

January, 2021



The Sugarbush Gazette

A Publication of the Friends of MacKenzie

*Supporting Environmental Education
and
Outdoor Skill Development*

“January brings the snow, makes our feet and fingers glow.” ... Sara Coleridge

January - The End of One Year, the Start of a New Year

January is named in honor of Janus - the Roman god of change, transitions, passages, and doorways. He is often depicted as a two-faced god - one face looking backward on that which has passed, one face looking forward to that which is to come. Janus was considered the equal to Jupiter in the Roman pantheon. Let us believe that the coming year returns us to a more normal world, free of pandemics and full of hope.



2021 Friends of MacKenzie Calendars



There are still a few 2021 Friends of MacKenzie calendars available to purchase. Not knowing if the calendars would be a successful fundraiser, we opted to have 200 printed. Most of these were purchased by the general public as Christmas gifts or as personal items; some were provided as complimentary gifts to the donors of our Wildlife Project.

So, if you have forgotten to purchase a calendar, or if you are looking for a belated Christmas gift, consider a calendar and support the Friends of MacKenzie. Calendars cost \$15 (there is also a \$3 shipping and handling fee). All 'surplus' money will be used toward our Wildlife Project.

See the Friends of MacKenzie website for additional information:

<http://friendsofmackenzie.org/friends-of-mackenzie-calendar/>

Wildlife Project Update - Wisconsin Wildlife Federation Donation



In December, the Wisconsin Wildlife Federation made a donation of \$6000.00 to the Friends of MacKenzie. The donation will be put toward our Wildlife Project - an effort to create an enlarged wolf enclosure, an animal care building, and an improved interpretive trail. The Wildlife Federation has supported the Friends for several years and their support is greatly appreciated.

Several individuals have also donated to our Wildlife Project. Some are board members and volunteers, others are new to our organization. Their support is also appreciated. In total, we were able to contribute over \$12,395.00 in the month of December. We have now raised over \$195,000.00 - thank you for the generous donations..

Christmas Bird Counts

Each year, the National Audubon Society conducts Christmas Bird Counts, a survey of the birds found in a given area. This year is the 121st year for the community sponsored volunteer survey. The survey is fairly simple. The count is held during a 24-hour period between December 14th and January 5th. A central point is determined for each surveyed area. For the Madison, Wisconsin count, the center point is the State Capitol. Birds within a 7.5 mile radius from the center point may be included.

Birders may be mobile and cover a specific route recording the number of species and total number of birds seen or heard. Others may remain at their home and record the birds at their feeders. Some ambitious birders are up at midnight scouring the area for various owl species; others prefer to birdwatch during the day. Some members tailgate

at a site with food and refreshments, although that was more difficult this year due to the Covid pandemic.

Several factors can influence the number and types of birds seen. An area with varied habitats and several volunteers will record more birds, and more bird species, than an area with limited habitats and few volunteers. Poor weather can also limit results. Organizers look at the weather forecast for an area and select a date with the most favorable conditions.

When the results are tabulated and recorded, overall trends can be observed. Some species are becoming more common, others are becoming less common. Results for the 2020-21 season can be seen at the following link:

<https://www.audubon.org/conservation/science/christmas-bird-count>. Click on “Access Count Results”, then “Current Year”, and “Results By Count”. Then enter your country and state or province and select one of the drop-down options. Some results may not yet be available.

A History of Snowmen

Is there anything better than a cancelled school day with nothing to do but go outside and build a snowman? Snowmen have probably been around for as long as people and snow have been associated. Recorded snowmen go back, at least, to the Middle Ages. In long winters, a new snowfall offered the members of a village to get out and express themselves artistically. At other times, snowmen were placed alongside cannons to thwart a possible attack from a hostile neighbor. Apparently, strength in numbers doesn't require actual human numbers - at least in winter.

In 1494, the royal family of Florence commissioned a young 19-year old artist to create a snowman for their courtyard. People believed it to be quite beautiful. Unfortunately, the snowman did not withstand the test of time, nor the warmth of spring. The artist turned to more 'lasting' forms of art - sculpture and painting. His name was Michelangelo.



The world's tallest snowman was built in 2008 in the state of Michigan. The snowman was named Olympia (in honor of Olympia Snowe, a US senator from Maine), a snowwoman standing 122 feet tall. Her eyelashes were skis, her lips were tires, and she had a 100 foot long scarf.

The rules for a 'perfect' snowman are simple. Maintain a ratio of 3:2:1. The base (feet and legs) should be three feet wide, the middle section (torso) should be two feet wide, and the top (head) should be one foot wide. Pack snow around the bottom to stabilize the snowman. Flatten the top of the bottom and middle sections to create a firm base for the next higher section. Decorate as appropriate.

So, when students are back to the MacKenzie Center and when our next snowfall has the proper moisture content (the moisture acts as a glue to hold the snow crystals together), perhaps we'll see a snowman near the entry of the MacKenzie Center.

Note: Some information for this article was obtained from The History of the Snowman, a book by Bob Eckstein.

Event Cancellations, Covid - 19

Although scheduled educational programs are presently canceled and MacKenzie Center buildings and fire tower are closed, the trails and wildlife exhibit are open to the public. Trails are open from dawn until dusk; the Wildlife Exhibit is open from 10:00 am until 4:00 pm.

Camping is not allowed at the MacKenzie Center; however, no admission fee or state park sticker is required.

Annual Meeting

The Friends of MacKenzie Annual Meeting is typically held in January with a sit-down meal and a presentation by a guest speaker. With the Covid-19 pandemic, the Board of Directors has decided to hold a virtual meeting, via Zoom, on Thursday, January 21 at 7:00 pm. Updated information will be mailed to all Friends members. New board members will be nominated and elected. Additional information will be available on our website and Facebook page.

Memberships and Donations

Memberships for 2021 are due in January. Please consider becoming a member of the Friends of MacKenzie, or consider renewing your existing membership. Memberships

help maintain programs promoting environmental education and outdoor skill development in our state.

At present, there are 360 members and volunteers of the Friends. Most are from Wisconsin and nearby states, but many others 'visit' over the internet, if not in person.

Donations supporting MacKenzie events and programs are welcomed and accepted at any time. Both donations and memberships can be made online or they can be mailed (see the Friends website for additional information).

Phenological Events - January

Phenology involves the timing and sequencing of natural events - when birds migrate or nest, when flowers bloom, or when the sap is flowing in maple trees.



The January full moon is known as the Wolf Moon by Native Americans.

On January 3rd, the Sun and Earth are nearest each other (perihelion). So close, but yet so cold.

Orion, the Hunter, is present in the night sky. If you follow the three stars in his belt toward the horizon, you will find Sirius, the Dog Star, the brightest star in the sky. Sirius is considered Orion's dog and is in the constellation Canis Major, the Great Dog.

Bear cubs are born in winter dens, blind and weighing less than a pound.

Horned larks are present walking along roadsides and flushing when a vehicle passes.

Fox and gray squirrels have their first mating of the year. A second mating will occur in June.

Robins and waxwings scour the area in search of persistent crabapples, hawthorns, buckthorn, or mountain ash fruits.

Ruffed grouse walk atop snow with the help of pectinations - snowshoe type growths along the sides of their toes.

Woodpeckers begin drumming on trees, and maybe on cabins.

Nuthatches, cardinals, and chickadees begin their calling.

Rough-winged hawks are seen hovering over grasslands prior to pouncing on a mouse or vole.

Ice may be a few feet thick on some lakes, or a few inches on others.
Days are getting longer; a January thaw is just around the corner.
The coldest month is behind us.

A Winter's Walk

I awake early, and seeing the temperature in the 20's and not much wind, I decide to take a pre-dawn walk through the woods and marsh near my home. The snow is soft underfoot, and my eyes soon adjust to the night. At this time of day, I am alone - at least as far as people are concerned.

Soon, I am greeted by an arpeggio of sonorous notes indicating the presence of a great-horned owl. His vocalization indicates that it is not food that has captured his interest but something of another kind. Moments later, his call is answered by similar hoots on a slightly lower pitch. This morning's mystery is solved, the mating season for the horned owls is upon us. An unused hawk or crow nest will be claimed or perhaps a cavity in a tree; a few weeks later, eggs will hatch. Great-horned owlets are the first birds of the new year.

Where the marsh and river meet, a small group of cranes announces my intrusion; they are aware of me long before I am of them. The procrastinating cranes must still be able to locate food to remain this far north. Soon, they too will be heading south. Their calling is joined by a chorus of Canada geese. My 'quiet' walk is no more.

As the moon gives way to the sun, I realize the trees are aglow with morning rime. The entire week has been like this. The air contains a great amount of moisture. Upon contact with the below freezing branch surfaces, the droplets crystallize creating a glistening environment. Until the sun's warmth melts the rime, we are surrounded by another miracle of nature.



I return home to a cup of coffee, a hearty breakfast, and my neighbors beginning their day. Too often, we miss the best part.

Stay Connected

Friends of MacKenzie website: www.friendsofmackenzie.org

Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/Friends-of-the-MacKenzie-Education-Center>

MacKenzie Center website: <https://dnr.wisconsin.gov/education/mackenzie>

