



# SUMMIT VIEW

The Newsletter of the Friends of Mt. Agamenticus

Winter 2021

## When it Comes to Wildlife the Best Relationship is Long-Distance!

**W**ith the winter arrival of Snowy Owls in Maine from the Arctic, what can be an outstanding viewing experience for us can be harassment for the bird and a direct threat to its survival. These birds are already stressed by hunger and cold temperatures. Young owls especially, can be so totally naive around humans that they seem to tolerate the onslaught of birders, photographers and the general public.

With innumerable threats to their lives and habitats, survival rates for both birds and wildlife are very low. Any expenditure of energy requires a constant hunt for food. In winter, survival often becomes a second-to-second battle. For those birds and mammals we are fortunate to observe in the wild, it is crucial that we humans do not add more challenges to their endurance and existence.

**These rules for viewing etiquette hold true for both birds and mammals:**

### **Keep your distance.**

If the owl is visibly reacting to your presence – fidgeting, repeatedly staring at you, head-bobbing or changing position – you’re too close, and need to back off immediately. Needless to say, if you’ve flushed the owl you were much too close – and should reconsider your behavior next time.

### **Respect private property.**

Many landowners who host snowy owls report problems with visitors ignoring common courtesies (and sometimes even

obvious “No Trespassing” signs) to get close to owls. Do not cross private property without permission. And in coastal environments, snowy owls often roost in fragile dune habitat that is generally closed to foot traffic. Obey all closure or off-limits signs.



Snowy Owl | John James Audubon’s Birds of America <https://www.audubon.org/birds-of-america/snowy-owl>

### **Do not feed an owl, ever.**

One of the most damaging things anyone can do (usually to attract the bird for a close-up photo, but sometimes out of a misplaced belief that the owl is starving) is to feed a snowy owl. ... Once they associate people with food, the owls are drawn into dangerous situations, such as swooping close to

roads. They may also approach people who may harm them, either from fear and ignorance, or from malice.

*\*From <https://www.projectsnowstorm.org>*

**National Audubon** urges observers to stay 200-300 feet and more from owls, to use binoculars and spotting scopes to see them. Also, never encircle birds or owls. All viewers should stay on one side of the bird and keep viewing time short because our mere presence causes stress. Snowy owls may have a better chance of making it home to the Arctic in the spring if we spread the word about respectful birding etiquette.

**National Park Service** offers further information on **wildlife viewing and safety etiquette.** [www.nps.gov/subjects/watchingwildlife/7uyas.htm](http://www.nps.gov/subjects/watchingwildlife/7uyas.htm)

**The Mount Agamenticus Conservation Area** is home to Whitetail deer, Black bear, Beaver, Fisher, Porcupine, Raccoon, and many more mammals, including visits from Snowy owls, Eagles, Hawks and Osprey. We ask that you follow the viewing etiquette rules listed above and visit our website for alerts more information so you may Know Before You Go. [www.agamenticus.org](http://www.agamenticus.org)

**Web Cams enable us to experience wildlife without disturbing them. Please see the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service web cams at: <https://www.fws.gov/refuges/learn/webcams.html>; or visit your favorite bird or wildlife website for a wealth of information.**

# Nature Underground: What happens to soil, seeds and roots in winter?

When we think of seasonal rhythms as autumn progresses to winter in the Northeast, we think of the soil and waterways freezing, darkness surpassing the amount of daylight and the natural world suspended and awaiting spring.

However, seasonal rhythms of life and preparation for growth are unfolding underground even as the air turns colder, birds migrate, leaves fall from trees and animals hibernate.

Soil – decomposing organic materials (fallen leaves, etc.) are converted by soil microbes into various chemicals that react with each other and with minerals to preserve nutrients and create favorable soil conditions for vegetative growth.

Seeds – many native species produce seeds that require cold stratification, a process by which cold and moisture enables their outer casings to soften in preparation for germination when conditions are favorable; sometimes that means poking up through remaining winter/early spring snow!

Roots – some parts of trees and plants, even underground, may die during fluctuating or particularly harsh winter conditions; however, many parts of root systems are like athletes on the sidelines, resting but primed for action when called upon. The resting phase is essential to the health of plants, trees and the entire forest.



Denise Johnson

For more information on forest health or native plants:

Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, <https://www.maine.gov/dacf/php/gotpests/diseases/factsheets/winter-desiccation.pdf>

Vermont State Forester & Commissioner, Michael Snyder (author of Woods Whys): [https://twitter.com/utfpr\\_commish](https://twitter.com/utfpr_commish)

University of New Hampshire, Cooperative Extension, Assessing & Understanding Soil Characteristics: [https://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource007266\\_Rep10475.pdf](https://extension.unh.edu/resources/files/Resource007266_Rep10475.pdf)

Wild Seed Project, Portland, Maine: <https://wildseedproject.net/how-to-grow-natives-from-seed/>

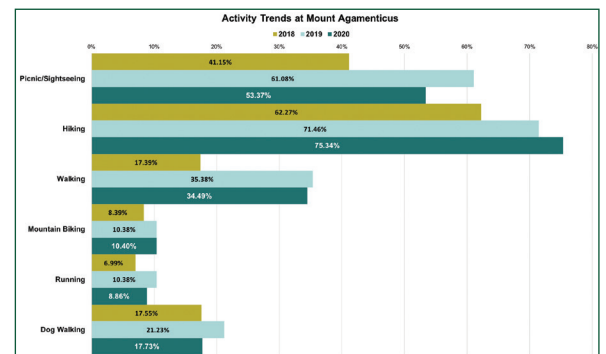
## The 2020 Visitor Use Survey

The Mount Agamenticus Visitor Use Survey is a tool that allows us to collect and analyze data on who is visiting Mount A, the popular activities on the mountain, and offers us a chance to receive direct visitor feedback. This data is gathered annually to allow for the analysis of changing trends.

After a particularly difficult spring that included a month-long closure, touching base with our multiple user groups seemed crucial. With the Learning Lodge and Conservation Office both closed to the public for the duration of the season, the survey provided us this vital opportunity for in-person outreach. We were blown away by the willingness of visitors to the mountain to speak with us despite masked faces, as well as with the generally positive feedback we received.

Of those surveyed, 70.91% of our visitors engage in multiple activities at Mount Agamenticus, a decrease from last year (76.89%). The vast majority of our visitors this year (75.34%) come to the mountain to hike the trails, an increase of 3.88% over last year. The bar graph shows three seasons of usage trends for the more common activities at Mount Agamenticus (those which have consistently seen a 10% or greater visitor participation rate over the years), from 2018-2020.

We want to take the time to thank everyone who spoke with us directly or who filled out the survey online. We greatly appreciate your feedback, suggestions, and support. A full report will be available at [Agamenticus.org](http://Agamenticus.org) soon along with our Outreach and Stewardship reports for the year.



### Some numbers at-a-glance:

- Total Surveys: 519 including 37 received online
- We surveyed 1190 individuals on-site, most people visiting Mount A in pairs!
- First Time Visitors: 189
  - First Time LOCAL Visitors: 51
- Frequent Visitors (visit at least 1/month or more): 125
- Favorite Trail: Ring Trail (32.35% of Frequent Visitors)



## Species Spotlight

## Northern Spicebush, *Lindera benzoin* by Katie Brodeur, Center for Wildlife

Don Cameron



The tiny yellow flowers of the northern spicebush provide one of the first splashes of color in the early spring landscape. This aromatic shrub is part of the laurel family, and is also referred to as spice wood, wild allspice, or snapbush. These names all reference the spicy aroma that fill the air when a leaf or twig is crushed. Though rare in Maine, it can be found growing wild along flood plains, marshes, and other wetland areas, including the wetlands on Mt. Agamenticus!

Not only is Spicebush a beautiful shrub (it is often planted as a native alternative to forsythia), but it also supports many native wildlife species. Over 20 species of birds, particularly wood thrushes, as well as raccoons, deer, rabbits, and opossums are known to eat the leaves and fruits. It is also the preferred food source and host plant for several butterfly species, including the black swallowtail and Spicebush swallowtail butterflies (*Papilio* spp.). Native Americans and frontiersmen used tea made from the leaves and dried fruits to improve digestion and circulation, reduce arthritis pain, and topically as a poultice for bruises and painful joints. When you're out on the trail this spring keep your eyes out for its yellow flowers and your nose on alert for its spicy perfume!

## BEAR BRIEF

There have been increased bear reports from sightings in and around the greater Mount Agamenticus region over the past summer and fall. Here is an explanation from Scott Lindsay, Regional Wildlife Biologist with the Maine Dept. of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife:

**There have been no bear population surveys in York County, but based on anecdotal reports, nuisance wildlife calls and personal observations, I do think the numbers have increased over the last twenty years. This area is considered to be in peripheral bear range and there certainly is a lower density of bears than in the primary range to the north.**

**There is less hunter effort for bear in this area since finding land to set bait is more difficult and running hounds is nearly impossible, so the low harvest does not necessarily reflect a low population.**

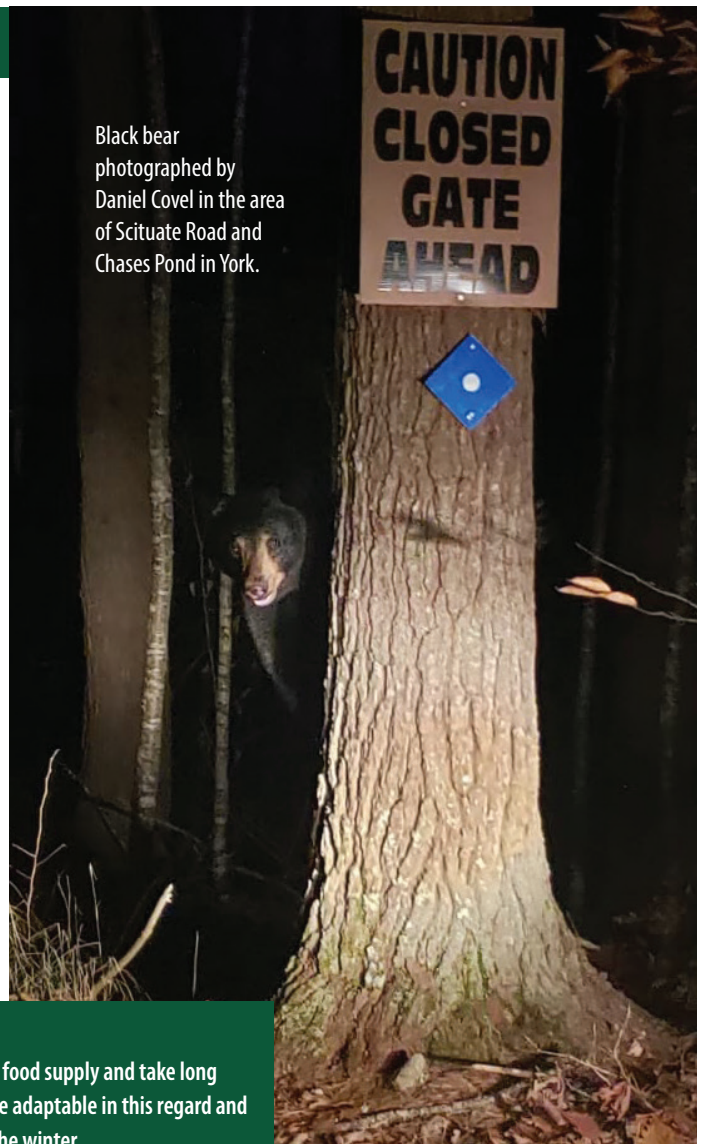
**Increased sightings are probably due to sows with cubs being out later in the fall than usual due to an abundant hard mast crop. It is not unusual for lone males to be out well into early winter, but sows with cubs normally tuck in earlier when natural food is not abundant.**

**The increased sightings may also be due to more people spending more time at their homes and more observant of bear or signs of bear being present.**

**Bears should not be considered a problem. Their range includes the entire state. Problems can be largely averted by homeowners removing bird seed feeders and other potential food attractants near the home that can be of interest to bears as well as other mammals. If a bear is localized in a dense residential area or if it shows aggression toward people or livestock, then it should be reported to Regional Communications Centers (RCC) dispatch at 624-7076 or 1-800-452-4664.**

Stay tuned for our spring newsletter to learn more about avoiding black bear encounters and conflicts!

Black bear photographed by Daniel Covel in the area of Scituate Road and Chases Pond in York.



### Did you know?

In Maine, bears are not true hibernators. They will den up when there is an insufficient food supply and take long naps. They can wake up if hurt, threatened by predators, or to give birth. Bears are more adaptable in this regard and do not physiologically commit to hibernation, sometimes waking up and going out in the winter.

# Mount A Winter Update

*"Know before you go" and help keep Mount A's trails safe and open this winter! Please continue to adhere to CDC physical distancing guidelines and pay attention to and follow all posted signage. Visitors from out of state should familiarize themselves with state guidelines regarding COVID-19, which can be found at [Maine.gov](http://Maine.gov).*

While our busiest season is now behind us, Mount Agamenticus is likely to remain a popular destination for winter recreation this year. For everything you need to know about visiting this winter, please visit [Agamenticus.org](http://Agamenticus.org)!



## Parking:

- Parking remains limited and may reach capacity, especially on weekends and holidays. Peak hours are typically between 10:00am and 2:00pm. Please park in designated parking areas only and do not block gates or roadways.
- Do not park in unplowed lots. Plow crews are busy keeping main roads and access safe. They sometimes need extra time after a weather event to get to Mount A. Please give them a break by not arriving during or shortly after a storm so they can do their work effectively.
- Have a back-up plan and be prepared to turn around and head elsewhere if parking is full or lots aren't plowed!
- Weather conditions may cause temporary road closure. In the event of an extended closure, information will be available on the notification bar at the top of our website as well as on our social media accounts!

## Facilities:

- Port-a-potties at the summit are closed for the season. The unit at the Base will remain open and is serviced by an outside company once a week during through the winter (typically on Mondays). There are no other restrooms available.
- The summit Learning Lodge is closed for the season.
- The Conservation Office remains closed to the public. *Please note that the office is staffed sporadically in the winter months and that we may not be available to talk outside or answer the phone.* You may leave a voice mail or contact us via our website. Do not call the office in an emergency. In an emergency, call 911.
- Trail boxes are open and maps are available! If you need a map, please take it with you, rather than returning it to the box. Trail maps are still also available online to download or print.
- Most decks and platforms are open; please allow others to exit before going on to decks. Stairs may be icy.
- Bring an alcohol-based hand sanitizer. Trail boxes, port-a-potties and deck/platform handrails are high touch surfaces.
- Running water is NOT available at the summit for hand washing or drinking.

Be safe and enjoy your winter!



Newsletter written and designed  
by the Friends of Mt. Agamenticus.  
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