



FALL/WINTER 2020-2021

VERMONT *Nature*

Virtual & Outdoor Learning at the VINS Nature Center

Late summer is always an exciting time of year in VINS School Programs, as we help teachers get ready for the new school year. This year has been no exception, as we have continued to meet the needs of classroom teachers in the evolving landscape of education in the COVID-19 era.

With VINS' long history of providing high-quality environmental and place-based education, we are well-situated to support teachers and families as they take their students outside.

VINS has long recognized that there are numerous advantages to bringing the learning beyond the four walls of the classroom.

Schools are embracing the opportunity for more outdoor learning and all the benefits that come with place-based education. Among these benefits are increased teacher satisfaction and engagement, improved academic performance and decreased behavioral issues, as well as better overall health for students and teachers. Now, when communities are especially focused on health and safety, an outdoor classroom is a perfect solution. It provides plenty of natural breezes and space for social distancing. Being outside can also reduce stress, helping people to feel more relaxed and less anxious. This is especially important during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Homeschoolers at the VINS Nature Center

Place-based education also nurtures strong community connections, and VINS is often one of those pillars of support and connection for schools. In addition to providing teachers with outdoor teaching tips, lesson ideas, virtual lessons and community connections, we also help teachers participate in different citizen science projects. We are supporting local teachers who are taking water quality measurements in Kedron Brook in Woodstock, Vermont, helping classrooms enter data into iNaturalist, and assisting students who are tracking observations through Journey North, one of North America's premiere citizen science programs.

In addition, we support homeschooling families by offering a series of lessons that engage parents and their children in the outdoors, science and nature discovery. The campus of the VINS Nature Center is an excellent classroom with space to learn in our meadow, forest and river's edge. Preschoolers and their families come to our outdoor classroom in the middle of our forest every other week to explore, play, sing and learn together. This provides opportunities for science discovery as well as socialization and a community of support for parents. Parents of older children can find this same kind of support in our program for Little Explorers (K - Grade 2) and Nature's Adventurers (Grade 3 - 5). VINS Science Educators take these students and their families on excursions around the campus as well as down into the Quechee Gorge.

Lessons encourage students to dig deep, think critically, share ideas, explore, discover and ask questions about the natural world.

Little Explorers and Nature's Adventurers also participate in virtual lessons that help them explore their own backyards and local natural places. The homeschooling series will continue into the winter and beyond as we work to provide long-term support to parents, educators and families.

Throughout all of our education efforts at VINS, we believe in connecting people to the outdoors and to their local place. Now, more than ever, is the time to head outside to learn, explore and discover.

—Hannah Gelroth, M.Ed., Director, School Programs
& Teacher Professional Development



Jack Lee
Board Chair

View from the Forest Canopy Walk

Charles F. Rattigan
Executive Director

A Special Message

Given the times, I think often of the opening lines of *A Tale of Two Cities* by Charles Dickens:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light...

That said, VINS has been fortunate, and while we closed the doors on March 14, 2020, we were able to reopen to the public following the governor’s guidelines on June 15, 2020. We instituted a remote-working policy for staff immediately upon closing, unless one was essential to caring for the program birds, reptiles and wild birds. A mandatory mask and social distancing protocol was put in place immediately and continues today.

As you know, the natural world does not pause or take time out. While the Nature Center was closed, the Center for Wild Bird Rehabilitation has remained open daily, and is furthermore having another record-breaking year! More than 900 wild birds

have found their way to us – over 300 more than all of last year – with three months to go. We could not have done this without the professionalism of the staff and the help of our dedicated volunteers.

We are grateful for the outpouring of support during this time of COVID-19 from friends and foundations. Your generosity has meant that we are able to maintain an uninterrupted focus on our mission of environmental education, wild bird rehabilitation and research. We know the next few months will be very challenging. The key to our stability is our staff and volunteers, who are our most valuable assets and are crucial to our success.

To our donors, members, students and visitors, please accept our gratitude for your support and faith in us.

Stay well and safe this holiday season.

—Charles F. Rattigan, Executive Director

Thank You!

As I reflect on the last six months, it feels more like six years have gone by. As with other organizations and individuals, VINS has seen its share of challenges in the face of the pandemic.

We are fortunate to have a great leadership team, staff, trustees and advisors who have so far guided the organization through this difficult period. We are also grateful to have an energetic and generous group of trustees and volunteers without whom VINS would not be where it is today. Thank you to all of the volunteers who have spent countless hours feeding baby birds, caring for the resident birds, transporting injured birds, assisting in ground maintenance/facilities projects, greeting guests and answering questions, and assisting with nature camps.

VINS would also not be in the same place we are today were it not for the support of the broader community. We want to thank all of our partners (banks who helped secure additional

funding sources and our nonprofit peers who came together with us for combined programs and to build a stronger voice to communicate our collective positions), the state and local governments who provided relief and support as we managed a complex range of issues and challenges, and the community at large who supported VINS during the shutdown and who came back to visit as we reopened our campus.

As we head into the fall, we are looking forward to continuing to provide the community with experiential environmental education (on campus, in the classrooms and virtually), important and interesting research, and a continued destination for injured birds to be nurtured back to health. Thank you for all you do, which allows us to continue the important work at VINS!

—Jack Lee, Board Chair



VINS Research Endeavors

Bugs, Birds, & Butterflies!

Fall is a time of migration and change.

As birds and bugs start to leave, our research efforts begin to focus on their movements. One of our new initiatives this summer was a partnership with the Black River Action Team to inventory the different types of dragonfly species that are present in Vermont. This project is a collection of observations that are submitted by users of iNaturalist (an app that allows users to record and organize nature findings, then allows others to see this data). Additionally, iNaturalist can aid users in making a species identification if needed. The data is automatically entered in our own iNaturalist account, allowing anyone's observations at the VINS Nature Center to be included in our database. This project allows us to track the movements of dragonflies and gives us an idea of what species call Vermont home. Since there are 16 species of dragonflies in North America that are regular migrants, observations during this period can be helpful not only to our researchers, but also to others who may be interested in learning about dragonfly behavior and migration.

A similar database was created on iNaturalist in collaboration with the White River Partnership to inventory crayfish throughout Vermont. This project is especially important to help track the spread of the Rusty Crayfish, an invasive species throughout the state, and to identify locations where native species are thriving and can be protected.

For more information on crayfish in Vermont, visit: inaturalist.org/projects/vermont-crayfish-index.

Fall also brings about more well-known migrations such as those of raptors and monarch butterflies.

This year, VINS will begin its fourth season of tracking the fall migration of monarch butterflies through monarch tagging, as part of Monarch Watch. Last season we tagged 200 butterflies as they began their journey south, and this year we hope for similar numbers.



New this year for VINS will be the creation of an official hawk watch site on Mount Ascutney in Windsor, Vermont. The site was created as part of the Hawk Migration Association of North America's long-term hawk counting efforts. VINS staff and volunteers will spend as many days as possible this season on the mountain counting the number of migrating raptors and monarchs!

With the change from summer to fall, we have also wrapped up our breeding bird survey for 2020. In June, staff and volunteers spent three mornings in the field recording every bird that was present at 18 different points on our campus. We observed 54 different species throughout the three days. We gained insight into which species were nesting, and which were passing through. A second part of this project involved sampling for insects at each point to determine what food was available for nesting birds. Results will be compiled during the winter.

Several other long-term projects will continue through the winter, including our game camera survey and weather monitoring. Stay tuned for more information on our new research programs!

—Jim Armbruster, Research Coordinator



Leonard Reitsma, Ph.D.
VINS Board Trustee

“Fall is a time of migration and change.”



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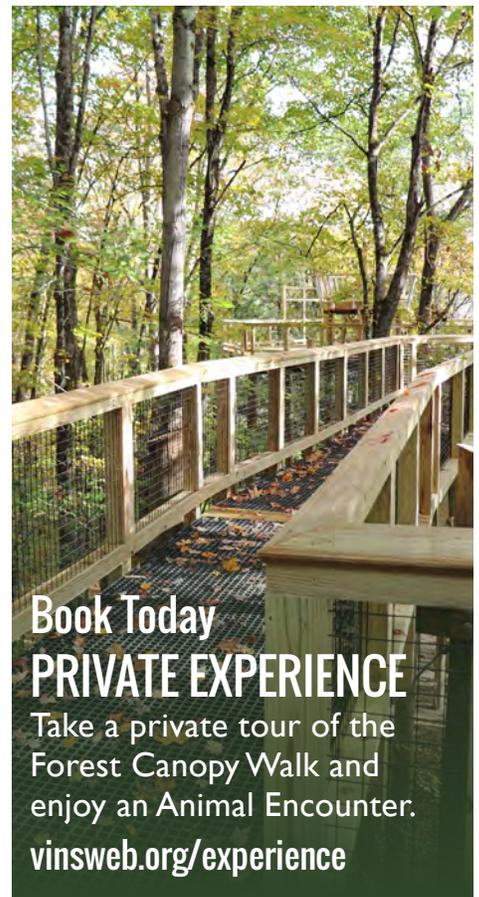
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