



ECO News

JANUARY

2014

EDUCATING CHILDREN OUTDOORS

- Waitsfield Elementary
- Moretown Elementary
- Twinfield Union School
- East Montpelier Elementary
- Union Elementary
- Hyde Park Elementary

"You know how bears dig their dens and snow falls on it and it keeps them warm? We could use snow for the insulation!" - Twinfield 1st Grader in reference to our 'Insect Hotels'



Snowy Owl in Addison County, VT

Students Welcome Snowy Owls to VT

by Amy Butler

Right before the end of the 2013 school year, students at Moretown Elementary School spent the day learning about Snowy Owls. The temperatures on this ECO day were well below zero so we spent our morning and afternoon sessions indoors celebrating Snowy Owls. An irruption of Snowy Owls here in New England this winter helped inspire the days activities.

The children love these magnificent birds and already knew quite a bit about them. Who hasn't heard of Harry Potter and his owl Hedwig? Our older students having been involved in ECO for 2 years have a lot of prior knowledge about birds and owls of Vermont. In ECO, this is what we do! We talk about animals, nature, and how animals survive here in Vermont. Children love talking about and learning about animals. They have an innate empathy and connection to living things. Plus, how cool are Snowy Owls? Well, for these young children, very, very cool. A whole 2 and 1/2 hours of cool, focused learning.

We started with asking "I wonder" questions about Snowy Owls during morning meeting. After sharing questions and talking about how Snowy Owls are here in Vermont this winter, we split into small working groups with an adult to answer some of our questions. With field guides and plenty of books on hand we decided to write letters to the owls welcoming them to Vermont! What would our arctic guests need to know?

Pam Dow just happened to have a box of owl pellets handy. We set them up on trays under the ELMO and the children were instant scientists. What do owls eat? These children found out very quickly. The big question was whether these were actually Snowy Owl pellets. That question alone created a cascade of more questions on the discoveries found in the pellets. How big are lemming bones? The pel-

lets were magnified and projected up on the classroom wall for all to see. Yucky and AWE-SOME!

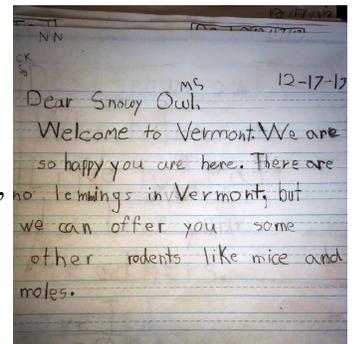
What is a morning of learning without a messy craft? This was a simple and fun craft that really relies on fine motor skills. Just combine some pine cones, stuffing, pipe cleaners, googly eyes and... voila! Instant Snowy Owl.



Making our own snowy owls!

Another learning station during our Snowy Owl celebration was an area set up where children could pour over books and pictures and then draw a picture of a Snowy Owl. We provided different mediums to draw with: black and white paper, craypas and pencils. During this time we also had a documentary by PBS called Magic of the Snowy Owl playing on the wall in the classroom.

This was a very busy and productive ECO session for our friends at Moretown Elementary. We may have not been able to get outdoors, but the spirit of the Snowy Owl was very present in the classroom. What I loved most about this day with my colleagues was that there was very little direct instruction on the topic of Snowy Owls. The students asked their own questions and with plenty of resources, inquisitive minds and enthusiastic adults the learning was truly intrinsic.



Letter to a Snowy Owl



Angie Barger, ECO Curriculum Coordinator

Teacher transition at Waitsfield Elementary

by Lindsey Vandal and Angie Barger

At the end of December, Lindsey phased out of her time teaching ECO with the Waitsfield Elementary School kindergarteners. She is pregnant with her first child and due on March 24. She is overjoyed with incoming parenthood, but will really miss working with the two Kindergarten classes and hopes to visit the classes this spring. The ECO program is in excellent hands with North Branch Nature Center curriculum coordinator, Angie Barger, stepping in as of Janu-

ary. Angie has been nurturing the wonder of nature in children of all ages for almost two decades. She has a B.S. in Psychology and Environmental Studies and is deeply focused on the study of plants: local, edible and medicinal. She has completed a classroom teacher training program in Vermont and implements this experience in nature's "room-less" classroom. Angie has led nature immersion programs for specific populations: adjudicated youth, alternative public

high school students and children labeled with ADHD. She is a clinical herbalist and looks forward to bringing her love of plants to ECO. Angie is inspired by the first two sessions she has spent with Ms. Gale and Mrs. Beattie's classes at Waitsfield Elementary. Kindergarteners quickly picked up on the four animal gait patterns and can be found walking, waddling, hopping or bounding from the mat in their classroom to the play station and from field to forest.

Telling Tracking Stories at Twinfield

by Ken Benton

As we all know, Winter has had her icy claws clasped firmly on our Green Mountain State. However, even amid the clutches of a polar vortex, ECO must go on! (albeit inside)

At Twinfield Union School, we had planned on doing some tracking in the school's forest, but a wind chill of -15 caused us to switch gears. We decided that since we couldn't go to the tracks, that we would bring the tracks to us.

So out came a ream of paper, track stamps and markers.

Soon we had created our own story strewn snowscapes, with crisscrossing canine meanderings and signs of lollygagging lagomorphs (rabbits and hares). Using the animal track stamps as the words of their stories, students told of deer running from predators, mice jumping through fields, and of bears awakening for a mid winters snack..

One particularly well thought out storyline had a set of rabbit tracks heading straight towards a garden. You could

see a moment's hesitation in a cluster of tracks before the rabbit hopped over the low fence drawn along the perimeter. Into a bed of carrots the tracks went before quickly turning and beating a hasty retreat as a fresh set of human tracks gave pursuit.

There are two things that children everywhere love: stories and animals. Whether we are outside or inside, during ECO, we find ways to bring both together to enrich our learning experiences.

Ice on Fire

Sunday, January 26, 2:00 - 5:00 p.m.

Suggested Donation: \$3 adult, \$1 child, \$5 family

Ice on Fire! The city of Montpelier's amazing winter festival is coming up on January 26th, 2014. This community event is held at the North Branch Nature Center. Local friends and

families will gather in the beautiful snow-covered fields for games, crafts, music, and stories to celebrate the winter season in Vermont. Begins at 2 pm with an opening parade, closes after the bonfire at 5 pm. Food and warm drinks will be available in the barn.



"I am thankful that our children have the opportunity to put down their textbooks once a week and do some learning outside in the fresh air" - Parent of Hyde Park 5th grader