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JUNE 2020
IN OTTER NEWS
Volume 2

A Blanding's Turtle at GRNA welcomes you as we re-open the Grass River Center. We are taking it slowly and safely.

GRASS RIVER CENTER NOW OPEN DAILY

After three months of no programs and two weekends of successful Roving Naturalist programs outdoors near the cabin, we made the decision to open the Grass River Center. The Center opened on Thursday the 25th and from now through October, the Center will be open 7 days/week from 10:00 am - 4:00 pm barring any changes in the COVID-19 situation.



Staff worked hard over the past few months to create new procedures that ensure the safety of our visitors; chief among these are requiring all visitors and staff to wear masks and to practice social distancing while inside the Center. We also removed some of the displays and activities that either put visitors in too close proximity of each other or are too difficult to keep germ free. Interpretive signs are still out, the gift shop is stocked, and Ruby (pictured left) is waiting to see your smiling faces! If you're not comfortable visiting us in an indoor space, we will still have the Roving Naturalist tent set up by the cabin on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 10:30 am -1:30 pm, where a naturalist will be available to answer questions. Of course, our trails are open every day from dawn to dusk.

In place of camps, the Education staff put together Otter P.A.C.K.s that are the equivalent of camp in a box. These kits will be chock full of all the supplies and instructions your camper will need to do many of our favorite camp activities and crafts at home, including an owl pellet dissection kit, Grass River T-shirt tie dye kit, hard cover nature journal, insect

collecting jar, and much more. We are even working on ways in which our 'campers' can interact virtually with our naturalist staff throughout the week. Otter P.A.C.K.s are priced at \$75 and can be shipped directly to you, or they will be available for pick-up at the Grass River Center starting in July. Scholarships are available for those in need. Purchase of the Otter P.A.C.K. is available on our [website](#). If you have questions please contact Education Director James Dake at james@grassriver.org.

WE THANK YOU for being patient with us as we worked to keep you healthy and safe at GRNA. Your willingness to voluntarily wear masks on your hikes, keep socially distanced, and remain mindful of others enjoying the trails made it possible for us to confidently take this next step.



ANTRIM COUNTY WANTS YOUR INPUT!

Antrim County is updating its *Community Park and Recreation Plan* and they need your help. If you care about the future of the parks and recreation facilities in Antrim County, please share your thoughts with them. Take the survey directly by [clicking here](#), or visit www.antrimcounty.org before July 31, 2020.

ROVING NATURALIST SCHEDULE AT GRNA

The first two weekends of having a Roving Naturalist were incredibly well received, with people even asking for programs to be repeated. The program will continue on Tuesday and Thursdays for the foreseeable future, and we may add some Saturdays as staff is available. The schedule for this week and next is:

Thursday, July 2

10:30 am - 1:30 pm

Naturalist Emily Burke

Program - Macroinvertebrates (aquatic insects) in the Grass River Streams

Tuesday, July 7

10:30 am - 1:30 pm

GRNA Intern Kyla Foley

Program - Identifying Trees Using a Dichotomous Key

Thursday, July 9

10:30 am - 1:30 pm

Naturalist Emily Burke

Program - Animal Furs

The Roving Naturalist can be found near the cabin on Finch Creek. Please observe social distancing as you interact with the naturalist.

Watch the newsletter and calendar on the website for added programs.

CONSUMERS ENERGY SUPPLYING THERMOSTATS TO HELP WITH ENERGY EFFICIENCY



Smart Thermostat Giveaway

Even during the COVID-19 pandemic Consumers Energy remains committed to achieving our clean energy goals! One pillar of our Clean Energy Plan is to help our customers use energy more efficiently. To keep those goals on track, **we are working with Google to give away 100,000 Nest Thermostat Es to Consumers Energy residential customers from now through the end of July.**

We know that people who use the Nest E reduce their energy usage by up to

15 percent on average. Which is why we're eager to get the word out about this exciting new program. Use Google Chrome to access the attached link for more details about how to take advantage of this limited time offer or visit: ConsumersEnergy.com/freethermostat This is only for residential customers of Consumers Energy and the customer must have air conditioning and WiFi to be eligible. Have your Consumers Energy Account Number ready. Once eligibility is verified, a cost of \$0.00 will appear in the shopping cart. The customer will be responsible for shipping costs. A complimentary Customer Care Kit will be provided to those customers who are not eligible.

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For more information about Consumers Energy, go to www.ConsumersEnergy.com

WHERE THE WILDFLOWERS GROW

Julie Hurd and Phil Jarvi would love to get back out on the trails with you and that will soon be available to small groups who reserve in advance, but for now we continue to bring you...

Virtual Birds and Blooms

with your guide, Julie Hurd

Creeping Snowberry

Gaultheria hispidula

and

Small Cranberry

Vaccinium oxycoccus

These two dainty little vining plants can be found, often together, on nursery stumps along the boardwalks. They possess common characteristics, but can be differentiated, in the absence of blossoms or berries, by close examination of the leaves. The Snowberry's leaves are round and arranged in pairs, opposite each other along the stems. They are dark green on top and paler below with bristly hairs. The small cranberry's leaves are oval and pointed, leathery green on top and white below, alternating on either side of the stems.



If you are fortunate and catch either plant in bloom or fruiting, look closely to appreciate beauty in miniature. The small cranberry flower is pink with four turned back petals forming a little cap with a beak protruding below. As you might expect, the berry that replaces the blossom is red. The snowberry blossom is white with bell-shaped lobes. The blossoms may be hidden by the leaves. The tiny white berries that follow may taste like wintergreen, a member of the same genus. Creeping snowberry and small cranberry deserve your consideration for inclusion in a fairy garden.



Photo of Creeping Snowberry courtesy of Adirondacks Forever Wild

Northern Pitcher Plant

Sarracenia purpurea



The Pitcher Plant flourishes in acidic bogs, often blooming in the company of various wild orchids. It is insectivorous and derives its nourishment, especially nitrogen, from trapped insects. The plant is tall, up to 24”, with a large, five-petaled maroon blossom rising above the leaves. Look closely at the largest leaves that fuse into the shape of a pitcher that collects rainwater. The inner surface of the leaves are lined with stiff, downward pointing hairs that can prevent insects that fall into the leafy trap from crawling out. The plant then produces enzymes that allow it to digest its meal.

Look for a Pitcher Plant along the Sedge Meadow Trail in the area close to Finch Creek. They also may be seen along the Skegemog Swamp pathway. The blossoms on these plants often persist into late summer and can help you locate one. You may even see insects floating in the leafy traps of this carnivorous species.

Naturalist Emily Burke introduces us to this edition's featured bird

Belted Kingfisher

Megasceryle alcyon

Belted kingfishers are large-headed, blue-gray birds with dagger-like bills that they use to capture fish upon diving headfirst into the water. The most notable characteristic of this species, however, is that, due to their chestnut belly band, the females are more colorful than the males, who lack this extra “belt.” Flashier females definitely deviate from the norm in bird species, and in a few other birds who exhibit this trait – such as phalaropes – the anomaly can usually be chalked up to reversed sex roles: the males are the ones who



incubate the eggs and tend to the nest. But in kingfishers, this is not the case – females are the sole incubators.



So why are female belted kingfishers more colorful? Researchers still aren't sure, but there are two theories. First, it may have to do with a quirk in kingfisher migration; males often stay on the breeding grounds

year-round, with females often migrating south for the winter. When the females return in the spring, the males are already defending territories, so the females' bright chestnut band may be a signal to males that she is a welcome visitor, not an intruder. The second theory is that, because female belted kingfishers generally exhibit more territorial aggression than males, they may have higher testosterone levels, and testosterone may affect the way pigments show up in a bird's plumage.

But while the reason for these color differences between the sexes remains a mystery for now, catching a glimpse of the kingfishers themselves is usually straightforward. Look for them on perches above Finch Creek along the Sedge Meadow and Fern Trails, and listen for their loud, rattling calls as they patrol their stream-based territories.

As we mentioned at the beginning of this article, beginning Tuesday, July 7th you can book a small group tour with Julie and Phil. The cost per person is \$5 and you must reserve in advance. The group must be comprised of people who are comfortable social distancing with each other and groups will not be combined. Please call the Grass River Center at 231.533.8576 if you have questions or wish to reserve.



Bellaire is Fresh Air

Shanty Creek Resort is currently promoting Antrim County and Bellaire with their "Bellaire is Fresh Air" campaign. Each week they are featuring outdoor activities to be enjoyed in the region to encourage visitor to come and enjoy the fresh air. This week Grass River Natural Area is in the spotlight. Click on this box to see the video tour they created for us and be sure to share it with friends. Thank you to Shanty Creek Resort for all their efforts to feature a broad array of things to do in our area.



CONSIDER A DONATION

Our financial wellbeing is dependent on programming dollars and donations, and with the former sidelined for the time being, donations are of paramount importance. Your generous support is always greatly appreciated, but in these difficult days, your willingness to help us continue our mission with a personal donation promotes you to Nature Warrior status at GRNA.

Grass River Natural Area is a nonprofit organization that has flourished for fifty-one years because of the generous support of people who value our mission "to manage the Grass River Natural Area, conserve and protect its watershed, and provide opportunities that increase knowledge, appreciation and community-wide stewardship of the natural environment".

If you believe in our mission and want to help us fulfill it for many years to come, please click on the Donate button below. Your support is greatly appreciated.

DONATE



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