

## THE CATALYST

### SLIPPERY ROCK WATERSHED COALITION MONTHLY ACTIVITIES UPDATE

**NEXT MEETING:** TBD per COVID-19 regulations; January and February meetings were cancelled.

### The 2021 Great Backyard Bird Count

February 12-15 saw thousands of bird enthusiasts from across the world take part in one of birding's most exciting weekends of the year! The Great Backyard Bird Count gave participants the chance to come together to watch, count, learn about, and celebrate birds. Each February, for four days, the world comes together for the love of birds. Over these four days, thousands of people spend time in their favorite places watching and counting as many birds as they can find and reporting them to the official backyard bird count web site. These observations help scientists better understand global bird populations before one of their annual migrations. Launched in 1998 by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, the Great Backyard Bird Count (GBBC) was the first online citizen-science project to collect data on wild birds and to display results in near real time. Birds Canada joined the project in 2009 to provide an expanded capacity to support participation in Canada. In 2013, GBBC became a global project when data was entered into eBird, the world's largest biodiversity-related community science project.

This year new participants were encouraged to use the Merlin ID Bird App, which covers bird species from 7 continents and is available in 8 languages. For anyone who missed participating in the GBBC but still wants to be involved in birding and reporting data, you can join eBird. eBird is a global community of tens of thousands of birders who submit bird observations, track their personal records, and use eBird's tools to better understand the occurrence of birds close to home and around the world. eBird's Explore Data tab shows range maps indicating where species are found, bar charts showing migration timing, and you can even sign up for Alerts to learn about interesting birds as soon as they are reported. The Explore a Location tool provides a dashboard style overview of all the eBird activity in a region, with links to bar charts, recent sightings, and the best local birding hotspots.

Pictured at right is GBBC participant Cassie Busler, age 12 and daughter of main *Catalyst* writer Melissa Busler. Cassie and her mom spotted cardinals, nuthatches, chickadees, titmice, house sparrows, and a red-bellied woodpecker and a downy woodpecker in their first hour of watching from their dining room window!



With birds on the move and temperatures pretty frigid right now (at least in western Pennsylvania!), you might wonder how you can help the birds. Two fun at-home projects are homemade bird feeders and bird nest helpers. To make a homemade bird feeder, simply smear peanut butter or vegetable shortening on an empty cardboard paper towel or toilet paper tube. Roll the tube in a tray of birdseed. It can be placed directly on a small tree or shrub branch, or you can hang it with string. To make a bird nest helper, gather together the supplies birds love to use in their nests! They will often use their beaks to weave nests out of pieces of straw, broom bristles, yarn, string, thread, floss, feathers, fur, dead leaves, bits of thin plastic, twigs, and moss. You can gather these materials and then use a clean suet cage or similar feeder design and fill it with nesting material. Hang this arrangement in a visible area where birds will notice it. Or create small piles of nesting material in places where it won't blow away or be soaked in spring rains. A tray feeder can be temporarily used for this purpose. Another idea is to fill a mesh bag or basket loosely with suitable nesting material. Be sure the mesh is wide enough for birds to extract the material, and hang it in a visible location. Whatever you do to help or appreciate birds, we wish you luck in spotting many of the beautiful species in your area!



Punxsutawney Phil predicted another 6 weeks of winter on February 2nd. We predict you'll read the article about him, found below!

## **Happy Groundhog Day!**

The Slippery Rock Watershed is located about 90 miles west of Punxsutawney, PA, home of Groundhog Phil. This year on February 2, what we all know as Groundhog's Day, Phil gave us some disappointing results when he saw his shadow. As legend has it, seeing a shadow forecasts 6 more weeks of winter weather instead of the early spring many of us hope for.

Is there any science behind Phil's famous forecasting skills at Gobblers Knob? Thankfully, no. Even though he's been forecasting since 1887, Phil's track record for the entire country isn't perfect. On average, Phil has gotten it right 50% of the time over the past 10 years if one compares the US national temperatures with Phil's forecasts. In 2020, Phil forecast a "short winter" when he did not see his shadow and predicted an early spring. In fact, the contiguous United States saw above-average temperatures in both February and March of last year. Interestingly, during March of 2020 the average contiguous US temperature was 46.1°F, 4.6°F above the twentieth-century average. This ranked as the 10th-warmest March in the 126-year period of record.

According to the Groundhog Club's records, the various incarnations of Punxsutawney Phil have predicted 104 forecasts of more winter and 20 early springs. There are nine years without any records, and even the Punxsutawney Area Chamber of Commerce, which keeps track of these historical records, doesn't know what happened to Phil during those years. Data from the Stormfax Almanac's data shows that Phil's six-week prognostications have been correct about 39% of the time. Phil does a shade poorer when you check his performance against actual weather outcomes since 1969, when the accuracy of weather records is less in question. From 1969 on, Phil's overall accuracy rate drops to about 36%.

But a groundhog predicting the weather is only one of many bits of folklore and superstition that may or may not have some scientific truth behind them. If you've ever heard the saying, "Red sky at night, sailor's delight; red sky in morning, sailor's warning" you might know this is often scientifically true. A red sky at night is due to the setting sun sending its light through a high concentration of dust particles. This usually indicates high pressure and stable air coming in from the west. Basically good weather will follow. A red sunrise can mean that a high pressure system (good weather) has already passed, thus indicating that a storm system (low pressure) may be moving to the east. A morning sky that is a deep, fiery red can indicate that there is high water content in the atmosphere. So, rain could be on its way. Other old sayings that often ring true? "When halo rings the moon or sun, rain's approaching on the run." Or "When the windows won't open and the salt clogs the shaker, the weather will favor the umbrella-maker." This last one is due to high humidity, often accompanied by precipitation. Other weather folklore we just shake our heads at... "When kitty washes behind her ears, we'll soon be tasting heavens tears."



# The KIDS Catalyst

## SLIPPERY ROCK WATERSHED COALITION FUN ACTIVITY

### Fun with Shadows!



When the famous groundhog Punxsutawney Phil saw his shadow on Groundhog's Day, six more weeks of winter weather were forecast. How good are you at identifying shadows? 9 animal silhouettes are shown below. The letters of each animal's name are given if you need any help. Write the name of the animal on the line on top of each shadow. If you mail us your completed paper, we'll send you a \$1 Amazon credit via a parent's email address! You can save the credits to buy yourself something extra special!



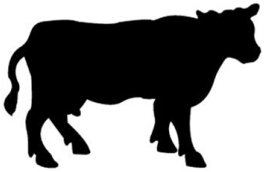
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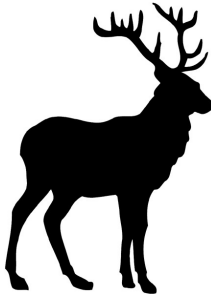
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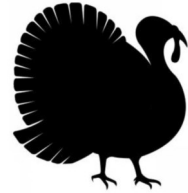
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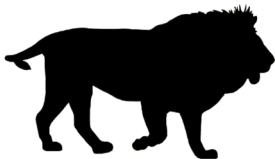
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Slippery Rock Watershed Coalition c/o Stream Restoration Incorporated  
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