

ISSUE 6 WINTER 2025/26

# RABBIT!

COLUMBUS NATURE, SCIENCE & COMMUNITY

*New!*

Now with  
Video Stories  
+ Audio Mystery

**BRRR!**

WINTER FUN  
INSIDE!

IN THIS ISSUE:

AMAZING OWL  
ADAPTATIONS

UNCOVERING  
OHIO'S ICE AGE

AWAKE  
IN WINTER

SPEAKING UP  
FOR NATURE

...AND MORE!



**On the cover:**

Up close with a Great Horned Owl and its striking yellow eyes. This owl is a year-round resident of Ohio.



**HONORING THE FIRST PEOPLE OF THIS LAND.**

As we explore the natural world around us in what is now called Columbus and Central Ohio, we acknowledge that this land has long been home to the Mound Culture People, Adena, Shawnee, Myaamia, Kaskaskia, Delaware, Ottawa, Wyandot, Seneca, Cayuga and other Indigenous Nations. These communities have cared for the land, rivers, and wetlands for thousands of years, shaping the natural world through their traditions, knowledge, and deep connection to the land.

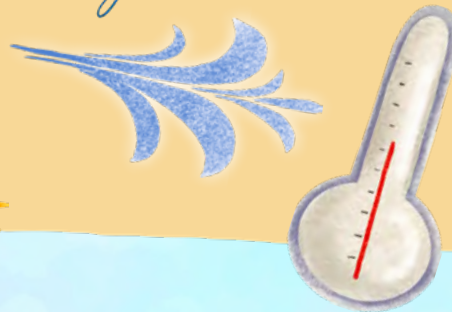
The land was taken from its original stewards through forceful and harmful treaties. By acknowledging the land's history, we open the space to ask ourselves how we can be kind and caring humans, and how we can take better care of the nature around us now and in the future. This includes supporting Indigenous Land Back movements and Indigenous Sovereignty of our lands. Please check out Native American Indian Center of Central Ohio (NAICCO.com) to learn more or donate to their local movement.

**HI EVERYONE,**

Winter may look quiet, but there is a lot happening if you know where to look. In this issue of Ribbit! you will discover amazing owl adaptations, uncover Ohio's Ice Age past, explore with animal senses, and learn about enjoying the outdoors, reducing waste, and speaking up for nature.

You will also find fun challenges, cozy stories, and something new this season. Video stories and an audio mystery invite you to scan, listen, and explore, whether you are indoors or outside in the cold.

*— Your Ribbit! Team*



**WWW.RIBBITMAGAZINE.COM**

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Long before winter coats, giant glaciers covered Ohio. Follow the icy clues they left behind.

### AWAKE IN WINTER **PAGE 18**

Meet our cold-hardy Columbus animals that stay active through winter.

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Slow down, try animal senses, and see how paying attention can reveal hidden wildlife all around you.

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Discover simple ways to cut holiday waste and make celebrations more joyful, creative, and planet-friendly.

### SPEAKING UP FOR NATURE **PAGE 26**

Discover how caring about nature can turn into real action that helps communities and the environment.

### BEFORE YOU GO... **PAGE 28**

One last stop to wrap things up and check your puzzle answers.

### Star Count

It gets dark early in winter. Count the stars scattered across the pages of this magazine.



(You can check page 29 to see if you're right.)



# COLUMBUS NATURE NEWS

WINTER EDITION

In this winter edition, Columbus Nature News highlights local parks, curious animals, and the hidden changes happening in Ohio during the colder months.

## Winter Hike Series

Families can explore the outdoors with the Winter Hike Series from Columbus & Franklin County Metro Parks. From December through February, families can walk any trail, any length, at different parks across central Ohio. Kids can collect stamps, enjoy winter treats, and celebrate the season at a Winter Hike Celebration on February 22.

## CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT

Families can join the Christmas Bird Count at many locations across central Ohio. Local parks host events through Columbus & Franklin County Metro Parks, Columbus Audubon leads bird walks, and families can also take part at Alum Creek State Park. You can join guided walks or count birds at home, which helps scientists learn how bird populations change from year to year.



## GREEN AT HOME

Families can find easy, planet-friendly ideas all year long at Columbus GreenSpot. The free program shares simple tips for saving energy, water, and reducing waste at home. Learn more at [columbusgreenspot.org](http://columbusgreenspot.org).



## Learning from Wetlands



World Wetlands Day takes place on February 2, with the theme Wetlands and Traditional Knowledge. The day highlights how people around the world have long learned from wetlands and why protecting these special places matters for clean water, wildlife, and future generations.

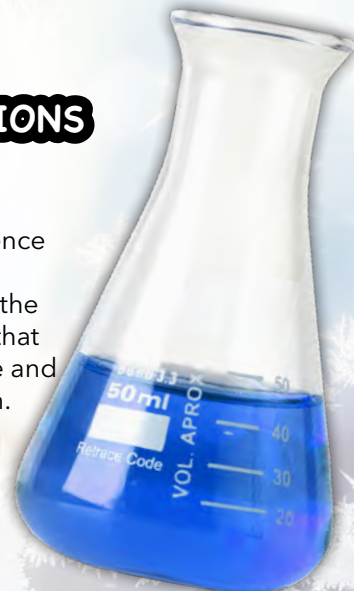
## LITTLE ACORN HEROES

January 21 is Squirrel Appreciation Day, a fun day to notice one of the most common wild neighbors in our neighborhoods and parks. This day recognizes the important role squirrels play in the ecosystem, such as spreading seeds and helping new trees grow.



## GIRLS ASK BIG QUESTIONS

International Day of Women and Girls in Science on February 11 celebrates women and girls in science fields, including those who study wildlife, ecosystems, weather, and the environment. The day reminds us that many scientists who protect nature and study the natural world are women.



## HIDDEN LEAVES

Winter trees may look bare, but spring already waits on their branches. Many trees form leaf buds before winter begins, then hold them tight through cold weather. Protective bud scales help shield the tiny leaves inside from frost and snow. When days grow longer and warmer, the buds open, and new leaves appear right on schedule.





# AMAZING

# OWL

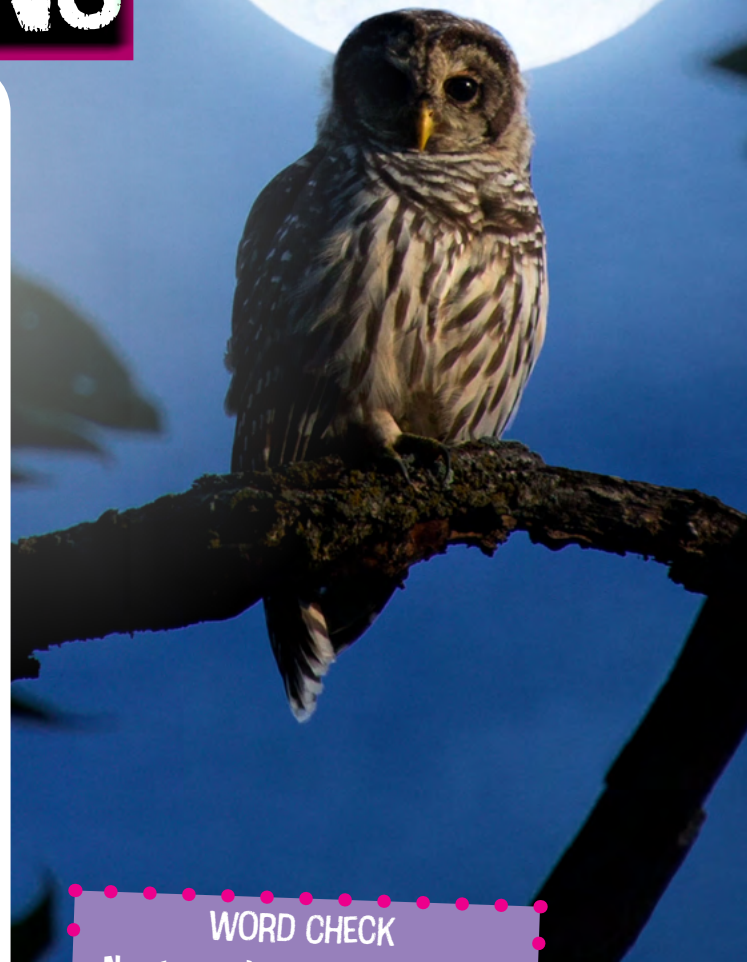
# ADAPTATIONS

By Kate Brierley  
Blacklick Woods Naturalist

» **T**he moon looms overhead and darkness coats the forest like a heavy mist. You can barely see a thing. It's nearly pitch black beyond your slow footsteps, yet you feel like you're being watched from the shadows. Who could see in this dead winter night? A branch creaks in the wind, followed by a deep silence, until HOO HOO HOO echoes from the distance. It can only be one creature. **An owl!**

Because of their mysterious nocturnal habits and unique appearance, owls are often at the center of many superstitions and myths. Many people believe that owls are wise, when they are actually not that smart compared to other birds. Many people also think that owls only come out at night, but some owls are less nocturnal than others; several owl species often hunt during the day or are completely diurnal. But behind all the tales and questions, **owl behavior and appearance are explained by fascinating adaptations** these creatures have developed in order to survive as fierce hunters of the night. Twelve different species of owls have been recorded in Ohio and all of them have special characteristics and behaviors that are intriguing to learn about.

**Owls are an important part of our ecosystem** and help us understand many adaptations in the natural world. Owls regulate the rodent and bug populations, and in turn, help keep the spread of disease under control. Their eyesight, hearing, feathers, and feet are all marvels of natural adaptation. If you're lucky enough during the day, or daring enough to go out at night, you might just see one of our Ohio species and experience the stunning gaze of an owl.



## WORD CHECK

**Nocturnal:** active at night and resting during the day.

**Diurnal:** active during the day and resting at night.

**Adaptation:** a physical trait or behavior that increases an organism's chances of survival in an ecosystem.



Owls and full moons  
just go together!

From its spot in  
the tree, this  
Barred Owl can  
detect even the  
smallest sound on  
the forest floor.



## INCREDIBLE EARS



Since most species are active during the evening, owls have developed incredibly sensitive, accurate, and unique hearing that helps them navigate and hunt in the dark. In fact, owls have the best hearing out of all tested animals! Owls don't have ears that stick out from their heads like humans do, even though some owls have feather tufts on their head that look like fluffy ears. Instead, owls have an opening called an aperture under all their feathers on each side of their head.

These **apertures** allow the owls to **determine how far and from which direction a sound comes from**. Barred Owls, a common Ohio bird, have an extra special adaptation that makes them better listeners than some other owls. Their ears are uneven on their head! One ear is higher up while the other is lower and closer to the front of their face. This allows the Barred Owl to pinpoint exactly where sounds are coming from: their distance, direction, and height!

### WORD CHECK

**Aperture:** an opening, hole, or gap.

## DID YOU KNOW?

A Barn Owl's facial disc works like a satellite dish that catches sound. This super-sharp hearing lets a Barn Owl detect even tiny noises such as a mouse moving under the snow.







Night flight mode: on.

## VISION



Just like hearing, vision is super important for hunting. Since owls are usually active at night, they need to have vision adapted for activity in the dark. Large eye size is one of these adaptations. **Owls' huge eyes collect and process light really well in dim conditions,** so they are able to see prey in near or total darkness. And similarly to humans, owls use both of their eyes to process visual information, allowing them to have depth perception.

Sharp vision helps this Barn Owl stay locked on what it's flying toward.



While their big eyes are super helpful, they can't move. Owls have a bone in their eye socket that prevents them from moving their eyes side-to-side. Instead, **owls can swivel their heads up to 270 degrees,** which allows them to look behind themselves without moving their bodies.

Owl eyes sit in tube-shaped sockets, which helps them see far in dim light. This is also why they turn their head: because they can't move their eyes side-to-side.







## EYE TO EYE

Get to know these owls up close.  
Each one has its own look!



**Barred Owl**



**Great Horned Owl**



**Eastern Screech-Owl**



**Barn Owl**



**Snowy Owl**



**Long-eared Owl**





## FANTASTIC FEATHERS

> Owls are nearly silent flyers. But how is that possible? Well, owls have several adaptations that allow them to be really quiet for expert hunting. One of those adaptations is their super-sized wings. Owl wing size is fairly large compared to their body size, which means they don't have to flap their wings very often in order to stay in the air – they glide! But even when they do flap their wings, they have specialized feathers to keep themselves from being detected. Their outer flight feathers have comb-like edges that muffle the sound of air passing over their wings.



**This Barred Owl can glide by without making a sound!**

**Snowy skies don't slow a Great Horned Owl.**







Owl feathers are also important for camouflage! Eastern Screech Owls are the most abundant owls in Ohio, but because of their excellent camouflage, people don't often see them. Their complex pattern of gray, white, and brown feathers help them to blend into tree bark, making it difficult for any predators to find them. Their small size helps them stay hidden too!

### WORD CHECK

**Camouflage:** a defense tactic that organisms use to disguise their appearance, usually to blend in with their surroundings.



## TRAIN YOUR EYE!

Look through the gallery and let your eyes warm up for spotting a camouflaged Eastern Screech Owl.

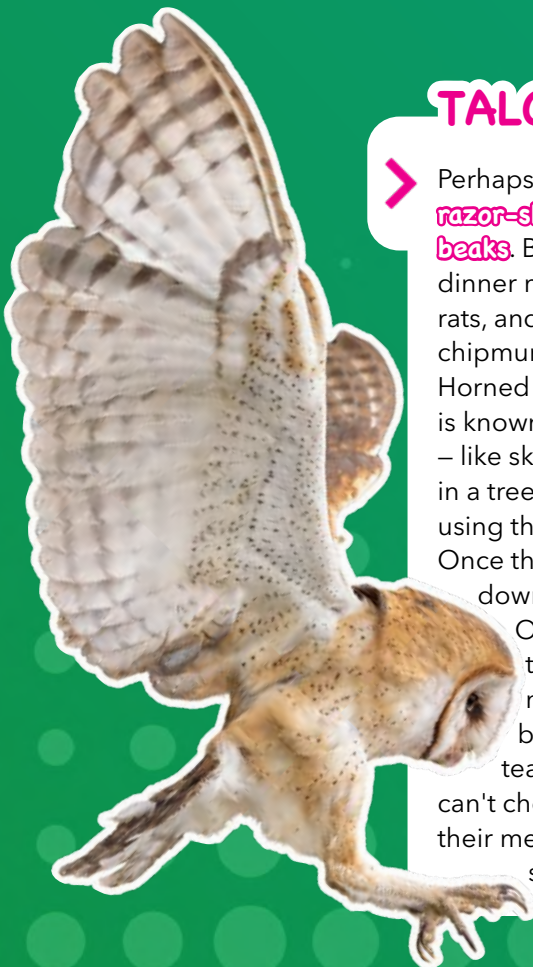




## TALONS AND BILL

➤ Perhaps the most ferocious parts of owls are their **razor-sharp talons and their powerful hooked beaks**. But fear not! Humans are not on an owl's dinner menu. Owls eat rodents like mice and rats, and other small mammals like squirrels or chipmunks. Some also eat insects. The Great Horned Owl, the largest resident owl in Ohio, is known to take down much larger animals – like skunks! Most owls hunt by perching in a tree and waiting for movement below using their exceptional hearing and vision. Once they spot their meal, they quickly swoop down and latch their talons around their target. Owls have a unique locking device in their feet that allows them to hold on tight without too much work. The owl will take its tasty meal back to a tree or its nest and use its beak to tear apart its prey. Owls don't have teeth so they can't chew; they rely on their talons and beak to turn their meal into pieces small enough to swallow whole!

**WORD CHECK**  
**Prey:** an animal that is caught and killed by another for food.



These fuzzy feet work like built-in winter boots. Great Horned Owls have feathers covering their feet and toes all the way to the talons, which helps keep them warm while hunting and perching in cold weather.

They look fluffy now, but these Great Horned Owl chicks will grow into amazing hunters.







Follow the QR code or go to [www.ribbonmagazine.com/library](http://www.ribbonmagazine.com/library) to visit the Blacklick Woods Nature Center and join Naturalist Shannon to learn about owls and winter activities at the Metro Parks!

## PEEK-A-WHO

Shhh! Most of these owls are sleeping. Can you find the five owls peeking and the hidden cat?

(The answers are on page 29)



### MORE ABOUT OWLS

- To learn more about Ohio's owls, visit the Ohio Department of Natural Resources **Division of Wildlife** website for field guides and more at [wildohio.gov](http://wildohio.gov). Look out for the next guided owl hike at **Metro Parks**: [www.metroparks.net/events-new/](http://www.metroparks.net/events-new/). Or meet the animal ambassadors at the **Ohio Wildlife Center** during their Second Saturday free family event.

### FOR EDUCATORS & YOUTH LEADERS

- With the **Parks Connect Grant**, the Friends of Metro Parks provide financial support to help schools, youth centers, and other groups enjoy our metro parks through field trips, transportation assistance, and outdoor programs. To learn more, visit [www.metroparksfriends.org/parksconnect](http://www.metroparksfriends.org/parksconnect).



# UNCOVERING OHIO'S ICE AGE



Glaciers once covered Ohio  
and changed the land forever.  
Their clues still tell the story of an  
icy time long ago.

THE GREAT GLACIER  
THAT COVERED THIS REGION,  
INCLUDING CENTRAL OHIO,  
WAS ABOUT 1,000 FEET THICK.

By Daniel Kelley, PhD,  
The Ohio State University,  
Battelle Center for Science,  
Engineering and Public Policy  
&

Jamey Stutz, PhD,  
Ohio Department of Natural Resources,  
Division of Geological Survey





This is a map of North America with Ohio outlined in black. The white area was covered by large sheets of ice, called glaciers, during the recent Ice Age.



## OHIO'S FROZEN PAST

Can you imagine huge sheets of ice covering most of Ohio? That may be hard to picture, but **very thick layers of ice, called glaciers**, once covered almost all of Canada to our north and much of the Great Lakes region. We don't have glaciers in Ohio anymore, so to understand them we need to look at the **evidence** they left behind on the land and in the rocks, just like a geologist does.

## HOW BIG WAS THE ICE?

The great glacier that covered this region, including central Ohio, was about **1,000 feet thick**. In northern Ohio and over Lake Erie, the ice piled even higher, up to one mile in thickness. That means **the whole area from northern to central Ohio was under a giant sheet of ice**. But not all of Ohio was covered. The glaciers did not reach the areas of eastern and southeastern Ohio where there are lots of hills.



This map of Ohio shows which areas were covered by a glacial ice sheet. The southern edge of the continental glacier reached into Ohio.





## LONG GONE

Of course, we don't have glaciers covering our state anymore. But we can **look for clues they left behind, like a geologist** does. Geologists study rocks, the materials that make up Earth, and their eroded materials, called sediments. They also study Earth's history and natural processes, including how glaciers shaped Ohio's land. By looking at the **rocks and sediments**, we can figure out what processes happened in the past.

Geologists know the **ice sheet was in Ohio until about 14,000 years ago**. That may sound like a long time, but to a geologist it is not very long. Since the ice melted, rivers have flowed, trees have grown, and animals have lived their lives just like we see in nature today.



Go into the field with Jamey the Geologist to look more closely at the sediments in this outcrop! Scan the QR code or go to: [www.ribbitmagazine.com/library!](http://www.ribbitmagazine.com/library!)

## WHY WERE THE GLACIERS HERE?

The glaciers were here because the **climate was much colder** then. We have cold winters now, but snow and ice always melt in spring. Back then, summers were too cold for all the snow to melt. Each year, **more snow and ice built up than melted away**. Over many years, this added up to thousands of feet of ice **forming a giant glacier**.

## WHY ARE THEY GONE NOW?

As the **climate slowly warmed, the glaciers began to melt**. For a time, the southern edge of the ice melted away while the northern part stayed frozen. As the ice melted, it left behind the sediments it once carried.

Over time, **Earth's climate has gone through several cycles of cooling and warming**. When it cooled, glaciers grew and spread south. When it warmed, they melted and moved back north.



## GLACIERS ON THE MOVE

Glaciers do not just sit still. Because they are **so thick and heavy, they slowly slide and flow across the land**. As they move, they **pick up sand, gravel, and bits of rock** from the ground. Those sediments become frozen within the ice and are carried from one place to another. When the climate became warmer and the ice melted, the **glacier left deposits of these sediments** behind.



## HOW DO WE KNOW?

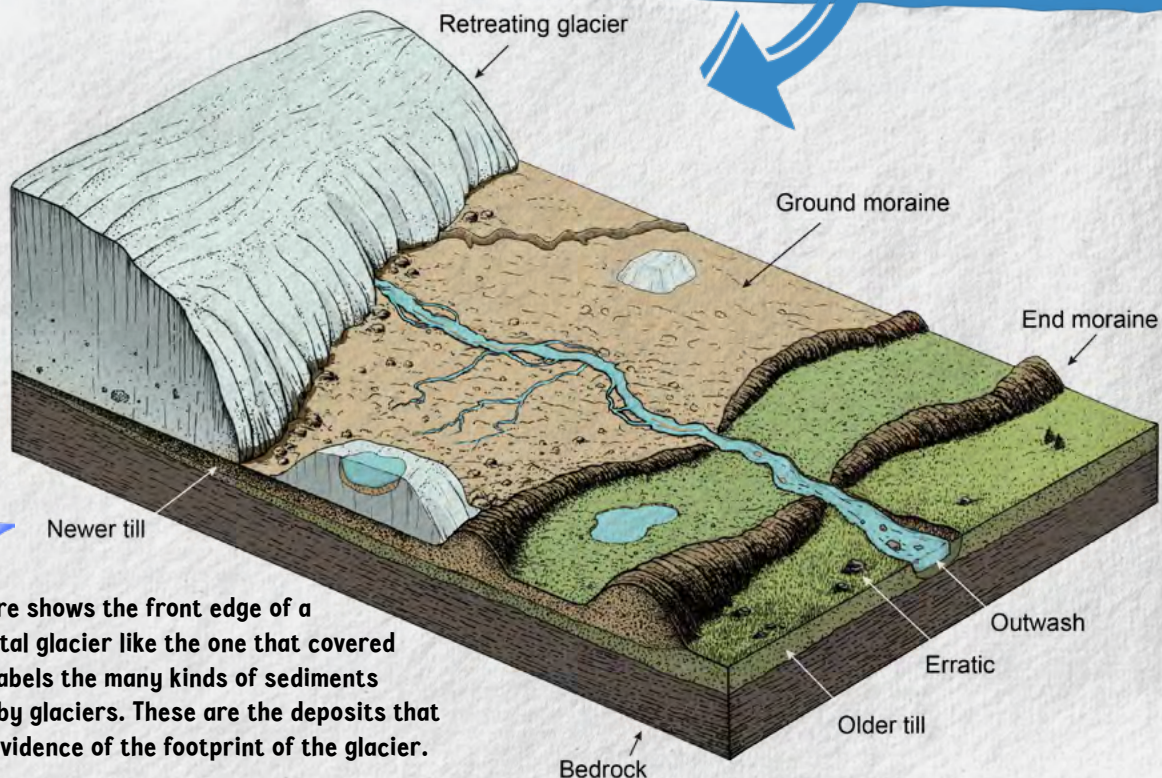
There were no geologists or cameras in Ohio 20,000 years ago, so we must look for evidence in the rocks and sediments. **Uniformitarianism is the idea that the present is the key to the past.** In other words, geologists study how Earth works today to understand how the rocks and sediments we find were formed long ago.

Glaciers create and leave behind a specific type of sediment called till after they have been on the ground in a region for some time. **Till is a deposit of rocks, sand, silt, and mud** that has no layering within it. Geologists observe and study the way that glaciers move and deposit sand and gravel on Earth today in cold areas at the North and South polar regions. By studying places that have glaciers, geologists can be confident that when we see the same type of sediment in places like Ohio, it means that a glacier was here in the past. This is practicing the concept of uniformitarianism.

## EVIDENCE OF GLACIERS

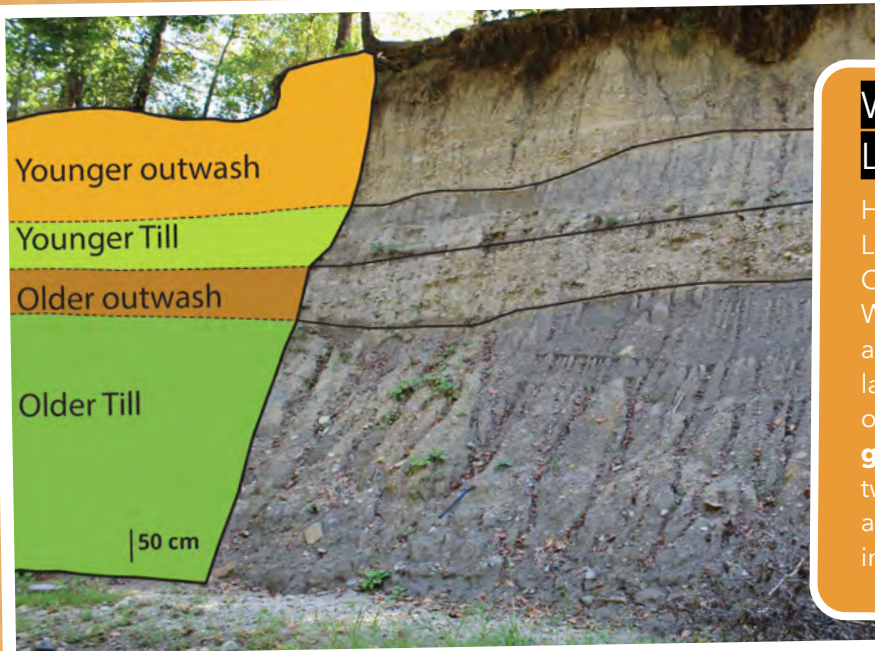
There are many different types of evidence that a glacier once covered a region. The **landforms and deposits they left behind are great clues!** Geologists like to understand the "footprint" of a glacier. They look carefully at the land to find features that the ice eroded and deposited. When a glacier melts, it may pause for a long time and **form a moraine**, a long ridge composed of glacial till.

The area near the edge of the glacial ice sheet is a unique environment. There is a lot of water melting from the front of the glacier and flowing away across the landscape. If melting continues, **large volumes of meltwater produce glacial outwash**, which is sand and gravel deposited in large river valleys. One sign that a glacier once covered an area is when we find a layer of till with glacial outwash above it. That means the glacier once sat over this spot and dropped the till. Later, as the ice melted and the front moved north, this same area ended up in front of the glacier, where water from the melting ice spread out and left the outwash behind.



This figure shows the front edge of a continental glacier like the one that covered Ohio. It labels the many kinds of sediments created by glaciers. These are the deposits that give us evidence of the footprint of the glacier.





## WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE TODAY?

Here you can see a bluff in Lobdell Reserve in Licking County, northeast of Columbus. We have drawn on it to show what a geologist sees. There are four layers stacked on top of each other. These are **layers of till and glacial outwash** left behind from two different times when glaciers advanced and then melted away in this part of Ohio.

## OTHER EVIDENCE OF GLACIERS

Sometimes we find large and unusual rocks lying in fields or neighborhoods in Ohio. These are called **glacial erratics**, and they were carried here from Canada by glaciers during the Ice Age. Geologists can tell they came from far away because they are often igneous or metamorphic rocks, which are not found naturally in Ohio's bedrock.



There are also places in Ohio where we can see deep smooth ridges cut into surface rocks. These are called **glacial grooves**. They were created as the heavy ice sheet and a film of water beneath it flowed along the surface of the Earth. These glacial grooves at Kelleys Island State Park are among the best examples anywhere in the world.







## THE GLACIERS' LASTING IMPACT

The glaciers changed Ohio in many ways. Their weight and movement helped **shape the Great Lakes**. These are the largest freshwater lakes in the world and are the result of our glacial history.

Glacial sediments also gave Ohio **rich farmland, clean water sources, and building materials**. Flat areas of till are perfect for growing crops, and sand and gravel deposits provide good water supplies and construction materials.



### The Ohio Department of Natural Resources – Division of Geological Survey

...is the state's oldest natural resources agency. Commonly referred to as the Ohio Geological Survey, their mission is to provide geologic information and services needed for responsible management of Ohio's natural resources. Learn more about Ohio's geologic past at [geology.ohiodnr.gov](http://geology.ohiodnr.gov)



### The Battelle Center at The Ohio State University

...is a science policy center in the John Glenn College of Public Affairs that helps students and scientists use their work to solve real-world issues that affect people and communities. Find out more about the work of the Battelle Center at [battellecenter.osu.edu](http://battellecenter.osu.edu).



# AWAKE IN WINTER



**These animals stay awake in our city, parks, and neighborhoods. Take a look at who stays awake, then see how easy they are to spot.**

## AMERICAN CROW

Moving across the sky or calling from a distant tree.

Visibility Score



## RED FOX

Leaving quiet tracks before slipping away.

Visibility Score



**1.**

**I come out mostly at night and have black-and-white stripes. Who am I?**

## WHITE-TAILED DEER

You notice it right after it notices you.

Visibility Score







### STRIPED SKUNK

Appearing quietly when conditions are right.

Visibility Score



2.

I'm the smallest mammal in North America.  
Who am I?



### PYGMY SHREW

Moving where few eyes ever look.

Visibility Score



3.

I hide nuts and come back for them later.  
Who am I?

(Page 29 has the answers.)



### EASTERN COTTONTAIL

Sitting low and still until it's time to move.

Visibility Score



### DOWNY WOODPECKER

Tapping along tree trunks in the cold.

Visibility Score



### EASTERN GRAY SQUIRREL

Never still for long, even on cold days.

Visibility Score





# LET NATURE COME TO YOU

Read this story to see how a quiet moment outside can reveal a whole world of wildlife.

By Jared Goodykoontz  
aka Jared the Nature Guy



As I sat there on the bench at a park in Grandview, I watched the dried, brown flowers of the small meadow dance in the breeze. At first, that's all I saw. My brain named the things around me: flowers, tall grass, some trees, the sky, clouds. Yup, seen all of these before!

I remembered that using the superb senses of animals can help you get a better idea of what's going on around you. So first up was using Owl Eyes. This meant opening my eyes wide like an owl, and sort of unfocusing, taking it all in, but snapping my attention to any spot I noticed movement, similar to how owls hunt mice at night.

I unfocused and took in the meadow. At first, I noticed a few remaining brown leaves rippling in the sunlight, and then an animal: a brilliant blue and white bird flew up from a shrub onto a branch of the walnut tree in

the middle of the place. He hopped from branch to branch, then puffed out his chest and yelled, "Jay! Jay!" A spunky Blue Jay! Wow!

Next, my Owl Eyes noticed more movement below. "Drip. Drip." The icicles on the bottom edge of the bench were dripping and building an upside-down icicle from the ground up. Whoa.

I decided then to switch to Deer Ears. Cupping my hands with fingers together, I used the cups to carefully push my ear slightly forward, forming "radar dishes" around my ears, similar to the large ears of a White-tailed Deer. This truly does enhance your hearing, and as I did so I heard a faint "Squee-squee-squeak," and when I turned my head, I saw a cute, fuzzy Meadow Vole slip out of sight in an instant, safe in the bunches of brown prairie grass. I looked closer and watched the stems rustle and shake, with more squeaks. He was up to something in there!

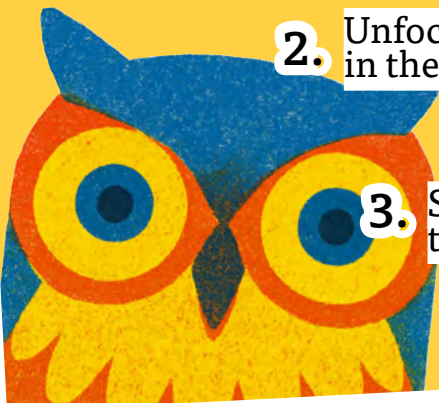
## PRACTICE YOUR ANIMAL SENSES:

### OWL EYES

1. Open eyes wide

2. Unfocus and take in the whole area

3. Snap attention to movement

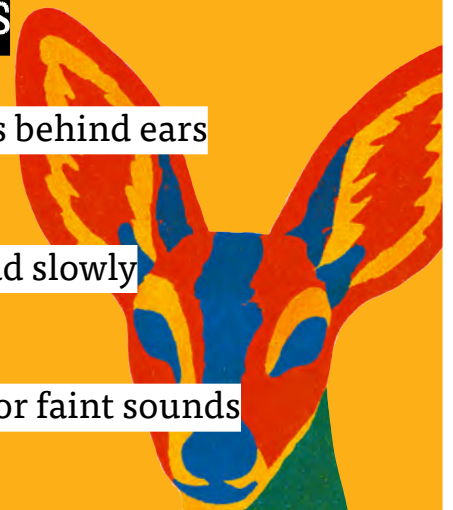


### DEER EARS

1. Cup hands behind ears

2. Turn head slowly

3. Listen for faint sounds





## Did you notice?

Jared slows down and uses animal senses to spot wildlife.

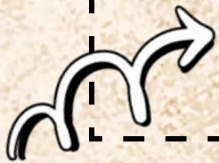
Which animal did he meet first in the story?

(Page 29 has the answers.)

a: White-tailed deer

b: Blue Jay

c: Gray Squirrel



Next, my Deer Ears heard distant cracking of branches and a slow, repeating crunching of snow and leaves, getting louder and louder bit by bit. I turned my whole body towards the sound and saw nothing. I switched back to Owl Eyes and saw a patch of grayish brown between branches. A deer?

After patiently waiting quietly, I heard a single "thud" on the ground. Looking closer, I saw him: a buck White-tailed Deer, and he was looking back at me! I respectfully got up and backed away, not wanting to scare him. He slowly stepped forward, with amazing stealth even for being so large. I watched with awe as he walked by the bench I had been on, then made his way through the sleeping meadow, nibbling this and that.

I had been sitting in the meadow, bored, but when I put on some animal senses, wow! It turned out there were all sorts of

stories going on all around me! I had always thought as a kid that I'd have to save up money and go to Africa or the Amazon Rainforest if I ever wanted to see cool animals, but 20 minutes of quiet paying attention at a park showed me there's plenty of cool wildlife to see right here. You just need to know how to look!

## ABOUT JARED

- Jared Goodykoontz, also known as Jared the Nature Guy, teaches weekly nature-connection classes at daycares and elementary schools across central Ohio. He helps kids explore the outdoors using "animal senses" like Owl Eyes, Deer Ears, Dog Nose, and Raccoon Touch. You can find him on Instagram at @jaredthenatureguy

Note: Jared learned about using animal senses by reading *Coyote's Guide to Connecting with Nature* by Jon Young.



### DOG NOSE

1. Close eyes
2. Tilt head up
3. Breathe in through nose
4. Identify & follow scents



### RACCOON TOUCH

1. Move fingers slowly
2. Feel texture
3. Notice details you can't see





# 'TIS THE SEASON

## FOR

# SUSTAINABLE HOLIDAYS



By Amy Densborn  
Programs Manager  
Solid Waste Authority  
of Central Ohio (SWACO)



A lot of holiday traditions create more waste than we realize, but small choices can make the season more joyful and more sustainable.

Sustainable activities around the holidays are great for people of all ages. As the holiday season unfolds, families often find themselves caught in a whirl of festivities, traditions, and more waste. The Ohio EPA estimates that 25% more waste is thrown away between Thanksgiving and New Year's.

We can all be part of the solution by creating less waste. Have your adults check out SWACO's Green Holiday Guide by scanning the QR code at the end of the article, or consider adding some of these fun sustainable activities that can be completed throughout the year by the entire family.



Scan the QR code or visit [www.ribbitmagazine.com/library](http://www.ribbitmagazine.com/library) to join us on a tour of the Franklin County Sanitary Landfill with Kim from SWACO!



## CARDS

If you love to handwrite cards, find ones made from recycled paper, or better yet - upcycle pictures from old cards and recreate your own! If the idea of a real card doesn't matter much to you, or if you are still practicing your handwriting skills, consider sending an e-card to friends and family.

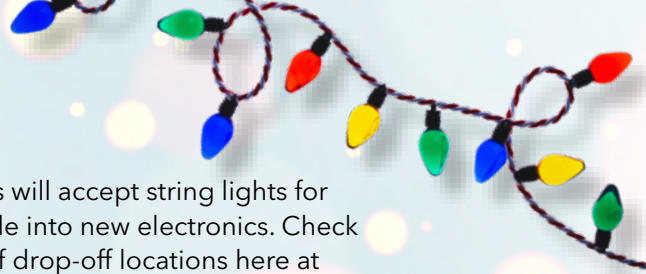


## CREATE HOMEMADE DECORATIONS

Look around your house to find ways to repurpose supplies you already have on hand. Paper plates can be turned into a menorah, toilet paper rolls turned into kinara, and ornaments created from dough. If you just paint or color these items, they can be recycled or maybe even composted (no paint or glitter) after you're done with them.







### RECYCLE BROKEN STRING LIGHTS

Over time, string lights might burn out and because they are considered electronic waste, they should go to a special facility to be recycled. All Goodwill locations and many

communities will accept string lights for free to recycle into new electronics. Check out the list of drop-off locations here at [RecycleRight.org](https://www.RecycleRight.org).



### REAL VS FAKE TREE

If you want to purchase a live tree, find one grown locally to cut back on the energy for transportation. Consider buying a smaller tree since there is less to dispose of afterwards and there is a shorter growing time which means less land and water required to grow the tree. Make sure your tree is composted at the end of its useful life. Check to see if your community offers a curbside tree collection service or consider taking your tree to a local goat farmer so the goats can enjoy some enrichment. If a fake tree is more up your alley, try to find one that you can commit to using for at least 5-10 years to help offset the environmental impact of making the tree. There are no recycling options for fake trees so they end up in landfills. Buying a fake tree every few years is less sustainable than buying a real one each year.



### VOLUNTEER

Volunteering your time to an organization that means something to you is very impactful and can be extra fun if done with your loved ones. There are so many ways to get involved in Franklin County, but one organization that provides service projects to youth is Seeds of Caring. They organize age-appropriate activities like decorating lunch bags for homeless neighbors and sorting diapers at diaper drives for the littlest humans. Other opportunities to clean up litter and serve meals at a shelter would make for a great gift to our community.



### HOLIDAY PARTY WASTE

Whenever possible, choose reusable plates, silverware and cups for parties. If that's not possible, choose serviceware materials that can be recycled or composted. Paper plates without wax coating and unlined paper cups can easily be composted at home or recycled if they are lined with plastic.



# 7.

## TASTY FOOD

The holidays can be such a delicious time of year because of the extra treats and meals with loved ones. If your adults cook lots of meals for gatherings, share with them this handy tool called the Guest-imator that helps ensure you buy the correct amount of food for the occasion. It allows customization according to the group size, appetite level, and if leftovers should be factored into the equation. Consider sending home goodie bags with guests afterwards if you know that your family has more than enough leftovers.

You could organize a family challenge to use leftovers creatively, perhaps a day to transform them into new, delicious recipes. For example, Thanksgiving leftovers can be turned into delicious hand pies that not only taste great, but can also be frozen for a hearty meal any time of year. Check out the Savory Pie Recipe Card below to bring new life to those leftovers. Don't forget to store leftover food in the freezer in a labeled, reusable container if you can't eat it all before it goes bad.



## SAVORY PIES

YIELD: 8-10 SERVINGS | TIME: 25 MINUTES

## FOOD SAVING HACKS

Out of eggs for that golden finish? Try substituting heavy cream, milk or milk alternative with a little sugar added or even aquafaba — the liquid usually discarded from chickpeas — for beautiful browning!

### CRUST INGREDIENTS:



2 PIE CRUSTS  
OR PUFF  
PASTRY



1 EGG  
beaten

### FILLING INGREDIENTS:

ANY LEFTOVER HOLIDAY FOOD  
2 cups



- Leftover turkey, ham or roast
- Mashed potatoes and sweet potatoes
- Roasted vegetables (carrots, peas, Brussels sprouts, green beans)
- Cranberry sauce
- Stuffing
- Gravy

### INSTRUCTIONS

1. Preheat oven to 400°F. Line a baking sheet with parchment paper.
2. Roll out pie crusts or puff pastry and cut into squares (about 4-5 inches).
3. Place 2-3 tablespoons of your chosen leftover filling in the center of half the squares.
4. Lightly brush the edges of filled squares with water using your finger. Top with remaining squares and press edges with a fork to seal completely.
5. Place pies on a prepared baking sheet. Brush tops with the beaten egg plus 1 tablespoon of water for a golden finish.
6. Bake 15-18 minutes until golden brown and crispy.
7. Let cool for 5 minutes before serving.

**SAVE MORE THAN FOOD:** Turn holiday leftovers into freezer-ready meals! Assemble savory pies, freeze them and bake straight from frozen (adding 3-5 extra minutes) for easy dinners that prevent food waste.



**WATCH US MAKE IT!**

Scan the QR code for a step-by-step video.

# 8.

## DONATE

Don't rely on the landfill this holiday season to purge your no-longer wanted toys, clothes, etc. If those items are in good condition, please consider donating first so another

kid might have the opportunity to play with that item. There are more than 45 places to donate items in Franklin County and a list of them can be found at [RecycleRight.org](https://www.recycle-right.org).



9.

## GIFT GIVING

Give the gift of experiences or consumables. Homemade food is always a welcome gift and rarely goes to waste. Try your skills out on a new jam or cookie you've been wanting to try to make. Experiences are the gifts that keep on giving throughout the year. If you know that you

don't need any more toys or clothes, why not ask for a membership to COSI or the Columbus Zoo for the year. If you are musically inclined, consider writing a song as a gift, and the adults in our lives could always use more help around the house with chores. Specialized coupon books can be a helpful gift to give to loved ones.

10.

## STYROFOAM RECYCLING

Many new electronics and other large items come packaged in Styrofoam. Did you know that Styrofoam is not accepted in the curbside recycling program in Franklin County? You still have recycling options

available if your adults want to drop it off to see it recycled into cool things like boogie boards and picture frames! Surf's up! Scan the QR code at the bottom of the page to find a drop-off site near you.



11.

## GIFT WRAPPING

Wrapping paper comes in all different colors, textures, and material types nowadays. If you buy the colorful paper at the store, look for the kind without foil, glitter or large gems on it to ensure it can be recycled afterwards. Or, kids can grab some markers and decorate the packing

paper left behind online shipments for a creative look. Want to skip wrapping altogether? Grab some reusable bags or fabric bags in a pattern that you can live with for many years to come. Use them year after year to save money and time!

12.

## SWITCH TO RECHARGEABLE BATTERIES

If you are currently using single-use batteries for electronic devices like gaming controllers, toy cars, or special lights, consider talking to your adults about investing in rechargeable batteries. Rechargeable batteries will last 500-1000 charges and will save lots

of money in the long run compared to buying new single-use batteries. When you choose rechargeable batteries, fewer batteries need to be manufactured and transported, which helps to conserve natural resources. Once any type of battery reaches the end of

its useful life, please make sure they go to a specialty recycler to be processed. Batteries should never go into your recycling or trash cart. Scan the QR code to find battery recycling locations near you.



The holiday season is a joyous time, but it can be a time filled with consumption and waste. A more environmentally friendly holiday is possible, however. Together, through activities like these, we can all develop a deeper knowledge of sustainable consumption which will help save money, preserve natural resources, keep waste out of the landfill, and lay the foundation for mindful habits that extend throughout the year.



# SPEAKING UP FOR NATURE



**ANNALISA ROCCA**

**Central Ohio Regional Director  
Ohio Environmental Council**  
Hobbies: reading, coaching  
volleyball, gardening, and  
spending time with friends

Annalisa Rocca works to make Ohio cleaner and safer through environmental advocacy. Here's what she does and how kids can help.



## **What is the Ohio Environmental Council (OEC)?**

The Ohio Environmental Council is a nonprofit group that works to protect Ohio's air, water, and land. We work to help make sure people and nature can be healthy and live in harmony together.

## **What do you do at the OEC, and what does your work look like on a normal day?**

I work with people and communities around Central Ohio to make our communities more sustainable and safer. Some days I meet with city and state leaders to talk about rules that can help the environment. Other days I go to events, educate others, or help plan projects to protect the earth.

## **What inspired you to care about the environment and choose this kind of job?**

My high school environmental science teacher inspired me to care about the environment. She taught me how everything in the environment is connected: the air, water, land, and people too. We depend on a healthy environment to live, so I wanted to make sure everyone can breathe clean air, drink safe water, and enjoy beautiful parks.

## **What is environmental advocacy?**

Advocacy means speaking up for something important. Environmental advocacy means speaking up to protect our trees, rivers, and animals, because they can't speak for themselves. It's about teaching all people why protecting the earth matters to everyone.

## **What does "speaking up for nature" mean to you?**

It means using your voice to protect the environment. It could be writing letters, calling your elected officials, and sharing ideas. Asking leaders to make good choices so that we have parks to enjoy with our pets and clean energy to power our refrigerator and charge our smart watches.

## **Can you tell us a story about a time when people's voices helped make a real change for the environment?**

Every year, the OEC goes to Washington, D.C. to talk to our federal lawmakers about keeping our water clean. We go as a big group, with advocates, community members, and people who care about the environment. We share stories about why clean water is so important for families, wildlife, and the Great Lakes. Because people have spoken up together, the federal government has kept putting money into making the Great Lakes cleaner and safer for everyone!

## **What are some of the biggest nature or environmental challenges here in Central Ohio?**

Did you know that Columbus is one of the fastest growing cities in the country? All this increased growth will put a strain on our wetlands, rivers, and energy supply. It is very important for environmentalists to work with builders to make sure we are growing responsibly.







letters from people who care about what is going on in the environment around them. I remind leaders that protecting the environment helps everyone – it keeps our communities strong, healthy, and happy.

### **What are some small things a classroom could do together to help the environment?**

There are lots of little things a classroom can do that make a big difference! You can learn what is and isn't recyclable and make sure to recycle the right way. Starting a classroom plant or even a small school garden is a great way to help things grow. Try to use less plastic and remember to turn off the lights when you don't need them. And one of my favorite ideas is to write thank-you notes to leaders who help protect the environment!

### **What can kids do on their own at home to make a difference?**

Turn off your lights and water when you're not using them. Pick up any trash and litter you see outside in your yard or parks. Compost any food that doesn't get eaten. Remind your family how to recycle. Reuse things instead of throwing them away, like using a refillable water bottle.

### **Can you tell us about one project or success you are really proud of?**

Last year, I traveled around Ohio for a whole week talking to the media in different cities about the importance of clean and safe drinking water. I was on TV in three different cities! I felt proud knowing that more people were learning how to protect their water.

### **What has been one of the hardest parts of your job, and what did you learn from it?**

One of the hardest parts of my job is talking face to face with someone who doesn't agree or thinks the same way I do. It can be tough, but I've learned that listening first really helps. Then you can find something you both care about, and it's easier to work together. And always – be nice! Kindness goes a long way.

### **Sometimes people think environmental work is only for scientists. What would you tell kids who want to help in other ways, like art, writing, or speaking up?**

You don't have to be a scientist to help the planet! Artists can show how beautiful nature is. Writers and speakers can teach others and inspire action through storytelling. Everyone has a talent they can use to protect the earth.

### **When you talk to city leaders or lawmakers, how do you help them understand what's best for the environment?**

When I talk to city leaders or lawmakers, I share facts, stories, and ideas from people in their community. I will explain how clean air, safe water, and more parks help kids and adults stay healthy. Sometimes I bring pictures or

### **What are some important environmental issues right now where kids and families could use their voices to help?**

One big issue right now is energy, the power we use to turn on lights, watch TV, and charge our phones. Energy comes from many different places, like coal, natural gas, wind, and the sun. We need more clean energy, like solar and wind, to help meet the demand and protect our planet. Speaking up for solar panels or wind turbines in your community can help make sure we have enough power, and keep our air clean, too!


### **If you could be any animal in nature, which one would you be and why?**

I would be a honeybee! Honeybees are small, but they make a big difference in the world and are very important to the ecosystem. Honeybees work together as a team to help the planet just like I do to protect the environment.

### **What is your favorite outdoor place around Columbus, and what do you love most about it?**

I love all the Columbus Metro Parks but especially Highbanks Metro Park. I grew up enjoying the big trees and many trails with my dog, Zeus. Spending time outside brings me peace and helps me feel connected with nature.






BEFORE YOU GO...




# THE MYSTERY OF THE RAIDED BIRD FEEDER



When the bird feeder topples, the mystery begins!


Winter doesn't mean wildlife disappears. While some animals hibernate or migrate, many others stay active and overwinter right here in Columbus. Birds like cardinals visit feeders all season long, and mammals such as squirrels and raccoons keep searching for food when snow and ice cover their usual meals. A tipped feeder, scattered seeds, or tracks in the snow can all tell the story of who stopped by during a cold winter night.



LISTEN TO THE STORY

Go to:

[www.ribbitmagazine.com/library](http://www.ribbitmagazine.com/library),  
or scan the QR code!



Starring the voices of:

Anna – Anna Cooper

Ava – Tilly Slagel

Narrator – Ben Shinaberry





## ANSWERS

### Page 1

There are 38 stars in total.

### Page 11



### Pages 18 & 19

1. Striped Skunk
2. Pygmy Shrew
3. Eastern Gray Squirrel

### Page 21

b: Blue Jay

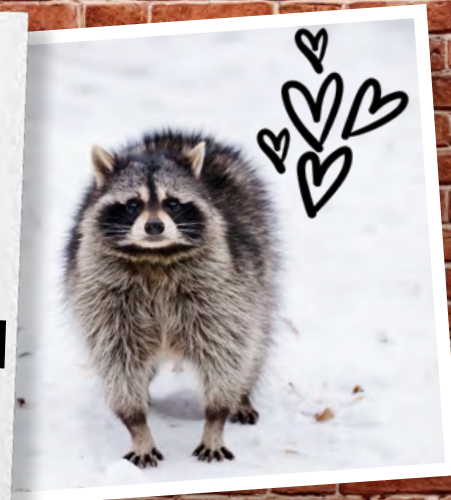


## We want to hear from you!

Have a question, a cool nature discovery, or a photo to share?

Text us, send a picture, or leave a short voice message using the number below. We're listening!

**(614) 407-4234**



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**Ribbit! Magazine** is published quarterly by Naturewise Columbus. Our mission is to connect children in Columbus with the environment through Ribbit!, our free community magazine that inspires curiosity, learning, and a sense of stewardship for the natural world.

### Naturewise Columbus

A 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization (EIN 99-1874129).

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Printed in Columbus, Ohio, by The Watkins Printing Company.

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OUR NEXT ISSUE DROPS MARCH 1<sup>ST</sup> 2026

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FUNDED IN PART BY THE OHIO ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FUND.



RIBBIT! MAGAZINE IS PUBLISHED BY NATUREWISE COLUMBUS