuse to get out of the house on a winter's day and for me, it's always an adventure discovering what my neighbors have been up to.

-Paul Knittel

Rice Creek Field Guides make a great gift for nature lovers

Rice Creek's field guides would be excellent for your nature family members and friends.

We currently have guides for mammals, invasive plants, butterflies and insects. While these guides have been specifically composed for the field station grounds, the fact that they are local publications makes them ideal for use anywhere within our local environs. Contact the field station at 315-312-6677 for further information and prices.

-Mike

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.

Rice Creek is on Facebook



2021 Reflection topics

Reflections have been suspended as a result of covid-19. We will notify you in advance when they resume.

Memorable Moments at Rice Creek

Every year, around the July 4 holiday, adult Japanese beetles emerge from the ground, where they spend life as grubs feeding on plant roots before pupating.



This photo was taken on June 30 at the field station this year.

Please share with us a special experience you've had at Rice Creek. A picture is not required. It will appear in a future newsletter. Send it to me (Mike) at fordlep@yahoo.com.

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 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 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 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!**

Board Election Results

We are pleased to announce that Laurel Artz, Wendy Fragale, Mike Holy, Mary Magistro, Gail Opanhoske, and Paul Knittel have been re-elected/elected to serve terms on the RCA Board of Directors.

Current RCA Board Members

Laurel Artz, President
Pat Jones, Co-Vice President
Sheri Morey, Co-Vice President
Wendy Fragale, Treasurer
Michael Holy, Secretary, Newsletter Editor
Maria Sagot, Small Grants Chair
Alexandra Corsini
Paul Knittel
Mary Magistro
Gail Opanhoske
Andrew McElwain
Peter A. Rosenbaum
Camila Sandoval, student rep.

Rice Creek Field Station Staff

Kamal Mohamed, Director
Kristen Haynes, Assistant Director
Wendy Fragale, Secretary
Alan Harris, Groundskeeper

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

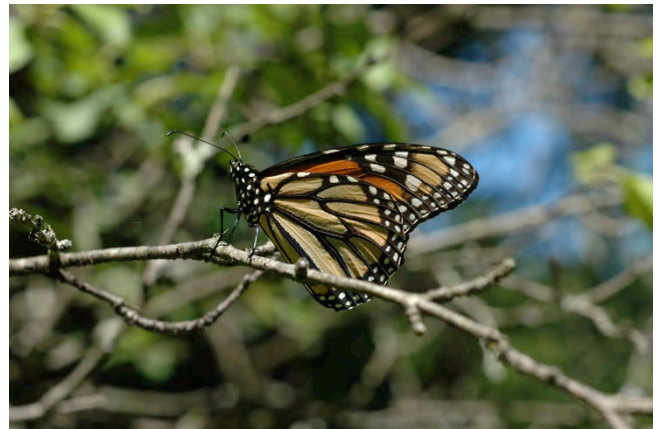
2020 Nature Scenes at Rice Creek



May 27



June 30



July 28



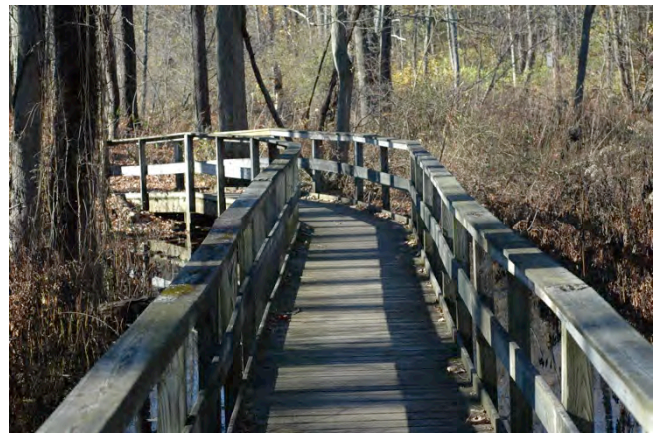
August 26



October 16



September 16



November 10

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

To: