



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# ONE Voice

## Outreach, News, and Events *January - February 2018*

*Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge/Lower Great Lakes Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office*

### Connecting with Urban Students About Animals

Staff from the Lower Great Lakes FWCO traveled to Fletcher Elementary School in Tonawanda, NY this month to explore animal adaptations with the entire 4th grade class. Students learned how to investigate and analyze the clues left behind on mammal skulls that can hint at what that animal was like while it was alive. Student observations such as placement of the eyes, or what types of teeth are present, helped them identify to what western New York animal it belonged. By the end of the two days, about 150 students observed, touched, and explored the furs and skulls of the mammals living right in their backyards! (Contact: Marcus Rosten)



### It's Never Too Late to Recognize Volunteers

*Roses are red, violets are blue  
You're wild about wildlife and we are too  
For surveys, mowing and students you teach  
We count on you from maintenance to outreach  
So thank you all for your assistance  
Without your help we couldn't go the distance  
With Iroquois volunteers, conservation does blossom  
That's because you're all turtly awesome.*

On Thursday, February 15th, Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge recognized the FY17 accomplishments of their volunteers with a “Valentine” commemorating their accomplishments, an appreciation dinner and an awards presentation. The dinner was hosted at the Iroquois NWR Visitor Center and featured guest speaker Dr. Doug Wilcox, Empire Innovation Professor of Wetland Science at the College of Brockport. Dr. Wilcox gave an intriguing presentation about two wetland projects he conducted at National Wildlife Refuges and the positive effects the changes had to those habitats. Iroquois NWR had 42 volunteers whom dedicated over 5,300 hours to the refuge in FY17. A total of 13 volunteers were able to attend the appreciation dinner receiving a gift from the refuge, milestone pins, and nine individuals received a Volunteer Pass. Volunteers assisted with outreach, maintenance, education, special events, visitor services, biological surveys, nest box checks and habitat management. We appreciate all that our volunteers do, and truly couldn't have achieved it all without them.

Here are some of the major landmarks reached in FY17: Celeste Morien, Dorothy Gerhart, and Charlie Silvernail achieved 1,000 career service hours, Larry Kersten and Andy Eberhardt reached 1,500 hours of service, Bob Schmidt hit his 25,000 hour milestone, and Carl Zenger reached 30,000 service hours. These milestones as well as those from all our volunteers, new and old, show the collective dedication to Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge and the Fish and Wildlife Service. (Contact: Kathryn Brenner)



Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge  
<http://www.fws.gov/refuge/iroquois/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/IroquoisNationalWildlifeRefuge>

Lower Great Lakes Fish & Wildlife Conservation Office  
<http://www.fws.gov/northeast/lowergreatlakes/>  
<https://www.facebook.com/LGLFWCO>



### **2018 Heron Nest Surveys**

Did you know that herons nest in colonies that are called rookeries? Well, technically they are called heronries, but that term has never really caught on in the U.S. A rookery is actually a nesting colony of rooks, a member of the crow family that lives in Europe and Asia. Whether you call it a rookery or a heronry, we have a big one at Iroquois NWR and earlier this month the refuge counted all the nests in it. This survey consists of staff and volunteers trudging through snow along transect lines counting the nests above them. This time of year the herons are spending their time in warmer climates to the south, so all of last year's nests are empty, but still in the trees. With no leaves to get in the way, counting them is a breeze, assuming you don't trip

on a stick or fall through the ice while you are looking up and counting them.

A total of 637 nests were counted this year (compared to 618 in 2017 and a 5-year average of 592). Although not our highest count (2015 had 673 nests), the 2018 heron nest numbers show an upward trend in the nesting population since inhabiting this location.

The refuge provides the ideal habitat for herons to nest, roost, and feed. They are always a visitor favorite to watch fly with their slow wing beats and prehistoric look and to watch hunt with their snake-like necks. Look for them on the refuge in spring, summer, and fall standing in the shallow edges of the marshes waiting for their next meal to swim, slither, or hop by. (Contact: Kathryn Brenner)

### **Muskrat Houses on the Rise at Iroquois NWR**

In February, Iroquois NWR staff took advantage of thick ice conditions in refuge wetlands to conduct its annual muskrat house survey. Twenty-seven, 10,000 square meter plots were surveyed and all muskrat houses within these plots were counted. Surveys were not conducted in 2016 and 2017 due to the lack of safe ice, so this year's ice conditions were a welcome change. Wetlands where the survey occurred include Cayuga Pool and Mohawk South, North, and West Pools. This year, 376 houses were counted, with Mohawk South Pool having the highest density of houses.



Counting muskrat houses gives the refuge an idea of the size of the muskrat population. Muskrats help to manage emergent wetlands by eating perennial vegetation such as cattail. They also make houses out of these emergent marsh plants. These muskrat "eat-outs" as they are called introduce open water areas within dense stands of vegetation, making these areas much more attractive to waterfowl and other water birds for resting, feeding, and nesting. Also, many birds such as geese, ducks, and black terns will use muskrat houses and feeding platforms for nesting sites. Marshes that have a lot of muskrat activity almost always contain more nesting waterfowl and water birds than marshes where few muskrats are found. This year's count shows that the number of muskrat houses on the refuge is rising, making us confident that these wetlands will be attractive to water birds as they return to the refuge from their winter break. (Contact: Paul Hess)