

Seedlings



VOLUME 11, ISSUE 5



Jr. ACORNS Wilderness First Aid Day at Genesee County Park

Saturday, October 25 was a special day for the Junior ACORNS at the Genesee County Park who participated in our Wilderness First Aid Demonstration. The day started with a lesson about hiking safety and first aid skills. Afterwards, they went outside where the Junior ACORNS became "patients" and were "rescued" by local first responders.

We have amazing first responders in Genesee County. Volunteer fire departments and EMTs from Byron, Bethany, and Alexander, helped to make this event possible. Mercy Flight was also on the scene to share their knowledge and answer questions from the Junior ACORNS. They all inspired participants to be more aware of what happens when emergencies arise.

While there has been an adult volunteer ACORNS group at the park for a while the junior version is for kids ages 7 to 16. The Junior ACORNS care about nature and participate in various programs — trail ranger training, wildlife and animal stewardship, aquatic ecosystems, native species study, guided walks, volunteer service such as planting trees, as well as, the wilderness first aid and forest rescue drill.

Brad Nickerson, a Genesee County ACORNS volunteer and EMT, spearheaded and led the first aid skills lesson stated, "I hope this day will leave lasting memories and improved safety and preparedness for everyone when they are outdoors!"



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Interpretive Nature Center Summer Hours: October - April
Thursday - Friday 10:00am-4:00pm | Saturday - Sunday 12:00-4:00pm



11095 Bethany Center Road
East Bethany, NY 14054



Celebrating Ground Hog Day



Every year on the second of February, thousands of people look forward to witnessing a beloved North American mammal named Punxsutawney Phil, pop its head out of the ground to witness whether or not it will see its shadow. We know this holiday as *Groundhog Day*. One of the groundhog's most famous attributes is that it "can predict weather". Legend has it, if it sees its shadow we will have an extended season of winter (6 more weeks) and if there is no shadow spring comes early. Most of us grew up learning about and celebrating this day in elementary school and didn't think much more on the clairvoyant groundhog thereafter. However, there is much more to the story of *Groundhog Day* and to the mammal that many of us have come to associate the day with.

Groundhog Day has been celebrated here in the United States since 1886 and Punxsutawney Phil was introduced one year later in 1887. While Groundhog Day is mainly celebrated in the United States and Canada, its roots can be traced back to ancient European lore, mainly from Germanic and Celtic cultures. The Celts, celebrated the ancient festival Imbolc, with fires and food offerings to honor Brigid – the goddess associated with fertility and spring. Imbolc marks the midpoint between the winter solstice and the spring equinox, and symbolizes the renewal and hope for the coming season. The timing and themes of Imbolc closely align with Groundhog Day as both occur in early February. Both holidays also use animals to predict weather. Celtic farmers watched the behavior of animals and the signs in nature such as cloud cover, hibernating animals and plant movement to gauge when to begin planting. As the groundhog is native to North America and not found in Ireland, the Celts likely used hedgehogs for their weather predictions. The Celts believed that if a hedgehog emerged from its burrow during Imbolc and saw its shadow, winter would continue. In Germany, badgers or bears were believed to predict the weather in early February. These customs were brought by German immigrants to Pennsylvania, where they substituted the native groundhog for their European animals – laying the foundation for the tradition we know today as *Groundhog Day*.

Our native North American *Marmota monax* is a red-brown mammal that goes by many different common names – the whistle-pig, the woodchuck, and the land-beaver, are a few. In our neck of the woods, we commonly refer to the *Marmota monax* as the woodchuck. No, it does not get this name from chucking wood! "Woodchuck" was derived from the Algonquin word for the animal – wuchak. Groundhogs are rodents, just like mice and rats. They are closely related to squirrels and are the largest animal in the squirrel family. While they are mainly herbivores eating grass, leaves, branches, bark, fruits and vegetables, they will also eat insects, small birds and eggs. An adult groundhog can eat more than one pound of vegetation daily. Instead of storing food for winter they stuff themselves over the summer months for sustenance during their winter hibernation.

Groundhogs live in underground homes, called burrows that are between two – five feet deep. They dig two different entrances to their burrow with their thick claws. One is used for the main entrance and the other for spying. The burrow itself, is used for safety when in danger, a retreat in inclement weather, as well as, sleeping, mating, nesting. They even make a chamber in their burrows used solely for toileting. They prefer to retreat to their burrows when they feel threatened and will defend themselves while in the burrow with their two large incisors and sharp claws. Outside of their burrow, you may see them standing erect observing the area for danger. When alarmed they will let out a high pitched whistle to warn the rest of the colony, hence the name "whistle-pig". While groundhogs are the most solitary of the marmots, several individuals may occupy the same burrow.

The groundhog is one of the few species that enters into true hibernation (the sleep like state during winter) and will build a separate hibernation burrow. Starting in late October or November the will hibernate and continue to do so through February. During hibernation their body temperature drops from 99 degrees to 37 degrees and their heartrate drops from 80 beats per minute to 5 beats per minute. By February the groundhog has lost as much as half of their body weight. Most if not all groundhogs will pop out of their hibernation state in the early spring. As the spring season can come in different months based on geography and local climate/weather the ancient cultures may have actually been onto something!



Come join us at the park for our Groundhog
Day walk on Saturday, January 31, 2026 from
10 – 11:30am



Winter Programs

First Day Hike

Thursday, January 1st | 10:00am - 12:00pm

Start the New Year on the right foot with a walk in the woods! Options for a shorter or longer hike will be available. This program is free! Registration appreciated but not required, please call 585-344-1122.

Meet at Pavilion B.

Moonlight Snowshoe Hike

**Saturday, January 10th 4:30 - 6:00pm &
Saturday, February 21st 5:30pm - 7:00pm**

Join Genesee County Parks for a winter walk underneath the (almost) full moon! Enjoy the tranquil beauty of the forest by moonlight on a journey through meadows, along creeks, and into woodlands. Snowshoes may be used, weather permitting, and are provided or you may bring your own. No previous experience needed, snowshoeing lesson included! Hike concludes with refreshments by a warm fire. Cost is \$5 per person or \$15 per family. Meet at Pavilion B near Veterans Memorial.

Eco-book Club

Saturday, January 24th | 10:00am - 12:00pm

Join us as we continue our book discussion of, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, by Robin Wall-Kimmerer. No prior meeting attendance is required - all are welcome to hop in on the discussion at any point throughout the year. Pick up a copy of the book at your local bookstore or your local library. We will head out for a walk at the park afterwards - please dress accordingly for the weather. Meet at Interpretive Center.

Rochester Orienteering Club-Ski Orienteering

**Saturday, January 17th
11:00am - 4:00pm**

Join our friends at the Rochester Orienteering Club for an Orienteering event! Orienteering is a fun way to learn how to navigate, finding your way from checkpoint to checkpoint along a pre-determined course! Options for beginners, intermediate, and advanced courses will be available. Meet at Interpretive Nature Center. This program is free. Registration will be from 11-12, Course starts from 12 - 1:30pm, and the Courses are open from 12 - 4pm. Learn more at <https://roc.us.orienteering.org/>

Groundhog Day Walk

Saturday, January 31st | 10:00am - 11:30am

It's Groundhog Day – again! Legend has it that if a woodchuck sees his shadow on Groundhog Day, we'll have six more weeks of winter. Join Genesee County Parks for a short walk through field and forest, we'll learn about Groundhog Day and other ways to predict the weather. This walk will begin with a short story time inside at the Interpretive Center. All are welcome; children must be accompanied by an adult. Cost is \$5/person and \$10/family.



Please click link below to register online for all park programs.

For more information and registration visit www.geneseeny.gov/parks or call (585) 344-1122.

Programs take place at the Genesee County Park & Forest Interpretive Nature Center at 11095 Bethany Center Road, East Bethany, NY 14054 unless otherwise noted.

Winter Programs

Great Backyard Bird Count

Saturday, February 14th | 9:00am - 10:30am

Join the Genesee County Parks for the Great Backyard Bird Count! The GBBC is an annual community science event sponsored by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Birders around the world will be counting birds throughout the weekend. Our observations will help scientists understand bird populations in the wintertime. Join us for an easy-paced walk, we'll spend time watching birds visiting feeders so dress warm! Beginners are welcome. Field guides and binoculars will be available to borrow. Cost is \$5/person, \$10/family. Meet at Pavilion B near Veterans Memorial.

Winter Break Program Series

Wednesday, February 18th,

Thursday, February 19th

Friday, February 20th

10:00am - 12:00pm

Beat the cabin fever and join us for a series of outdoor adventures at the Genesee County Park & Forest during Winter Break! Each session will focus on a different nature topic and will include an outdoor adventure and indoor take-home craft. Program best suited for students in grades 1 – 8. Please note: participants must be accompanied by a parent or guardian through the entire duration of the program! Meet at the GCP Interpretive Center. Program Fees help support the park! Cost for attendance for each program is \$5 per person or \$10 per family.

Jr. ACORNS

Orientation & Trail Ranger Training

Saturday, March 14th | 10:00am - 1:00pm

Calling all park lovers and future naturalists! The ACORNS are the volunteer friends group at the Genesee County Parks! Together, we connect people with nature through outdoor learning, exploration and fun. You can join our mission by becoming a Junior ACORN! [Visit our website to learn more today!](#)

Early Springs Wood Walk

Saturday, March 21st | 10:00am - 12:00pm

Join us for an easy paced springtime walk at DeWitt Recreation Area! Meet at Pavilion 2. Cost for attendance is \$5/person, \$10/family.

Amphibian Adventure

Saturday, March 28th | 5:30pm - 7:00pm

Hear the chorus of spring and learn about amphibians and how to help them. We will head into the wetlands and woodlands on a night hike to visit frogs and salamanders in their habitat! Dress for the weather...we'll walk rain or shine!



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Highlights from Fall 2025



Run for the ACORNS was another huge success this year with the largest turn out so far in its history.



Thank you to all of the ACORNS volunteers who helped make the race another success this year!



Our first ever Eco-book Club participants had a beautiful day for a hike after our book discussion.



Caroline Berkmeier, GLOW Recycling Administrator, presented on how to compost.



Jennifer Metz, a certified meditation leader, leads our meditation and grounding program at the park.



A Jr. ACORNS member participates in Wilderness First Aid Day as local EMTs practice their skills.



A Jr. ACORNS member is loaded into the Mercy Flight helicopter as part of a simulated rescue.



Local firemen & EMTs work to transport a "victim" up a steep hill for transport on Wilderness First Aid Day.

Rex and the Genesee County Park Dog Patrol

By: Rex the German Shepherd and his friend Pete Stanbridge, ACORNS Park Volunteer and Calista Light, Artist



Thank you for a fantastic year at the Genesee County Parks!



Meet the ACORNS

Association for the Conservation of Recreational and Natural Spaces

ACORNS is the volunteer group formed to support the Genesee County Parks by assisting with environmental programs and park maintenance, offering recreational opportunities and promoting the parks.

Board of Directors

Ashley McKeown - President
Brad Nickerson - Vice President
Kathie Woika - Secretary
Julia Garver - Treasurer
Chris Nickerson
Jerome Gentry
Lewis Tandy
George Squires
Pete Stanbridge



Members

Gabe & Michelle Abdella
Roula Alkhouri
Kim, Stephen, Eric, Jared Allen
Charlie Augrom and Lucy
Sargent
Nancy Balbick
Sarah Balduf
Sam & Ann Barone
Teresa Bartz
Jenna Benedict
Beth Berkemeier
Brian & Renee Burns
Christopher & Melissa Caputi
Sonya & Carl Christensen
Adam Clark
Guy & Patricia Clark
Tom & Linda Clark
Nina Czach
Bart & Sue Dambra
Alea Delong
Barb Easton
Tina Frank
Gretchen Franke
Julia Garver & Joe Ruh
Liz Genesky
Jerome, Isabel, Elsa Gentry
Paul Hess

Bernard Hoerbelt
David Jaros
Catherine Johnston
Brian Kemp
Josh, Heather, Landon, Ainsley Kent
Sarah Kohl
Jeff & Priscilla Langdon
Esther Leadley
Kathy Lee
Jack and Mary Lou Lemkuil
Jennifer, Jim, Jay Lewis
Dave Lichtenthal
Shannon, Matt & Danny Lyaski
Krysia & Jon Mager
Laurie McKenzie
Kyle & Ashley McKeown
Mary Miller
Katie Mohler
Bill & Connie Moon
Mike Morasco
Molly Morrison
Jim & Claudia Morrison
Sheri Mosher
Debbi Nanni
Christine & Brad Nickerson
Claudia & Matt Nusstein
Paul & Emma Osborn
Pat Patota

Cassandra Pettry & James Nesbitt
Kathy Purcell
Dave & Dawn Rumsey
Jim Schmitt
Sean Sheehan
George Squires
Pete Stanbridge
Sandy & Dave Steele
Lewis & Bonnie Tandy
Kristin Turturo
Chase & Bianca Vallance
Phyllis VandenBosch
Tom, Anne, & Mary VandenBosch
Evan Verbanic
Mitchell & Megan Wardell
Karyn Winters
Kathie & Jack Woika
Pam Zola



Remember to **renew your membership** for 2026!

To renew or become a member, please visit the ACORNS website or contact Ashley McKeown, ACORNS Membership Specialist at acornsoutreach@gmail.com
Send renewals to ACORNS at PO Box 787 Stafford, NY 14143.

Join Our Volunteer Team!

Park volunteers donate their time to help keep our parks beautiful and connect others to nature. Learn more and complete a volunteer application form on our website.

<https://www.geneseeny.gov/Volunteer-Opportunities>

Reserve a Pavilion or the Interpretive Center

Reserving a Genesee County Park pavilion is easy and can be done totally online! Whether you want to host a birthday party, family cookout, or a graduation party, the parks are the place to be. You can also reserve the Interpretive Nature Center for business meetings, training sessions, conference, or special events.

Visit our website to check out the list of pavilions and amenities available:
www.geneseeny.gov/parks

Scout Opportunities

Genesee County Parks, Recreation & Forestry provides volunteer opportunities for Scouts of all ages!

Earn service hours by:

- Assisting with programs
- Creating trail signs
- Monitoring nest boxes
- Maintaining Outdoor Learning Center
- Hosting duties and cleaning the Interpretive Center
- Providing turtle care

Please contact Claudia Nusstein at:
Claudia.Nusstein@geneseeny.gov



GENESEE COUNTY PARKS, RECREATION & FORESTRY

www.geneseeny.gov/parks

(585) 344 - 1122

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