



BONNYVALE

ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CENTER

NEWS & PROGRAMS

FALL 2022

Dressed to Kill

by Patti Smith

I wrote this article several years ago, my monthly "View from Heifer Hill" column in the Brattleboro Reformer. I was reminded of it during the first week of November this year when a white weasel bounded through the brown leaf litter in my yard.

I HAD an unusual visitor recently. There was no knock on the door, just the sound of bunk . . . bunk . . . bunk as he descended the stairs. He paused on the lowest step and scanned the room. I said hello when he looked at me. The weasel, a dainty little beauty in bright white fur, ignored my greeting and set off on his busy search for mouse morsels. This weasel has become a conspicuous neighbor since the snow melted, and a source of discord because I love the weasel and his prey. The first couple of times I saw him, a flash of white against the dark, damp, April earth, I hoped he would decide to hunt elsewhere if I followed him from hiding spot to hiding spot lecturing him about the benefits of a vegetarian diet. Instead, he realized that I was just a large harmless creature that could be ignored. Now when I see him outside, I rush out to shoo the squirrels away, and then I watch the weasel show. The weasel lopes gracefully from the space beneath a boulder to the gap under a fallen tree, exploring every nook that might shelter a mouse or vole.

To be hunters of small things in

small spaces, weasels must be low and lean, a body plan that also means they lose heat quickly. To compensate, they must fuel their metabolic furnaces with frequent high-protein meals. Among the adaptations that make them successful hunters are large brains that help them find and catch prey in novel places and kill prey several times their size. Another is their cryptic coloration. Both of our local weasel species, the long-tailed and the short-tailed (aka ermine), turn from brown in summer to white in winter. This camouflage not only helps these active hunters avoid detection by their prey, but it also helps them avoid detection by the larger predators that would prey on them. The color change is regulated by genes, which vary from weasel to weasel, and is triggered by day-length. Most weasels in our area transition from white to brown in late March.



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In January, a different weasel visited my yard. I know this was a different weasel because she wore a coat colored for summer—milk chocolate above and white below. She was nearly as conspicuous against the snow as the white weasel was in late April.

I am glad to have this evidence that the weasel gene pool has this variant. As climate change brings us shorter winters and less reliable snowfall, a weasel that doesn't turn white will be more likely to survive.

The range of weasels, especially the long-tailed weasel, extends into southern regions where it seldom snows, and in these places weasels remain brown year-round. There is a belt between the north and south in which some weasels change color and some do not. The ratio of white to brown must shift each year with the duration of the snow time.

It seems probable that we have locked in enough climate change already that white winter weasels will disappear from our region someday. I hope that the same genetic flexibility will allow white weasels to repopulate a snowy landscape in the future when our seasons are restored. You and I are living in that brief window of time during which the actions of our species will determine whether or not such a future will be possible.



The exquisite little ermine in my living room left his shelter beneath the couch and loped over to the woodstove, did a lap in the kitchen, and then hopped up onto the aquarium where a couple of mice were being detained. He posed there, frustrated, and then headed back up the stairs and out through whichever little mouse tunnel let him in.

Wildlife Rehab News

POP GOES, an orphaned short-tailed weasel, was among the 60 injured or orphaned mammals Patti cared for this summer. He was a lively fellow and displayed the remarkable adaptations these creatures have for hunting in cramped spaces.

According to reports from gardeners, this was a big year for woodchucks in southern Vermont. A record number of orphans, 9, were cared for. They were charmers.

Pumpkin and Pye, the young beavers, were released just before their second birthdays and are now the parents of three beaver kits, the Nutmegs.





My Basement Freezer by Fred Homer



NEARLY FORTY years ago when I began caring for orphaned and injured raptors, I stored their food in the freezer compartment of our kitchen refrigerator. My wife, acknowledging the dietary needs of my rodent-consuming birds of prey and recognizing we lacked alternative accommodations, reluctantly accepted their presence.

I did my best to be sure my "mice-icles" were kept separate from our pasta and tortellini. For the most part I was successful.

As I reflect on this time in my life, it included a gratifying blend of experiences. Three things come to mind. First, Debbie and I had recently bought our house in Williamsville. We were beguiled by the romance and charm of the small hillside cape with its expansive easterly views and failed to realize the extensive work needed to restore both the house and surrounding property. Fortunately I had some rudimentary carpentry skills and was soon devoting them to home improvements.

Second, having fulfilled all requirements, and with the approval of both state and federal Fish & Wildlife Services, I received my Bird Rehabilitator licenses.

Third, I assumed the role of Househusband, which enabled me to attend to our newborn daughter, Kestrel, while Debbie worked as a physical therapist at Brattleboro Memorial Hospital.

In those early days working with birds, as the number of my avian patients increased, so did the need for food. The situation was analogous to an axiom learned in high school math: "The number of mice needed to feed convalescing raptors is directly proportionate to the number of raptors in one's care."

As the human/rodent ratio in our freezer became increasingly disparate, so did Debbie's insistence that I find a different storage facility.

I agreed with her. My head bobbed in confirmation, but I took no action. It's interesting how our routines can sometimes lull us into complacency and we turn a deaf ear to our inner niggling voice that asks, "What could possibly go wrong?"

This question was eventually resolved by a houseguest. Debbie's friend had been visiting for several days. She was pleasant company, affable and engaging, and we encouraged her to make our home her home for the duration of her stay.

It was her scream, an extravagant shriek of blood-curdling proportions, that launched Debbie and me from our living room chairs and propelled us into the kitchen.

There stood our guest, immobilized, hands spread wide, bent over and looking down at a small brown paper bag with its contents of frozen mice scattered on the floor. "What could possibly go wrong?" was no longer hypothetical.

This moment included a curious blend of variables. First, I know about animal phobias and the intense response some people have to creatures they find repulsive. Snakes, bats, spiders, and even our little furry cupboard mice may be met with fear and loathing. I had never witnessed a phobic response, however, and was startled and perplexed by its debilitating intensity.

Second, my wife was giving me "The Look." You know, the "I told you so" look. This was accompanied by her cavernous silence and eliminated all possibilities of a "yes, but" response.

Third, while apologizing and comforting our traumatized visitor, I was also thinking about cold-storage appliances and calculating cubic foot dimensions and where in our cellar would be the best location for my new basement freezer.

You might be wondering,
"What's in here?"
With some apprehension
And maybe some fear

I confess it contains
Many frozen creatures
Small and large
With unusual features

Ones so designed
Could readily crawl
While others might scamper
Up a vertical wall

And there are some that
Would quietly creep
As others fluttered
While you were asleep



Mice are nice
And little shrews are too
A plump red squirrel
Will sometimes do

It depends who is hungry
And ready for lunch
Whether I serve chicken hearts
Or something with crunch

I've never been tempted
To sample this food
I've not been that hungry
Or in the right mood.

But it's different for the patients
I try to rehabilitate
My freezer is essential
As I try to facilitate

Their successful recoveries
And to finally set free
Those once confined
And dependent on me

How fascinating and unique
Are all forms of life
Experiencing some comfort
Amidst all the strife

I give thanks to my good fortune
At the end of each day
And smile with amazement
At life's vast array.

For some, French cuisine
With a glass of red wine.
For others fur and bones
Make their supper sublime.





DIRECTOR'S REPORT

FALL IS a season of transformation and preparation for the future. Migratory birds head south for the season, reptiles and amphibians burrow down to safe places, bears eat as much as they can before their big sleep, and beavers prepare for life under the ice.

If you've been to BEEC recently, you know that we're preparing for the future of the organization by transforming our old farmhouse into an updated education center so that we can better serve all of you and our extended community. We will share more about this exciting project soon.

Meanwhile, as you'll see in this newsletter, BEEC staff continue to foster experiences that inspire connection to the natural world and its many inhabitants. We need your help to do this important work. If you value BEEC, please give what you can now to support our current programs, and consider how you can help BEEC to plan for our future. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Linda".

Linda Huebner, Director



Thank You Morgan!

ALL OF us at BEEC are grateful to Morgan Ingalls for serving on the Board of Directors for nearly 10 years. Morgan, who works as a bat biologist at Acadia National Park, splits her time between Maine and Vermont. During her time on the Board, Morgan served as BEEC's Treasurer and chaired and served on many board committees. We are thankful that Morgan will continue to assist from Maine as a BEEC Advisory Committee member.



Morgan Ingalls & Salamander



Welcome to BEEC's Administrative Specialist

BEEC IS pleased to introduce our new Administrative Specialist, Willow Jordan Uth ("youth"). She and her family have just moved from the west coast where she worked as a land steward, farmer, and community organizer. She has worked over 15 years with biodiverse farms, small businesses and universities tending land with an array of ecological techniques while engaging the community in the process. An avid plant nerd, adventurer, and nature crafter, she loves to celebrate the turning of the seasons. New to New England, Willow is excited to be a student of the forest and to join BEEC behind the scenes. Outside of BEEC, she will be working with her family on their small farm, Sylvan Moon Farm, in Putney. Willow feels most at home nestled in the duff amongst oaks, lichen and rocks, in the fog near a body of water – kind of like a mushroom.



Upcoming Programs



BEEC IS planning a busy winter and spring. Stay updated on BEEC events. Visit beec.org or scan this QR code to subscribe to our e newsletter with event descriptions each month.

Look forward to tracking, gardening with wildlife, an old growth forest trip and more.



Also on the way — a late winter celebration of owls, with an owl prowling for adults with the Southeastern Vermont Audubon Society and another for kids with Susie Spikol. Have you heard the Bird Diva's owl imitations? Hold onto your hats!

Naturalist Club Outings

THE NATURALISTS group is for anyone who likes to poke around and look at things. Whether we find birds, bugs, mosses, mushrooms, tracks, scat—there's usually someone along who knows something about it, and if not, we'll figure it out together. Register at beec.org for directions and updates on trail conditions.

In December . . .

Deer Run Nature Preserve

Sunday, December 11 at 10 am

Meet at the trailhead, 940 Camp Arden Road in Dummerston. Meander up through pine and hemlock forests, and then head off trail to explore a dry oak-hickory glade.



Naturalist Outings for Teens



BEEC INVITES teens, ages 14-18, with a passion for the natural world to learn together with comrades and mentors. Each monthly outing will visit a different natural area guided by the interests of the participants. In October we plumbed the mysteries of fungi and goldenrod galls. In November, we visited porcupines and beavers. Scan this QR code to find upcoming outings under the Youth Programs menu at beec.org.



A GIFT FOR
You

Porcupines in Winter
an expedition to the den
sites and feeding areas of
study porcupines.

From Me

Holiday Gift Idea!

DO YOU know someone who would love an experience in nature? BEEC is offering gift certificates for our Personalized Programs. Visit beec.org or email patti@beec.org to learn more.



A Big Thank You!

PLANS WERE well underway for 2022's Forest of Mystery, BEEC's fall community event and fundraiser, when COVID struck; writer and director James Gelter and his right-hand woman Jessica both contracted cases. We were sorry to have to cancel the event, but are grateful that many community businesses donated their sponsorships to BEEC so the other show, BEEC's nature education programs, could go on. We hope you will thank them in turn by supporting their businesses:

Brattleboro Savings & Loan
Brattleboro Veterinary Clinic

EvRClear Audio
Berkley & Veller Realtors
802 Credit Union
Brattleboro Hearing Center
The Shoe Tree
Vermont Country Deli
Beadniks
Hemlock Ridge Integrative
Veterinary Care
Long View Forest, Inc
Richmond Auto Repair
The Richards Group
Winston Prouty



One Morning at School

BEEC's school program educators are full of stories of children and their discoveries. Here is one from one of Sarah's classes

ON A winter morning, Sarah led a group of 5th graders on a quest for tracks and wildlife sign in the forest adjacent to their school. The group had learned about the different track patterns and prints of local mammals. They had practiced hopping like snowshoe hares, waddling like bears, and bounding like weasels. They had examined track casts and matched images of animals feet with the prints they left in mud and snow. They had worked together to decode "track stories." Now, the young people were putting their knowledge into practice.

Outside, the students used a data sheet to record their

observations and to take note of how each discovery connected to their ongoing studies of the earth's spheres and ecosystem interactions. One pair found an indented area of snow where they surmised that a deer had bedded down. With Sarah's querying, they talked through how their discovery was an example of a biosphere-hydrosphere interaction.

A few other students came to look. One boy's eyes lit up as he noticed faint deer tracks and scat not far from the deer bed and shared his discovery with the group. His classroom teacher noted that he was often disengaged in the classroom, but in the forest, he was alive with curiosity and eager to apply and extend his understanding of ecosystem interactions.





Make A Winter Wreath

FOR THE past several years, BEEC has hosted a holiday wreath-making event. This year, we are taking a break from hosting the festivities, but encourage you to do it on your own. Past participants attest to the holiday magic found in nature this time of year: if you set forth into the drab forests of early winter with an eye toward beauty, you will find it in abundance. When you gather materials from a particular place, every time you see the wreath, the place is recalled. Find short videos to guide you on BEEC's "Nature From Home" web-page in the scroll-down "What We Do" menu.



You will need:

- Florist or wreath wire (available at hardware or craft stores)
- Pruning shears (recommended)
- Gloves
- Cookies and Cocoa!

Gather:

Supple twigs or vines to make your wreath frame. Test carefully before you commit! Weave them together until you have ring of the desired size and shape. It should be fairly rigid.

The rest is up to you!
Evergreen boughs?
Dried grasses and flowers?
Cones?

Gathering Guidelines:

When gathering twigs from a living plant, harvest thoughtfully. Do not take enough to damage its vitality. Using the berries from invasive plants may spread their seeds.

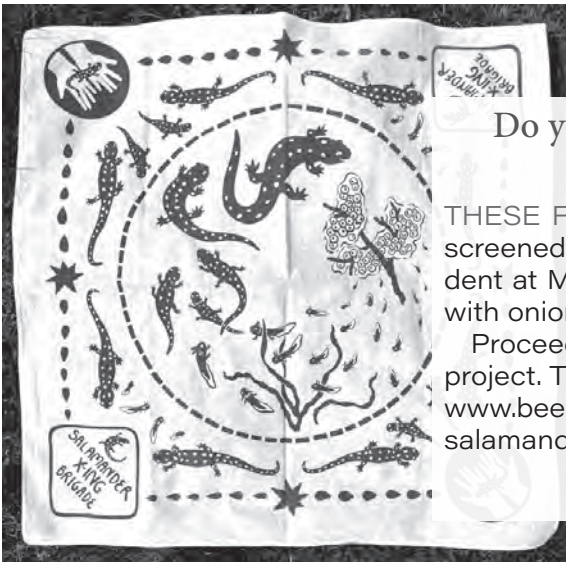
AVOID

- Asiatic bittersweet (pictured)
- Japanese barberry
- Multiflora rose



Join us on BEEC's Board of Directors

BEEC IS looking for people who are interested in joining the Board of Directors. For more information or to express interest, email admin@beec.org. Meetings are monthly on the 3rd Wed from 5:45-7:45.



Do you have a Salamander Crossing Guard on your holiday list?

THESE FABULOUS bandanas were created and hand-screened by crossing guard Fairen Stark, now an art student at Maine College of Art & Design. They were dyed with onion skins and turmeric and come in beige or gold.

Proceeds go to BEEC's salamander crossing brigades project. The price for a bandana is \$20. Order on-line at: www.beec.org/get-involved/conservation-projects/salamanders/ or email admin@beec.org.





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About BEEC

THE BONNYVALE Environmental Education Center fosters experiences that inspire connection to the natural world and its many inhabitants. BEEC is located on a picturesque old farm in Brattleboro, Vermont. The pastures and forests offer natural beauty to those who walk the trails. The sweeping view from the summit of Heifer Hill is not to be missed.

Our programs include:

- Science-based school programs
- Nature Explorers camps
- Natural history hikes and workshops
- Educational programs on environmental issues
- Conservation planning resources
- Salamander Crossing Brigades
- Wildlife Rehabilitation



BEEC has 2 miles of trails that are open for walking from dawn until dusk. **Please leash and clean up after your dogs.** BEEC is located at 1223 Bonnyvale Road (Heifer Hill) in West Brattleboro. Trails are posted against hunting.

Bonnyvale Environmental Education Center is located within the homelands of the Abenaki people, who have lived here for thousands of years. We express gratitude for their example of ongoing reciprocal relationships with the Land.

Your support makes our work possible. Thank you!



Donation

- \$25
 \$50
 \$100
 \$ Other

Membership

Benefits include the newsletter, & program discounts.

- \$100/year for a sustaining membership
 (enable more people to enjoy BEEC programs)
 \$70/year for a family
 \$45/year for an individual
 \$25/year for a student or senior

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