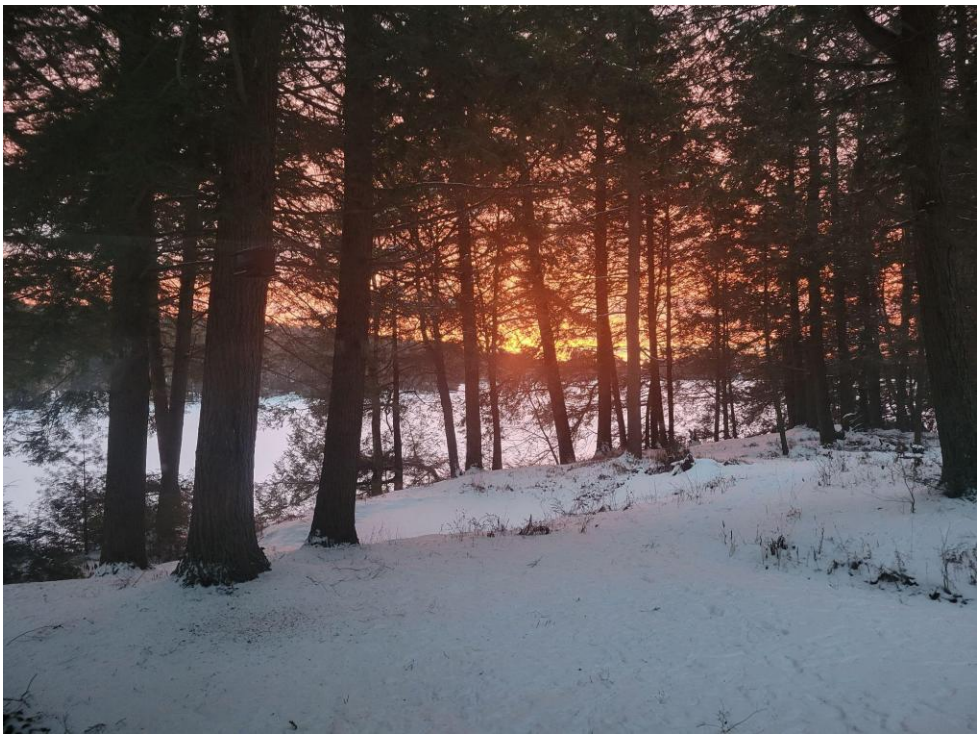
Edward L Rose Conservancy

Conservancy Currents

Winter-2026



Winter Morning

Winter's Hidden World

As winter deepens across the forests, fields, and woodlands of the northeastern United States, a snowy blanket transforms the landscape into a quiet, white world. But beneath that seemingly still surface lies a bustling ecosystem — a secret universe of tiny tunnels, hidden chambers, and wildlife activity. Living beneath the snow is one of nature's most fascinating winter survival modes.

When snow accumulates, its lower layer stays loosely packed and insulated from the extreme cold above. Between this layer and the frozen ground is the subnivean zone — a sheltered, slightly warmer space where temperatures stay near freezing even when the air is much colder. This environment offers protection from harsh conditions and predators, helping many woodland creatures survive the winter months.

Perhaps the most iconic residents of this hidden world in our area are voles — small, mouse-like rodents that stay active all winter long. In northeastern forests and fields, meadow voles build elaborate tunnel systems under the snow, complete with chambers for eating, sleeping, and storing food. These tunnels let them access plant material, grasses, seeds, and other vegetation while staying above the ground's freezing surface. When snow melts in spring, those tunnels often show up as little trails on lawns and fields.

Smaller predators like shrews move through the same subnivean corridors hunting for insects, spiders, and tiny invertebrates that also overwinter beneath the snow. Deer mice and other small rodents share this space, sometimes huddling together to conserve heat or searching caches of seeds they collected in fall. Insects and other arthropods are also part of this world. Springtails, beetles, mites, and other tiny critters stay active under the snow, contributing to decomposition and nutrient cycling and serving as food for shrews and other small mammals.

This hidden ecosystem is delicate. The insulating snow layer is critical — without consistent snow cover, temperatures drop too low and expose these animals to freezing air and predators. At the same time, too much melt or unstable snow can flood tunnels, displacing their inhabitants. If you're out hiking our trails this winter, remember - below that quiet white blanket, a hidden world of life pulses with activity, ingenious survival, and ecological connections that make the forest thrive come spring. So, let's hope for a nice cozy and persistent layer of snow this winter, for their sake.

New Conservancy Directors

With a new year the Conservancy welcomes two new interim members to the Board of Directors, **Johannah Barry** and **Claire Woidt**. They both have much to offer and we look forward to their contributions to the success of the Conservancy and its mission.

Johannah Barry founded the Charles Darwin Foundation, Inc. in the Washington, DC, area in 1991 while serving as Executive Director of the Delaware-based Darwin Scientific Foundation, Inc. In 2001, she led the merger of the two organizations, creating Galápagos Conservancy, which continues to be the only US-based non-profit organization dedicated exclusively to conservation in the Galápagos Islands, and led the organization as its president for 30 years. Johannah's background includes over 40 years of institutional advancement and organizational development. She has held senior fundraising positions with the World Conservation Union (U.S.), The Wilderness Society, and Resources for the Future. She has served as a consultant to the Weyerhaeuser Company Foundation, Henry A. Wallace Institute for Alternative Agriculture, Rails to Trails, and the Audubon Naturalist Society. Johannah holds Bachelor's and Master's degrees in English from Washington State University and the University of Virginia, respectively. She and her family moved to Brackney, PA in 2003, and she has served as a member of the Ross Park Zoo's development team, and as head of the fundraising committee for the Susquehanna County Democratic Committee.

Claire Woidt has lived in the NY/PA area her entire life. She attended grades K-12 in Binghamton and spent her summers at Tripp Lake, Liberty Township, on property that had been in her family for almost 175 years. She graduated from Ithaca College (BS and MS) in Educational Communications, a field focused on using various media formats for instructional/informational purposes. After graduating, she worked at the college level in both production of courses in the hard sciences and teaching. Her corporate experience involves producing marketing and training programs.

She has been married to her husband, Rick, for 42 years. They established their lives in Binghamton and welcomed two children. After their second child arrived, she took some time off to be a stay-at-home mom to their children, serving in the PTA, volunteering, cheering on their children's sports teams and acting as family chauffeur. Subsequently, she worked at her husband's engineering business, taking on the various support roles needed as a small business starts up.

These days she enjoys spending more time at the lake, having fun with three grandchildren, and pursuing hobbies she didn't have much time for while working full time.

Growing up at Tripp Lake, she was taught to appreciate the outdoors. Spending summers at "the lake" made her aware of the simplicity of a perfect summer day--and the importance of preserving that simplicity for future generations. She always tried to live by a "less is more" approach. She is looking forward to working with the Conservancy to try to help maintain and expand its reach in support of local conservation.

Winter Watch: Owls Overwintering in Northeast Pennsylvania

Board President, Keith Oberg had the recent experience of being stared at through his window by a barred owl perched next to his bird feeder. The feeder birds were not terribly concerned, but the red squirrels were nowhere to be seen. The next day, he couldn't help but notice that there were only two red squirrels under the feeder, rather than the three that were usually there. While many migratory birds head south, several owl species, including the barred owl, stay throughout winter, turning the long nights into an opportunity for the typically night-time hunters, though apparently, easy pickings in the daytime are also acceptable.

Among the owls that stay year-round in our region, the barred owl (*Strix varia*) is one of the most emblematic. Permanent residents throughout much of the state, barred owls are well adapted to cold weather and deep woods habitats that define much of northeast Pennsylvania's landscape.

Unlike seasonal visitors such as snowy owls or short-eared owls, barred owls overwinter locally. These owls favor mature, unfragmented forests — especially mixed woods near streams or lakes— where large trees offer ideal roosting and nesting sites. Their signature hoot — often remembered as "*Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you all?*" — is more frequently heard on winter evenings and early mornings. Barred owls typically hunt small mammals like mice and voles and are strong, silent flyers through the snow-covered woods. Their brown eyes and mottled plumage help them blend into the winter forest. Barred owls often become easier to locate in winter because leafless trees make spotting perches and silhouettes against the sky a little easier for patient, or lucky, observers. Listen and you may hear their calls echo through the chilled air at dusk at the Highpoint Preserve.

Although barred owls often steal the show, several other owl species also overwinter in varying numbers:

- Great Horned Owl: Another year-round resident, equally at home in woods and along forest edges. These powerful predators can be heard booming through winter nights.

- Eastern Screech-Owl: Small but fierce, this species also remains through the winter, often in dense trees or near old woodpecker holes.
- Northern Saw-whet Owl: Mostly migratory, but some individuals may stay if habitat and food allow.
- Short-eared Owl & Snowy Owl: These species visit in winter irregularly. Snowy owls, for example, turn up in some winters depending on prey availability farther north.

Owls are not just beautiful to behold — they're vital parts of our ecosystems. By hunting rodents and other small mammals in winter, they help balance populations and contribute to forest health. Their presence through harsh months also signifies resilient, functioning habitats — a testament to the wild heart of northeast Pennsylvania's preserved woodlands.

Accreditation

The Conservancy is applying for national accreditation with the Land Trust Alliance. One of the requirements in the process is providing a notification of the application for accreditation to stakeholders to allow for comment. A notice was sent to our contact list and to our local newspapers, and is also posted to our website. If anyone wishes to comment, the information on how to do so is available at elrose.org.

Land Trust Alliance
Together, conserving the places you love

Hope for Ash Trees-*with your help*

In recent years, ash trees of all species – white, black, and green – have been decimated across New York State and Pennsylvania by the invasive emerald ash borer. Ash trees are important economically for lumber used in baseball bats, tool handles, flooring, and other applications. They play important roles in Indigenous cultures, including creation stories and basket-making. Ecologically, they provide food for many butterfly and moth species, whose caterpillars feed on their leaves. Birds feed on the caterpillars and the ash seeds, as do mammals. And holes, or cavities, readily form in these trees and provide nesting sites for birds, and homes for animals like bats and flying squirrels. Because ash trees often grow along streams and wetlands, they are also important for filtering pollutants from our waterways, and stabilizing streambanks, contributing to healthy watersheds.

With the hope of keeping these important trees as part of our future forests, Cornell and the Nature Conservancy are partnering on a new conservation project, called "Trees in Peril". As ash trees succumbed to the beetle, scientists noticed occasional survivors, indicating that

some trees are resistant to the beetle. Resistant trees can either wall off the beetle larvae, preventing them from girdling the tree, or produce fewer of the chemicals that the beetles use to find ash trees.

"Trees in Peril" is an effort to use twigs from resistant trees to grow new trees in a controlled environment. The lingering ash will be planted in test sites along with trees known to be susceptible to the emerald ash borer. If they prove to be resistant, researchers will then cross the trees that can wall off the beetle with trees that do not attract the beetle, to create an even more resistant variety. Eventually, those trees would then be used to restore ash to the landscape.

Have you seen any lone ash survivors within a grove of otherwise dead ash trees? If so, it could be a resistant tree. These trees could be useful for scientists who are developing resistant trees. If you find one, you can mark the location on a map, note which ash species it is if you know, and email Outreach@MonitoringAsh.org. Please copy the Conservancy at elrosepublic@gmail.com, so we can track potential trees in our area. Conservancy members are encouraged to participate.

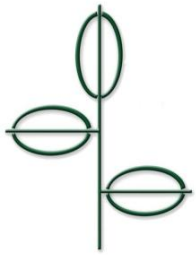
Upcoming Programs

We are starting to put together our programs and events schedule at the Woodbourne Forest Preserve. Two events for May will be naturalist Joyce Stone's Bird Walk and an Amphibian Walk and Talk presented by Kristi Sullivan. More information on these and other programs will be coming out soon.

Help Wanted

The Conservancy is interested in acquiring the services of a part time land steward. With over twelve miles of trails to maintain, invasive plants on the rise, upkeep needed on structures and parking areas, boundaries to mark, and a garden to take care of, it's all becoming too much for our generous volunteers to handle. If you know anyone who might be interested, either as an employee or as an independent contractor, please let us know.

More info at **ELROSE.ORG**



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