

SAGATAGAN

Saint John's
OUTDOOR
UNIVERSITY



Discovering My 6th Sense in the 'Arb'

CAROLYN ROWLEY '23

Growing up in St. Paul, my experiences with nature were often fragmented. They consisted mostly of trips to local playgrounds, walks or bike rides around the block, and the occasional venture to a larger park with trails. Almost always, these experiences were limited by time, leaving me with few memories of unstructured play and exploration. I grew up in the city, yet I recall always having a deep-down urge for unrestricted adventure.

It wasn't until this year, my first year, at Saint Ben's that I truly discovered and listened to this yearning. Within the first few weeks of college, I found myself spending hours in the Abbey Arboretum. As I spent more time in "the arb,"

I began to realize that sometimes I felt nature pulling me to places I didn't know existed.

I soon noticed that if I gave myself enough time and didn't have a specific plan, this compulsion would come often and naturally. I can best describe it as nature saying, "come over here, I have something cool to show you,"

and the subsequent urge to follow it. I gradually became used to this new feeling, which I identify as my sixth sense, my "adventure sense."

By following my newly uncovered adventure sense, I experienced some of the most profound natural and spiritual moments

of my life at CSB/SJU. One night in the early fall, I was watching the sunset over the west-facing corn field at Saint Ben's when my adventure sense beckoned me towards what I now know is the Sacred Heart Trail. Upon entering the woods, I encountered a deer that was not 15 feet from me, with which I had a staring contest for quite a few minutes until it pranced away.

Another time, my adventure sense brought me across the bridge to the Watab picnic grounds at Saint John's, where I found golden light pouring through the pines in magnificent stripes. Other times that I listened to this sixth sense brought me to places where I was completely surrounded by snow-



A sketch book is a great companion on adventures large and small: a rough sketch of the Stella Maris Chapel and a view from a favorite hammocking spot on Lake Sagatagn. CAROLYN ROWLEY.

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Deer tracks slipping on a frozen pond covered in light “powdered sugar snow.”
CAROLYN ROWLEY.

blanketed coniferous trees, hilltops from which I could see vast expanses of the arb, and frozen ponds covered with powdered-sugar snow and deer tracks that slipped and skidded.

Sometimes when I am exploring in the arb, it is as if the place reveals little pieces of its history to me to reignite my imagination. I can almost see crowds of students gathered at Watab picnic grounds for the old Pinestock concerts, and the generations of lovers who walked the Chapel Trail. Standing underneath the large white pines near the end of the Chapel Trail, I try to envision the monks who planted them.

One time, my adventure sense led me to a rusted out 1964 Budweiser can under some leaf litter. I wondered who drank it and left it there, and why I was the one who found it. Another time, I stumbled upon a large post with a wheel on top and a ring of twisted metal, which I later found out was part of the old ski slope.

While strolling along the boardwalk loop, I pretend I am one of the thousands of elementary school students who come on Outdoor U field trips. I consider what it is like for some of those students who have never seen or interacted with such a landscape, and I gain a renewed respect for the area.

When I unexpectedly returned to St. Paul this spring, I knew I didn’t want to leave my newly discovered adventure sense behind. So I hopped on my bike. I pedal wherever it feels right. Every week I discover new pockets of nature in my urban neighborhood that I never knew about before. I found a fantastic hill to watch the sunset, a little wooded ravine, a small stand of white pines at a local park, and several flowering crab apple trees.

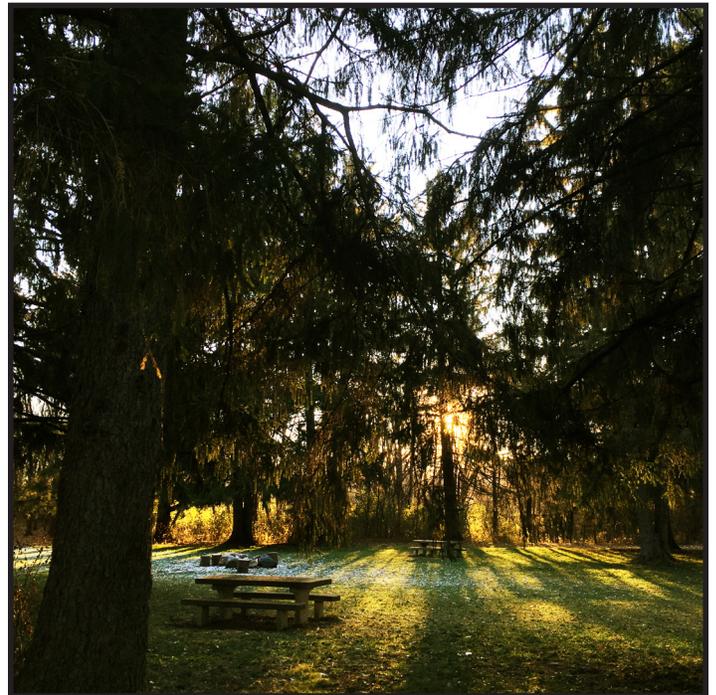
Following my adventure sense on my bike also brought me to some fun hills to coast down and helped me find

beauty in each unique St. Paul alley. I also started exploring Google maps to pick out new parks nearby or creeks and lakes for fishing. Although I enjoy these excursions, I still feel homesick for the Abbey Arboretum and the experiences it bestowed upon me.

Once while sitting on a stump in the arb, I contemplated this yearning for exploration and why I never felt it before so strongly: I had never given myself the time and space to listen to it! The first time I ever freely explored in nature was in the Abbey Arboretum, and that is where I learned how to listen to my adventure sense. I grew to understand the importance of unstructured time to wander.

Sauntering through the woods at Saint John’s and Saint Ben’s brought me spiritual renewal, greater independence, a deeper connection and concern for our environment, and has taught me lessons that I will never learn in a classroom. Sitting on that stump, I realized that even if I am not there to see it, spiders continue to build their webs deep in the woods, the sun sets and the moon rises even behind the clouds, and fish still swim in Lake Sagatagan when thick ice covers it. An astounding number of spectacular natural moments happen every hour of every day, and the only way that we get even a tiny glimpse is if we let ourselves listen to our adventure sense.

CAROLYN ROWLEY is a sophomore environmental studies major at the College of Saint Benedict and a student naturalist for Outdoor U.



Golden sunlight streaming through the trees at the Watab Picnic Grounds, a moment of beauty discovered while following her “adventure sense” on an open-ended hike.
CAROLYN ROWLEY.

The Naturalist and the Chickadee

MADLINE SORUM '20

The chickadee has appeared quite frequently and there have been multiple occasions where we have met up on the front porch, in the backyard, and even out my back window. The first few interactions were brief as the surprise of seeing one another seemed to startle us both. As our meetings have become more frequent, we seem to be growing quite fond of each other.

My presence no longer startles my small friend and he has become increasingly curious about me, as the tipping of Mr. Chickadee's head back and forth seems to signal as he watches me. His gentle fluttering and hops have become less hesitant and more confident as he no longer seems to look at me as a stranger or threat, but as a peaceful neighbor.

The other night, as I gazed out my back window at the falling dusk, my friend hopped up onto the railing on the deck.

After a moment of quiet, he moved closer. It was pure magic as we were only a foot apart, merely separated by a screen. His dark eyes peered up at me as the warm summer breeze passed over us. Sunsets are beautiful but much more enjoyable with a friendly companion.

Much like a chickadee, I must be quick, attentive, and patient in my observations. In a bolt of black and white stripes, the friendly critter swoops in for a quick greeting. He will join me on the rim of the chair opposite of mine. I see myself in his mannerisms: an extroverted type who enthusiastically shares his discoveries of the day. I gain insight into the world as I admire Mr. Chickadee's bold coloring and absorb his stories through his body language.

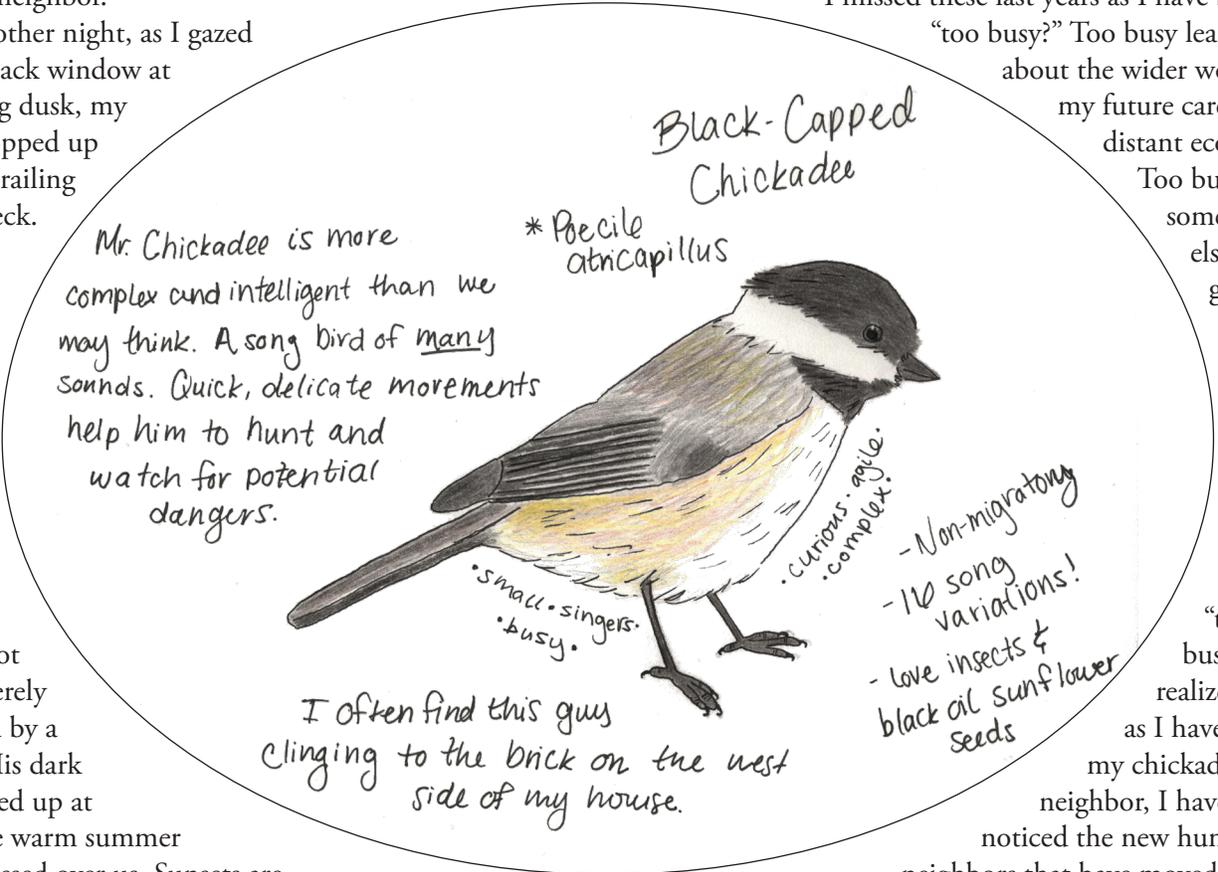
A great lesson I have learned from my chickadee friend is one of patience. The ability to sit and wait. To settle comfortably with the absence of instant response. Mr. Chickadee has his own life he is trying to live filled constantly with the task of survival. Often, it is in the middle of his hunt for insects living along my house or in the red maple out front that he notices my presence and chooses to join me. He is not responsible for my happiness nor am I for his, but the benefits of companionship, developing trust, and learning about each other enrich our lives.

I patiently wait for my chickadee friend and take a moment to look around my wider community. What have

I missed these last years as I have been "too busy?" Too busy learning about the wider world, my future career, and distant ecosystems.

Too busy living somewhere else and getting to know people all over the world. In my time being "too busy," I realize, just as I have missed

my chickadee neighbor, I have not noticed the new human neighbors that have moved in or kept in contact with those I have known a long time. I have not spent enough time appreciating the beautiful changes of my small hometown.



Nature journal sketch and observations of a Black-capped chickadee at her home. MADDIE SORUM.

MADDIE SORUM is a 2020 graduate of the College of Saint Benedict and a student naturalist for Outdoor U. The students in her future classroom will be incredibly lucky to have her.

Adventure is a State of Mind¹

KYLE RAUCH

Discovery of nature in wild places is what many of us go searching for in an iconic national park, but it can be found right in our own community. A microadventure¹ is a local, cheap, and simple outing with all the makings of big adventure: challenge, risk, uncertainty, discovery, and excitement.

Kayaking the North Branch of the Watab River would be my microadventure. I had the idea years ago while biking the Wobegon Trail and this spring was my opportunity. Glimpsing the river from different points on the trail, visions of adventure started swirling.

I poured over Google Earth for to study the route and get a sense of how feasible it would be. I knew the whole stretch would not be navigable, but I hoped the bulk of it would be. Forested riverbanks meant trees, which meant strainers and sweepers to duck under, climb over, or portage around. Aerial images showed most of the river route was through open grass and marshlands with a few sections flowing through forested areas along with a number of culverts and tunnels to pass through.

It seemed reasonable enough to try. My route would take me from the launching point off Collegeville Road to the take-out at the Route 2 crossing north of St. Joseph. Alternative take-outs were planned at Old Collegeville Road and at Route 3 if the going was too tough or weather took a turn for the worse.

It was the 50th Anniversary of Earth Day, the air temperature hit 70°F in Stearns County for the first time since the fall, and the stream flow was still high due to March snowmelt and rain. In addition, The Outdoor Adventure Education course I taught this spring was learning about microadventures in our final week of class.



Downed trees across the river forced Kyle over, under, and around countless times, sometimes even requiring Kyle to go over a log while the boat went under. KYLE RAUCH.

This adventure would make a fine video to share.

My support crew (wife and kids) dropped me off at the launch site along the frontage road. Just upstream, the Watab flows through the restored wetlands of Saint John's, passes under the interstate and frontage road, then emerges close to the northern boundary of the Abbey Arboretum flowing generally east to



A large beaver lodge built upstream of the dam they constructed to impede the Watab River, creating their own pond. Located near the northeastern boundary of the Abbey Arboretum. KYLE RAUCH.

the Mississippi. I dropped my boat in the water, reviewed the plans (including contingencies), waved goodbye, and turned my nine-foot Dagger rec boat downstream.

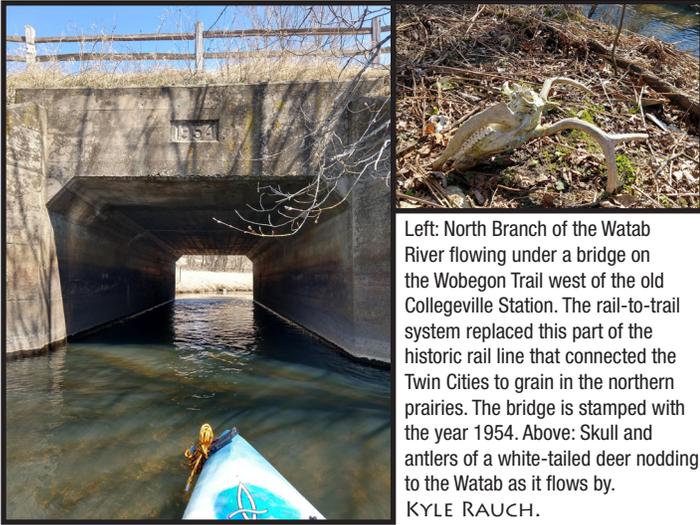
The river, often referred to locally as Watab creek, flows among some planted tamarack trees to begin the route. Watab is an Anishinaabe word derived from the Algonquin language, *watap*, and refers to the roots of conifer trees, such as tamaracks, that were historically used to make cordage to sew birchbark canoes.²

After passing the trees in this one channelized section, the river meanders through a dense marshland along the northeastern boundary of the Abbey Arboretum. I flushed mallards, woodcocks, and swamp sparrows. Within the first half mile, I paddled into a beaver pond with a large lodge in the middle. The beavers had dammed the Watab on the downstream side of the pond and forced my first portage using bunchgrass hummocks to step down the spillway. Further along through the wetlands, I drifted by a giant, two-foot diameter, snapping turtle basking on the grassy bank.

The river flow was swift with cold and clear water. It ranged in depth from only a few inches in some rocky riffles to several feet in the deeper pools. Most of the runs only required steering the boat to keep it off the narrow banks as the current kept me moving at a good clip. As I neared the hamlet of Collegeville, the creek dropped in elevation and ran over a rocky bottom with glacial boulders strewn about the corridor.

I observed a number of bigger fish (white suckers, *Catostomus commersonii*, I think) that would dart upstream when I'd spook them moving downstream. Schools of minnows danced in the sun dappled pools. It was a spectacular stretch. A 2003 Watab River fish survey³ conducted by the MN DNR recorded a plethora of fish species including darters, dace, fatheads, suckers, chubs, pike, and sunnies. I was in good company for this voyage!

The mid-section of the route was the most challenging. A ribbon of trees – boxelder, maple, willow – buffer the



Left: North Branch of the Watab River flowing under a bridge on the Wobegon Trail west of the old Collegeville Station. The rail-to-trail system replaced this part of the historic rail line that connected the Twin Cities to grain in the northern prairies. The bridge is stamped with the year 1954. Above: Skull and antlers of a white-tailed deer nodding to the Watab as it flows by. KYLE RAUCH.

river from fields on both sides. The deadfalls forced me in and out of the river. I had to carry, line, drag, and shimmy my boat throughout the riverine entanglement. A few portages were several hundred feet through riparian woodlands thick with prickly ash, buckthorn, and ticks, not to mention the fencing (most of it barbed).

Blue flag iris were sending up blue-green shoots from their corms growing in the riverbank. Marsh marigolds with red and green heart-shaped leaves were only half-grown, yet already green-balled flower heads were swelling on the stems. Sandbars revealed a community of animals frequenting the creek – otter, raccoon, deer, turtles, canids, birds. Belted kingfishers rattled up and down the little valley and wood ducks whistled off from nearly every sheltered pool. Deer, both dead and alive, were about, along with turkeys and pheasants on the edges. The phrase “water is life”⁴ came to mind as the river provided an abundance of habitat.

The final section of the paddle took me through a natural area owned by Saint Ben’s. A vast wetland of cattails and reeds sprawling out from the confluence of the north and south forks of the Watab River. The Watab was historically used as a boundary line in a land treaty between the U.S. government and several Great Lakes Indian nations. The 1825 Treaty of Prairie du Chien demarcated the Watab as this boundary running from “the mouth of the first river that enters the Mississippi on its west side above the Sauk River, thence ascending said river to its source at a small lake.”⁵

The government-imposed treaty designated Ojibwe land to the north and Dakota land to the south of the Watab. Although the treaty does not explicitly state which branch of the Watab to follow, as both branches originate

in small lakes to the west, an 1835 survey crew used the north branch as the boundary line.⁶ The boundary line was used in subsequent treaties as more Native people were displaced and American settlement moved westward. This connection to history through the land is an important reminder for those of us who live here now to respect and *acknowledge* those who have walked these lands and paddled these waters in times past.

My take-out was less than a mile downstream from the confluence. The Watab nearly doubles in streamflow and width after the confluence, which made the paddling much easier. The entire route was about five miles and it took me about five hours to complete. From the take-out, the river flows another nine miles to the Mississippi.

This microadventure was so much more than I could have imagined. I hope to finish paddling the Watab River this summer along with the upper reaches of the north branch, which flows through a series of lakes at Saint John’s. The south fork needs a closer look as well...

I hope you can find yourself a safe and exciting microadventure. Let your imagination get things started then do a little research about your area. Use a mapping app to locate some green space (remember “water is life” when looking for wildlife), plan for the task at-hand, then behold the discoveries you will find.



The confluence of the North and South Forks of the Watab River. The Watab flows 9.8 miles to the Mississippi from this point. KYLE RAUCH.

KYLE RAUCH is the Outdoor U director of CSB/SJU Adventure Programs and environmental education coordinator.

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- ¹ Humphreys, A. 2014. *Microadventures: Local Discoveries for Great Escapes*.
- ² Gannet, H. 1902. *The Origin of Certain Place Names in the United States*.
- ³ State of Minnesota, Department of Natural Resources. 2004. *Watab River Fish Survey*, 2003.
- ⁴ LaDuke, W. *Honor the Earth*.
- ⁵ *Indian Affairs: laws and treaties*, Vol. 2. Treaty with the Sioux, etc., 1825, Article 5, p. 251-252.
- ⁶ Mitchell, W. 1915. *History of Stearns County, Minnesota*.

Watch a 1-minute video of Kyle’s microadventure:
https://youtu.be/fwvA_DmZcp8

A Flagship Species for the Abbey Arboretum

JACOB NEY '20

While studying abroad with Round River Conservation Studies in Botswana, we studied the use of *traditional* flagship species to promote and fund ecosystem conservation efforts. After returning to Minnesota, I dove deeper into the research for my senior thesis in environmental studies and applied it to a case study using Saint John's Abbey Arboretum.

Flagship species are important tools for their ability to drive conservation work, but many traditional flagship species are not as effective as they could be and many *non-traditional* flagship species could be more effective at conservation of the whole landscape.

A *traditional* flagship species is a charismatic animal (most often a mammal) the general public is excited to protect. The best-known examples of traditional flagship species include lions, polar bears, elephants, and apes. The World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF) famously uses the giant panda as their logo.

Unfortunately, the conservation of many traditional flagship species fail in their intended efforts to conserve the broader habitats. Much of the capital gained in fundraising for pandas, for example, goes to captive breeding programs instead of protecting the incredibly biodiverse and highly threatened habitat in which they live.

Other flagship species that we may love are poorly perceived by local communities. Consider how difficult it can be to convince a rural African farmer to support the elephant that tramples his crops and the lion that kills his cattle. Because of issues such as these with “traditional” flagship species, I wanted to write my senior thesis about the characteristics that make a flagship species effective, and consider whether “non-traditional” flagship species, such as plants and insects, could do the job better.

By collecting data from academic literature, I identified a short list of criteria needed to make an effective flagship species. It should:

- be charismatic
- be easily recognizable
- have value to the people living around it
- live in a habitat in need of conservation
- effectively raise funds to support the conservation of the entire habitat.

Using these criteria, I created a survey to select a flagship species for Saint John's Abbey Arboretum and administered it to 108 CSB/SJU community members, including Outdoor U staff and environmental studies professors and students.

Respondents strongly preferred species that were culturally and locally valuable, well known, easily



The panda logo of the World Wildlife Fund for Nature represents the uses of a “traditional” flagship species to encourage conservation and education. The Outdoor U and Saint John's Maple Syrup logos reflect the use of “non-traditional” flagship species.

recognizable, and colorful or unique. Additionally, most people identified with the forested parts of the Abbey Arboretum over the prairies, lakes, and wetlands.

First, let's consider the very traditional runner-up—the white-tailed deer. This deer is well-known, easily recognizable, and charismatic. Hunters are a fan for the sport and meat these animals provide. Indeed, hunting fees support overall conservation efforts and each autumn a controlled archery hunt removes females from the population in our own arboretum.

Yet this is also why the white-tailed deer would be a bad flagship species. The population in the Abbey Arboretum is unsustainably high—there are currently around fifteen to thirty individuals per square mile while eight to ten is considered a healthy population. Overgrazing by deer leads to detrimental effects on succession of new trees and for the overall biodiversity of the forest, so fences and other tools are used to stop deer from doing further harm. A species that is currently harming its ecosystem more than helping it would serve poorly as a flagship species for conservation efforts.

Data from my survey suggests the sugar maple tree may prove most effective for representing the Abbey Arboretum. Like the deer, the sugar maple primarily resides within the forest, which is within the area of the arboretum that survey respondents reported enjoying the most. It is also a well-known, easily identifiable species.

Outdoor U already successfully uses a non-traditional flagship species – an oak tree– in their logo, but they may be able to gather more members and support for their conservation and education efforts, by identifying a sugar maple as a prominent representation of their organization or the Abbey Arboretum landscape. Indeed, they are already well on the way by using it as a reason to gather volunteers for the maple syrup season.

FAMILY SUMMER BUCKET LIST

Ongoing, online

Free and available on our website.

Get inspired on how to explore the natural world with your family this summer! Available to print, this beautifully-designed bucket list will encourage the whole family to get outside. More information on each activity is posted online.

VIRTUAL NATURE TRIVIA

Jun 25, Jul 11, Jul 23

Free and open to the public. Free-will donations accepted in support of Outdoor U programs. Register by noon the day before the trivia event.

Connect with fellow nature nuts and compete in a friendly trivia game. These events will be hosted on Zoom using an online quiz platform. Thursday evening games are geared toward adults. Saturday morning is family trivia! Instructions and registration available on our website. Prizes awarded to the top teams.

NATURE EXPLORERS "AT HOME" SUMMER CAMPS

weeks of Jul 13, 20, 27

Materials available FREE online. Or pay \$50 fee for additional facilitation by camp staff.

Recommended for rising 3rd-6th grade students, these three camps are designed for kids to do at home this summer. Paid registration gets you: daily personal interaction with Outdoor U naturalists via Flipgrid online; a thoughtful balance between screen time and "green" time; all camp materials printed and mailed to your home; plus special surprises! Camp themes include: Jr. Naturalist, Nature Art, and Nature Near Me.

MN WOODLAND OWNERS WEEKEND

Fri-Sat, Oct 2-3

\$35-single day; \$70-both days; discounts for Outdoor U members; early registration ends Aug 28

Join us for one or both days of workshops designed for woodland owners and nature lovers in Minnesota. Nationally recognized keynote speakers Lee Frelich (Fri p.m.) and Doug Tallamy (Sat a.m.), field tours in the Abbey Arboretum, concurrent sessions, exhibit hall, lunch/dinner and refreshments. Session details and registration on our website.

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Sugar maples are culturally important at Saint John's for the yearly tradition of maple syrup production. The Saint John's maple syrup operation was established in 1942, and the Ojibwe practiced the tradition on the same land for hundreds of years before European settlement. Maple syrup season is perhaps one of the largest community building events of the year for Outdoor U, engaging hundreds of volunteers and providing education and exposure to this landscape.

Perhaps more conservation organizations could recognize how a non-traditional species like the sugar maple tree can effectively bring together hundreds of people to appreciate the land and promote conservation for the good of all species in that landscape.

JACOB NEY is a 2020 graduate of Saint John's University and was a lead facilitator for the Peer Resource Program.

Organisms Considered as a Flagship Species for Saint John's Abbey Arboretum

- Blue-spotted salamander (*Ambystoma laterale*)—An easily identifiable and charismatic amphibian
- Wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*)—A well-known bird species
- Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*)—A grass species of the prairie, not well-known or liked
- Goldenrod (*Solidago sp.*)—Used in intro biology labs, but still not well known or liked
- White-tailed deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*)—A charismatic, well-known traditional flagship species
- Largemouth bass (*Micropterus salmoides*)—A fish to represent the lake and wetland ecosystems
- Sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*)—Has strong cultural importance at CSB/SJU
- Regal fritillary (*Speyeria Idalia*)—An endangered butterfly

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SAGATAGAN SEASONS

Summer 2020

OUTDOOR UNIVERSITY

THE PROGRAM

Saint John's **Outdoor University** provides environmental and outdoor education through classes, events and initiatives with the Abbey Arboretum, Saint John's University and the College of Saint Benedict.

THE PLACE

Saint John's **Abbey Arboretum** is more than 2,500 acres of lakes, prairie, oak savanna and forest owned by Saint John's Abbey and surrounding Saint John's University.

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MN WOW!

Fri-Sat, Oct 2-3

A 2-day conference for woodland owners and lovers in Minnesota. Space is limited! Register now.

NATURE TRIVIA

The 'virtual' edition

Trivia Nights:
Thurs, Jun 25
Thurs, Jul 23
7:30 p.m.

Family Trivia:
Sat, Jul 11
10:00 a.m.

Nature Explorers

SUMMER CAMP

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Weeks of: Jul 13, Jul 20, Jul 27

Materials available online for free.

OR

Register for daily meet-ups with camp staff, special surprises, and more!

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