



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
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Chickadee Smarts



Chickadees are highly intelligent birds. Stand in the window at the Emma Treadwell Thatcher Nature Center and watch them. Again and again a chickadee flies to the feeder, grabs a seed and disappears into the woods. Shortly it's back again to pick up another. Chickadees are caching birds. They hide seeds in nooks and crannies of trees and bushes, saving them to eat later when food might be scarce. "A little smackerel" as Winnie the Pooh would say.

Scientists who are patient observers have found that an individual chickadee can remember thousands of places where it has hidden seeds. Moreover, it remembers what kind of seed it put in each place. When the bird goes back later to retrieve its snack, the chickadee will first go to the more perishable seeds and the seeds that it likes best. Black oil sunflower seeds appear to be their favorite.

The amazing thing is that their brains change size in order to accomplish this feat of memory. The hippocampus is the part of the brain that is responsible for mapping and navigation. The hippocampus is larger in the fall and winter when the chickadee needs to remember where it put all those seeds. But this part of the brain needs a lot of energy to support. So in the spring and summer, the hippocampus shrinks, since it's not needed so much.

How can a brain that is often no bigger than a kidney bean do such complex things? It turns out that compared to humans and other mammals, bird brains have more brain cells / higher neuron counts. Their neurons are much smaller, more numerous and densely packed. The extra neurons are in the forebrain, the part of the brain that is associated with intelligent behavior.

The chickadee-dee-dee call is one of the most familiar of bird calls. These calls are a sophisticated form of communication. The calls can give other birds news of

a tasty treat or warn of predators. The number of the dees indicates the predator type, size and degree of threat. More dees ("chickadee dee-dee-dee-dee-dee") means a smaller more dangerous predator. A bigger and more cumbersome predator like an owl in a tree doesn't get as many dees. Such alarm calls communicate to fellow chickadees and also tell a predator that its cover is blown. It might as well not bother to attack these wary birds.

Whether you hike, snowshoe, or ski at Thacher in winter, you are likely to be accompanied by these delightful birds. When you see or hear a chickadee, stop and observe it. Think of that tiny brain and all it can accomplish.

- by Sigrin Newell



Black-capped Chickadee

Drawing of chickadee pair by Adirondack Artist Nan Wilson.
You can find more of her art work here [https://
www.thistledownstudio.com/](https://www.thistledownstudio.com/)

What's On Our Trail Cameras?

When the cold weather comes, most of us hunker down in our heated homes and wait out the winter months. But not the animals of Thacher Park—our trail cameras have captured a variety of wildlife roaming the area these past few weeks.

The first camera, placed in a hemlock stand on the North Property, was located near a small sinkhole surrounded by footprints in the snow. This part of the park is a great example of a karst landscape, which is defined by sinkholes and other ground openings caused by the erosion of soluble rocks. These openings provide an ideal home for animals during the winter months, attracting many hopeful residents from across the park. The images don't disappoint: one racoon is seen repeatedly lumbering in and out of the sinkhole at all hours, perhaps in search of food. Its hideout is visited by a porcupine and a fisher in quick succession one snowy night, but neither enters... perhaps they'd rather trudge on in the cold than risk a quarrel with the current tenant.



A second camera was placed in a separate hemlock stand on the Southern Property. Unsurprisingly, this area was covered in tracks and scat. During the

winter, many animals sleep under hemlock branches to hide from the snow, and feed on their needles when they get hungry. The camera captured several young deer munching on the drooping branches of a nearby tree during the day and occasionally at night. But they ought to be careful—only a few hours after one leisurely meal, a coyote was captured trotting west under the trees. A fisher makes a brief, leaping appearance the next morning, before the camera runs out of memory.

A third camera was placed on an aspen tree just off the Meadow Loop. Although there was less activity recorded overall at this spot, a waddling porcupine can be seen making several passes over the snow throughout the week. Where exactly it's coming from and going to aren't clear, but a nearby cache of twigs suggests it's visiting an adjacent hemlock to snack on its branches.



A dead deer was discovered near a trail earlier this week, and relocated to a more secluded section of the park. We quickly moved our trail cameras to this new location, hoping to catch a glimpse of the animals that would feed over the next few days. Surprisingly, there's been little activity over a week later: two crows and two red-tailed hawks have been captured regularly feeding on the carcass, but no other takers have been spotted. Perhaps as the weather gets warmer in the coming weeks more animals will come to pose for our cameras.

- by Patrick Farquharson

A Call to Volunteers!

Looking to become more involved with volunteer opportunities through the park? Give the Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center a call to be added to our volunteer email list! We're looking for individuals who want to work on garden improvement, invasive species removal, monitoring nest boxes and trail improvement. Volunteers on our email list will be sent single day projects and reoccurring projects throughout the year. **Call 518-872-0800 for information.**

Check for updates at www.friendsofthacherpark.org

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As always, call (518) 872-0800 or (518) 872-1237 to verify activity times and dates.

Please feel free to call board members with questions or suggestions.

Many thanks to Sigrin Newell, Nan Wilson, Savannah Wilson, Peter Farquharson, Michelle Johnston and Marina Dreeben for their contributions to this newsletter.

Want to contribute? Please email me at cgervasi@albany.edu. Christine Gervasi—Editor

Eagle Update:

Our Thompson's Lake eagle pair have been spotted carrying sticks to make repairs to their nest. Eagle nests are constructed with large sticks, and may be lined with moss, grass, plant stalks, lichens, or sod. Bald eagle nests are generally 4-5 feet wide and 2-4 feet deep, although the nesting pair will add nesting material to the nest every year!



Peregrine Falcon News:

Peregrine falcon populations have been slowly increasing in New York since their population crash in the 1960's. Peregrines typically nest on cliffs from about 25–1,300 feet high. On these cliffs they choose a ledge that is typically around a third of the way down the cliff face and scratch a small bowl shape into the dirt to use as their nest. The Helderberg Escarpment has been an area where peregrines have attempted nesting without success, but that could be changing! In February of 2022, a peregrine has been spotted flying around the Thacher area! Report peregrine sightings to Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center as we monitor their habitat use and hope for future nesting success.

- by Savannah Wilson

Save the Date!

I Love My Park Day
May 7th, 2022



This is a day to "Show the Love" for Thacher Park by helping out on some park improvement projects. There will be projects for all ages and abilities, so bring the family. This event is co-sponsored by Parks and Trails New York. Please register online at www.ptny.org, where you will find a link for John Boyd Thacher State Park. Contact the park at 518-872-0800 with any questions.

Call to our Members:

What would you like to see more of (less of) in our newsletter? Please email cgersvasi@albany.edu with comments.

Nature Art Show

Come and be inspired by the works of local artists at our annual art show. Meet the artists and support your local art community. This year's exhibit features the work of more than 35 artists, in a variety of media from watercolors, oils, and photography, to fiber and wood.



The Nature Art Exhibit will be on display until March 23, Tuesday through Sunday, 9am – 4pm. Call 518- 872-0800 for more information.

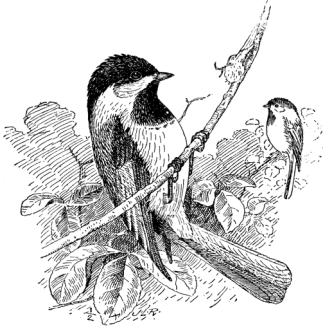


Photo by Michelle Johnston

Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2022

Meeting dates are Wednesdays, March 9, May 11, July 13, September 14, and November 9.
7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center. Come join us! (Masks may be required)

Friends of Thacher Park
c/o Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center
87 Nature Center Way
Voorheesville, New York 12186-2601



<https://etc.usf.edu/clipart/>

Wednesday, March 9, 2022

Next:

Board Meeting

7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center (masks may be required)

Citizen Science at Thacher!

iNaturalist is a citizen science platform that allows anyone and everyone to contribute to a growing body of biodiversity data. In addition to creating opportunities for lay people to gather scientifically rigorous data, iNaturalist can serve as an educational tool for folks interested in learning about the species living around them.

Over the last few weeks, we have been working on creating an iNaturalist project for Thacher State Park, and it is now up and running! Although iNaturalist users have been making observations in and around the park for many years, but we can now filter observations using the official park boundary, which means we can gather statistics about biodiversity within the bounds of the park. As of February 11, 2022, 191 iNaturalist users have made a total of 1,063 observations in Thacher State Park. 391 different species have been documented in the park using iNaturalist, and 330 different people have helped identify those species! Just imagine how much data we will be able to gather now that the park is taking an active role in encouraging the use of iNaturalist!

Here's how it works:

Park visitors take pictures of species they see and upload those observations to iNaturalist. If the observer knows the name of the species they documented, they can include that information with their observation. However, many of us are interested in observing things that we can't identify! This is where the iNaturalist community comes in - other folks who use iNaturalist can help identify the species you observe. Once two thirds of the people reviewing a particular observation agree on its identity, the observation is designated as "research grade," and gets included in an open-access database.

To start observing, you can download the iNaturalist app for free or upload observations through the iNaturalist website, and be sure to check out the data that has been curated in our project so far! <https://www.inaturalist.org/projects/biodiversity-of-thacher-state-park>

Over the next few months, I am excited to start leading guided hikes focused on teaching visitors how to use the iNaturalist app so we can make the most of everything iNaturalist has to offer!

- by Marina Dreeben

As always, you can find a color version of the newsletter at www.friendsofthacherpark.org