

33K

**NATURE
CENTER
VISITORS**

83

**ANIMAL
OUTREACHES**

375

**NATURE
CENTER
PROGRAMS**

641

**NATURE
CAMPERS**

JUN – AUG 2025



**NEWS FROM THE
NATURE CENTER**

**FALL
2025**

Wildlife Ambassador Programs

Reaching New Communities

As visitors to the VINS Nature Center engage with our wildlife ambassador programs, one of our roles as educators is to highlight the aspects of the VINS mission that are less visible, and to help our community understand the interconnectedness of the organization. I find myself talking about the work of the Center for Wild Bird Rehabilitation, for example, and the surprising ways in which the life of an injured or orphaned bird is not so different from our diverse human relationships.

During the baby bird season, we will sometimes ask one of the resident ambassador birds to be a “foster parent” to a displaced young one, to prevent the nestling from imprinting on humans, and help give it the skills it needs to survive in the wild.

This past spring, VINS partnered with the Vermont Department of Children and Families to create three specialized outreach programs for foster families across Vermont.

We themed the programs around different kinds of “bird families,” and discussed everything from a kestrel’s life cycle to an ambassador bird’s journey from wild-living hawk to calm symbol of wilderness in the classroom. We talked about how those relationships are built, and what to do if you find a baby bird in need of help.

Our outreach programs make it possible for us to reach new communities and bring stories of the inherent connectedness of the natural world into a different environment. We are so grateful for this partnership and hope to continue it in the future!

Anna Morris, Director of Wildlife Ambassador Programs



BLACKBURNIAN WARBLER



EASTERN BLUEBIRDS



AMERICAN KESTREL



Welcome to the World Vinnie the Bald Eagle

If you visited this summer, chances are you saw more eagles than just Minnesota, Wyoming, and Arizona – our three residents. The Tree House brought you to a view of wild Bald Eagles, nesting for the first time on this property. We first caught sight of the eaglet in late May, a three-week-old fluffball, standing and demanding food. Even though the nest is 400 yards away, our spotting scope brought the eye close, and most days we had a clear visual of the eaglet standing on the nest or hopping to a nearby branch.

In early August, Vinnie took his first flight.

He perched several days in a White Pine very close to the Forest Canopy Walk, where children were playing in the Spider Web. For two weeks he returned to the nest to be fed – a fish, a squirrel, even a young goose! He spent more and more time on the wing, and September gave us glimpses of Vinnie soaring high above VINS property. We anticipate that all three eagles will be leaving our area sometime this fall, before Dewey's Pond ices over, to find a better hunting ground for the winter.

When the mated pair return in early spring, we'll be ready. Our plan is to bring you much closer to the nest. Figuring out how to livestream the eagle nest – 100-feet high in the most remote part of the property, without electricity, and without disturbing them – is a fun challenge. If they survive the winter and return to the same nest, by March you could be watching the VINS Bald Eagle family on your phone or home computer.

Alden Smith, Executive Director

JUN – AUG 2025

American Kestrel Research Project

69

BANDED

21

**BOXES
MONITORED**

16

FLEDGED



Center for Wild Bird Rehabilitation

645

**TOTAL BIRD
INTAKES**

375

**NESTLINGS
+ FLEDGLINGS**

270

ADULT BIRDS

VINSWEB.ORG

Animal Outreach Traveling the State

One of the joys of delivering outreach programs for VINS is getting to explore the nooks and crannies of rural Vermont. It's easy to be tempted by the excitement of traveling afar, seeing other states and even other countries; yet there is so much to be found within our little state itself. Most of my outreaches have been to towns I have never heard of before, often just far enough away from Quechee that the majority of attendees have never been to VINS.

Those programs are some of my favorites, as I introduce kids and adults alike to the beauty and wonder of our live reptiles and raptors.

One such outreach took place in Rupert, Vermont, at the R.K. Kittay Public Library. I headed out with the materials and animals for our summer library program this year, *Color Our World*. This would be my fifth time delivering this program, so I felt confident and prepared. As it turns out, this would be my favorite library outreach of all! As I arrived, the room was bustling with excited children and caregivers engaged in crafts and activities, but everyone settled as I introduced myself and prepared to bring out the animals. The audience was incredibly engaged throughout the program, and I received thoughtful questions from kids and adults alike. At the end, I was given a final surprise: one of the children, who had been quietly sitting at the craft table, presented two rocks painted with pictures of Ferrisburgh, our American Kestrel, and Jersey, our Eastern Box Turtle. Those rocks are proudly displayed on my desk, and I smile each time I look at them and remember my wonderful outreach in Rupert!

Kassian Jensen, VINS Educator



WATCH VIDEO



View summer highlights at VINS!

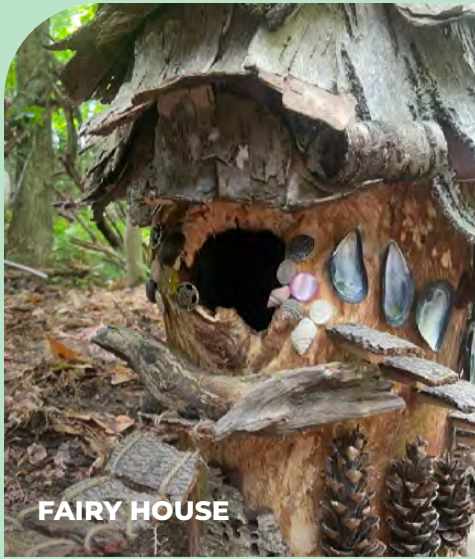
VINS Volunteer Spotlight Aine Devine

My name is Aine and I'm thirteen years old. I have been volunteering at VINS since I was six. In those seven years, I have worked in all three branches of VINS (education, research, and avian wildlife rehabilitation) and my favorite job so far has been catching monarch butterflies in research. This involves looking in stands of good-smelling goldenrod. VINS mostly specializes in birds, but there are all kinds of animals involved with research, most of them wild.

Monarch butterflies migrate each year from the northern United States and southern Canada all the way to Mexico. In the late summer and autumn, when they are starting their journeys, I catch them with a net. Then I put a tiny tag on the wing, and release the butterfly. The tags let humans find out how many butterflies reach Mexico.

I have enjoyed all my volunteer positions, but catching butterflies is my favorite!





FAIRY HOUSE

Nature Camp Magic in Play

For VINS Nature Camp, The Pine Knoll is home. Under the towering conifers of this secluded area of the Nature Center, nature-based play rules the day. Tiny Fairy Houses and massive shelters spring up throughout the summer. Our youngest campers, the Peeps, build with hopes of luring Fairies to visit their stick houses and – if they are lucky – finding the “treasures” they may leave behind.

This magical play is a highlight for many of our Peeps.

Older campers occasionally noticed these loved and intricate structures, but quickly turned back to their own building efforts. Then, one week, something truly special occurred: a group of campers became inspired to create some nature magic of their own. They painted rainbow rocks and sticks and spent their free time not playing but hiding these treasures for the Peeps to find. They wrote notes from fairies that thanked the younger campers for their creations. Each morning, they would then check in to find out what the Peeps had discovered that day. Over the course of the week, it became difficult to tell who was more excited for those daily discoveries: the Peeps who were receiving these fairy gifts, or the older campers who witnessed the joy and wonder their work inspired.

That week served as a reminder of the power of play. What began as regular nature-based play created opportunities for imaginations to be free to believe in magic and for a group of children to create kindness and foster community among VINS campers. That is the true magic of play.

*Kelly Marqua, Family Programs & Nature Camp Coordinator
Sarah Strew, Director of Nature Camp & Adult Education*



NATURE CAMPERS

VINS School Programs Wee Wonders

The VINS Wee Wonders program not only immerses toddlers in the natural world, but it also builds empathy. In a recent *World of Water* lesson, children met our large fish puppet. I handed the puppet to the first child, who decided to give it a big hug. Without prompting, as the puppet made its way around the circle, each additional child did the same: hugged the puppet and passed it on. This simple act stood out to me – not only were the toddlers deepening their connection to the animal, they were practicing key social-emotional skills as they waited their turn and modeled peer behavior.

After this, the rest of the lesson came alive.

Their play was more creative and detailed as they caught pretend fish with their nets and tried to avoid the hungry otter. They tossed blue scarves of ‘water’ up into the air amongst laughter and shouts of delight. The world of water was now their own.

Hannah Gelroth, Senior Director of Education



WEE WONDERS



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VINS NATURE CENTER

A Forest of Lights

November – January



SELECT DATES AVAILABLE!