

Building Minnesota Kids SARAH GAINNEY

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Aww, do we have to go? These are words any environmental educator wants to hear from her students when she is telling them it is time to go back to the bus. In this instance I was sitting under the shady trees in the oak savannah with a group of seven fifth graders from a St. Cloud elementary school.

We had just finished about an hour of exploring in the woods and everything I introduced the students to was met with awe and wonder: the sweet burst of nectar when you nibble on the knob of a Columbine flower; the dry bumpy skin of small toads hiding in the tall grass; the sticky leaves and stems of bedstraw which allows the plant to stick to your clothes. Almost everything in nature was new to them and I had them exactly where I wanted them. They were asking questions, being curious, acting silly while still remembering it was a school day, stretching out of their comfort zone of indoor places and electronics.

It was hard to believe this was the same group of kids that not more than an hour before, were not allowed to complete the afternoon's activities alongside their classmates due to their misbehavior.

I am a Minnesota kid. Being outside is second nature to me. I have lived in Minnesota most of my life, I had the good fortune of parents who took me outside, and I have learned how to adjust to the seasons (layers, it's all about layers).

I try to remain aware of this difference between me and most of the students who come on field trips with Outdoor U out in the Abbey Arboretum. For some, it is no big deal to spend two hours outdoors in the elements. They are mentally and physically prepared for it. But for most, being outside for that long in a place as "wild" as the Abbey Arboretum is an experience



Outdoor U preK-12 field trips are increasingly serving students with a wide variety of socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, many with little to no experience in natural spaces. SARAH PASELA.

unlike anything they have done before. Or at least something they do not do very often. This unfamiliarity sometimes leads to behaviors that make it difficult for them to be outside. Other students may be used to being outside, but are dealing with other issues such as poverty. They also may exhibit behaviors that have nothing to do with the experience we are providing but instead are just trying to survive their life.

I try not to focus on why our students sometimes have difficulty on our field trips, but I

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...the most important thing we can do is give kids a positive experience outside where they feel successful and want to keep going outside. "Building Minnesota kids," I started calling it.



“Building Minnesota kids” is in part, helping students explore the natural world filled with curiosity and excitement to keep exploring. Dipping for macroinvertebrates in the wetlands is a popular activity for students of all levels of outdoor experience. OUTDOOR U ARCHIVES.

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know their inexperience in nature is due to a wide range of things: from a lack of adults to take them outside, to a lack of safe places to be outside, to a lack of family resources to allow them the time to be outside. A lot of our students are also recent refugees from places incredibly different than Minnesota. Not being familiar with things common to most kids, such as acorns or how to put on snow pants, adds another layer of difficulty.

My job isn't to focus on the why but instead to introduce them to the wonders of the natural world and with hope, spark their curiosity and desire to keep exploring after the field trip is over. And that job has become very different in my tenure at Outdoor U.

After a few years of talking with staff, experiencing difficult field trips, and watching the continued change in our students, we spent this summer making some major changes in the logistics of our field trips with the hopes of creating a better experience for all students. We started by inviting past student and professional staff back to campus to discuss where our strengths are, what we can improve on and how we can get there. Everyone agreed we do a great job incorporating state academic standards into our curricula. But we also agreed that the most important thing we can do is give kids a positive experience outside where they feel successful and want to keep going outside. “Building Minnesota kids,” I started calling it. We then spent the summer working out the details to keep our programs relevant to the needs of our students and to continue to provide the quality experiences we are known for.

The changes include both big and small adjustments. One big change is reworking our staff so we can cut the student to teacher ratio in half. Small class sizes is a well-known best practice in formal education. We feel it will help our lead instructors create better connections and relationships with the students they are teaching, leading to more buy-in from the students.

A variety of small changes will help make the teaching experience easier on our staff, such as making sure all student visitors have nametags and creating a “Tricks of the Trail” resource for all staff. This will give our lead instructors training and resources to adjust the class activities while teaching if the students aren't responding well to the experience. We feel these changes plus many others will make

the outdoor experience more welcoming to our students, successful for our staff and enjoyable for the teachers and chaperones.

I'll probably never know if my time with those fifth graders made a lasting impact on their lives. But I do know the impact of them on my life. I held those students close to my heart when planning these changes for our program. For those students and the many others I have taught that couldn't enjoy their time with us – for all their various reasons – I have high hopes that these adjustments to our programming will help them understand the importance of the natural world and their important role in it. I hope that they learn how to be Minnesota kids.

SARAH GAINNEY is the environmental education coordinator for preK-12 education at Outdoor U. When not at work, she enjoys helping her two daughters become Minnesota kids.

iNaturalist and You

ELLA GROTE '18

Saint John's Abbey has a long history of recording observations of the natural world. The written history and phenology (the study of the timing of biological events in plants and animals) are incredibly valuable to scientists studying particular species, the effects of habitat loss or environmental changes due to climate change. And it's a great way to deeply know the land around you.

Although nature can often serve as an escape from the pervasiveness of technology in our lives, that same technology is making it easier to record and share our nature observations. iNaturalist is a platform based on crowd sourcing of data that helps you identify what you see in the natural world. The program recruits citizen scientists and naturalists to record observations of all kinds of species (plants, animals and any living things you can capture with a camera) and their locations, all over the world. Users of iNaturalist simply submit observations of organisms in the form of photographs or sound recordings through the mobile application or the website at iNaturalist.org.

Are you going for a walk in the Abbey Arboretum? Did you notice a strange bug in your back yard? Snap some photos of the plants and animals you see and post them to iNaturalist. The observations provide valuable open data to a variety of scientific research projects, museums, botanical gardens, parks and other organizations. iNaturalist users have contributed nearly six million observations since its founding in 2008.

Every single iNaturalist observation represents a moment when someone spent just a little more of their time considering the natural world than they would have otherwise, and as a result they have a record of that experience they can share and discuss with the world. Maybe you're not the only one who admires the many varieties of lichens. Do you visit a natural area to see birds, but wonder about all of the amphibians around you?

Getting Started with iNaturalist

- Download the free app for Apple or Android or visit the website iNaturalist.org
- Create an account to begin posting or commenting on observations. *You do not need to create an account just to explore the site and the vast catalog of observations.*
- Get outside! *Go for a hike and take some photos or recordings (be sure to note your location if you aren't using a geolocator on your phone or other GPS device).*
- Search for "Abbey Arboretum" under "Places" to see what people have been observing here!



Outdoor U staff have been using iNaturalist as we practice our identification skills on the trails. ELLA GROTE.

Whatever your naturalist passion or your curiosity, chances are that iNaturalist can connect you with others who share your fascination or those who can answer your questions.

Once you post an observation other iNaturalist members can comment on it or suggest an identification. For instance, a member interested in lichens could search within Observations on the program just for Beard Lichens and comment on posts by other lichen lovers. If you are interested in observations of a specific place, like Saint John's Abbey Arboretum, you can begin by searching under Place. iNaturalist is an invitation to take note of the natural world, to enjoy nature, interact with it and provide observations to a vast shared nature journal.

In addition to the crowd-sourcing capabilities for identifying unknown species, as of this summer iNaturalist now uses artificial intelligence to offer immediate identifications for your observations. Prior to this new feature, it could take a few days before your observation would be identified by an expert. Now, iNaturalist will provide you with a list of ten top suggestions for your observation seconds after you post it and one of those ends up being correct 78% of the time. The program has even learned to recognize several species from unusual angles—like the head-on perspective of a slaty skimmer dragonfly. It can also cope with species that come in various patterns. Experts will still verify the program's identification, but it's a great way to get instant feedback on your observations.

From hikers to hunters, birders to beach-combers, the world is filled with naturalists, and many of us like to know the names of what we find and be able to share this knowledge with others. Join us in documenting the natural world around Saint John's and in all your favorite outdoor spaces.

ELLA GROTE is senior psychology major at the College of Saint Benedict and is a student naturalist for Outdoor U.

A Loon by Any Other Name Would Sound as Sweet

KYHL LYNDGAARD

Listen—the wail of a loon rings out through the darkness. Three tones at night, distinctive and individuated. Wolf-like. For many of us, this sound evokes deep feelings of wonderment and brings to mind the wild places in Minnesota, whether you imagine Lake Sagatagan or Saganaga Lake at the end of the Gunflint Trail in the Boundary Waters.

This association may have been cemented by writer Sigurd Olson, who played a critical role in wilderness conservation in northern Minnesota (and whose son became the most prominent loon expert in the country). Olson opened his best-known book with the eponymous phrase “[t]he singing wilderness has to do with the calling of the loons...” Of course, when we want to talk to each other over breakfast about the eerie sounds we heard last night, that proper noun — *loon* — is not, in this case, tied directly to the vocalizations of the bird itself or the landscape the bird inhabits.

While meditating at Saint John’s in 1956, the great Catholic thinker Thomas Merton wrote in his journal about seeing and hearing loons: “The loon, I think, is a very serious bird and I take him very seriously. To me it is not crazy but even, in a way, beautiful. It means distances, wind, water, forests, the loneliness of the North.”

While Merton goes straight to the heart of our symbolism of the bird as a wilderness icon, he is mistaken in his reference to the word “crazy.” It is a common misconception that the basis of the loon’s name is “lunatic,” even if some people think their tremolo call sounds like the laughter of an unhinged soul. Some evidence suggests that the Norwegian word “lom” — think of the English word lament — is a source for the name loon. Anthropomorphically speaking, that is, if we apply human characteristics to the noises loons make, they can sound mournful and dirge-like. In truth, our American English name for the bird likely comes from the Icelandic word “luinn,” meaning clumsy or lame.

Is it an improvement to think of loons as lame, rather than loony? Although a backhanded compliment at best, lameness does at least nod to the evolutionary success of loons over millions of years. Their legs are positioned near the terminus of their body in order to propel them deep



Gavia immer, the common loon, is an icon of the Minnesota wilderness. Across centuries and cultures, the loon has been given a variety of names — some more complimentary than others. MIKE LEEDAHL.

into clear lakes in pursuit of their fish diet. Loons venture on land only for nesting and mating, and are far more comfortable in water.

And this line of investigation has resulted in much worse names. John Florio’s Italian-English dictionary *A Worlde of Wordes*, published in 1598, gives loons the alternate moniker of “arsefoote.” And if that purveyor of unnecessary E’s didn’t do enough damage to the reputation of the loon, the family name was next based on the Latin word for diver: “urinari.” That’s right. Instead of *Gavia immer*, the common loon was known in the 19th century as *Urinator imber*, a handle that makes me feel downright pissed off. At least the Brits had the good sense to eventually settle on a truly poetic common name for the common loon — the great northern diver. And while *Gavia* may best be translated as “generic seabird but still better than *Urinator*,” *Immer* remains an inspired choice. It may refer to two aspects of the loon. One is the beautiful plumage, as the Swedish “immer” or ember denotes the ashy blacks and whites of the feathers. The second is the Latin word *immergo*, which clearly nods to the bird’s preferred watery mode of being.

Many languages have employed onomatopoeia in the naming of loons. Onomatopoeic words imitate sounds made in nature like “buzz” or “snort.” Birds with such names in English include the chickadee, whippoorwill, whooping crane, and even the bobolink. Interestingly, studies of auditory processing have revealed that different

“The loon, I think, is a very serious bird and I take him very seriously. To me it is not crazy but even, in a way, beautiful. It means distances, wind, water, forests, the loneliness of the North.” –*Thomas Merton*

regions of your brain respond to non-verbal sounds, like a loon call, versus most human language, like the word “loon” being spoken. On the other hand, onomatopoeic words are processed by multiple regions and therefore can bridge human language and animal sounds. Great examples of these names for loons range from the Russian “gagara” to the Finnish “kuikka” and the French “huart.”

In North America, Algonquin tribes call the loon “Kwee-Moo.” While many creation stories are about turtles, some describe the loon diving to find earth after the failure of muskrat, otter, and beaver. After several minutes below the surface, Kwee-moo finally returns. Thinking he has failed, he wags his foot above the surface to wave good-bye to the others in disappointment (a move loons are known to make, though not as a farewell). Then, surprise! A few specks of mud glistened on his foot – just enough to make the world out of. Other onomatopoeic names heard on Loon Island include Kwimuuk and Hukweem. The Anishinaabe word for loons is “Mahng”; furthermore, loons represent a totem animal with great abilities. Going back to names based on physical characteristics, the loon is known by various groups of Inuit as “Too-lik” or “Tullik.” These names reference the very strong and shapely bill of a loon. Transliterated, too-lik means “having a tusk.”

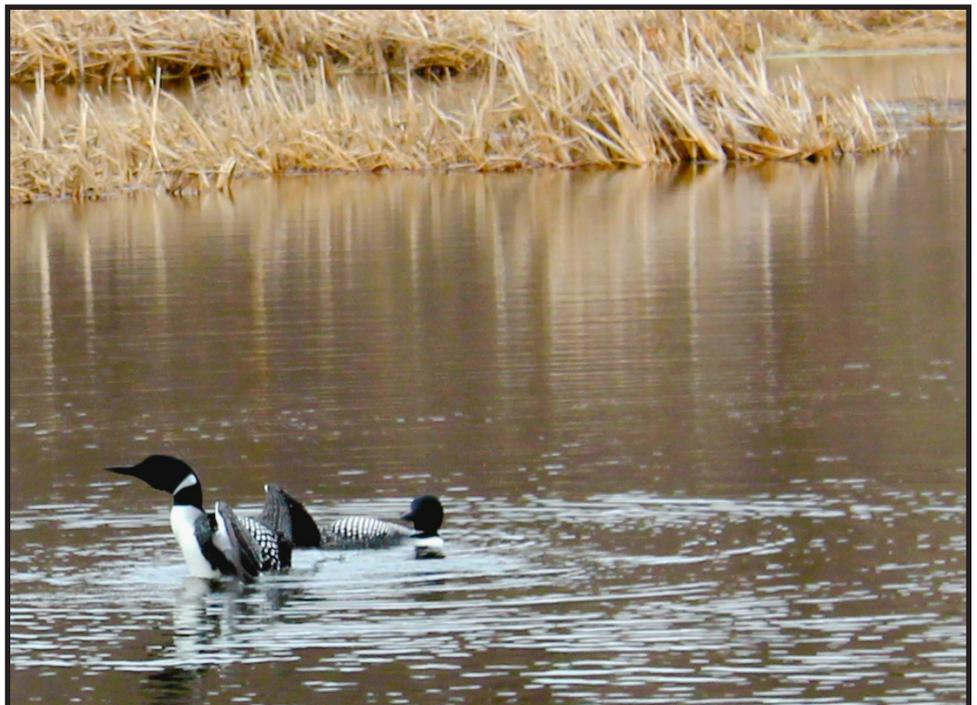
Yet, for those of us fortunate enough to observe loons on the same lake over a period of time, knowing the species name is not nearly specific enough. Loons at Saint John’s have been the subject of scientific studies in recent years, with Big John being the nickname given to an adult male who returned to Lake Sagatagan for several years after each winter spent bobbing on the Gulf of Mexico. Minnesotans who live on a lake will often say, just a few days after ice-out, “Our loons are back!” And they are correct – these birds are usually the same individuals year after year. The wails the big male loons let out at night are territorial markers, and each loon has its own voice. If you listen carefully enough, you may even begin to differentiate between various individuals.

And, if listening isn’t enough,

go ahead and let out a loon call in return, like Katharine Hepburn does in the film *On Golden Pond*. You’ll no doubt sound like an individual, too, as your brain and vocal cords work in tandem to span an inestimable distance of words and sounds and evolutionary history. You will be a wild and rather loony individual at that, but let me assure you, not the least bit lame.

KYHL LYNDGAARD is an affiliated scholar of environmental studies and is the director of the CSB/SJU Writing Center and First Year Seminar program. An avid outdoor explorer and nature writer, he may occasionally be described as a wild and rather loony individual, but we assure him, not the least bit lame.

*Many of the names from other languages were gleaned from Judith McIntyre’s excellent book *The Common Loon: Spirit of Northern Lakes* (University of Minnesota Press, 1988).*



It is a common misconception that the loon’s name stems from the word “lunatic,” despite the distinctive tremolo call that has wildness to it that evokes a little “looniness.” OUTDOOR U ARCHIVES.

What I Learned This Summer

LIBBY AMES '19

Work as the Collegebound coordinator all pays off after one memorable week in the wilderness of Northern Minnesota. At least that is what I thought. It turns out I learned so much more this summer than I could have imagined.

1. I can plan a weeklong wilderness trip.

More accurately, I can organize four different types of wilderness trips for 150 of my peers, all starting and ending together with lots of adventure in between. Several groups went canoeing in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA), some were rock climbing in Tettegouche State Park, some camped at various parks along the North Shore, and others backpacked along the Superior Hiking Trail. All ended in Grand Marais, Minnesota for a final night of camping as one large group.

Collegebound is designed as an outdoor orientation experience for students entering their first year of college. It's a way to test boundaries and develop skills, meet new people and have a great shared experience before embarking on four years of college together. Coordinating a successful weeklong trip for 150 people takes meticulous planning, countless hours working with spreadsheets and lots of practice setting up and repairing gear. While I met with my supervisor regularly, I had to otherwise work independently and learn to hold myself accountable for getting all the needed work done. I am grateful for the trust that was placed in me to plan a spectacular trip.

2. I can patch holes - in tents and plans. Every aspect of this trip needed to be thought about in detail, from transportation to and from the North Shore for a group of 150, to how each group would purify their water. It turns out I cannot write notes to myself on random pieces of paper because they get lost. I spent two full weeks setting up tents, repairing zippers and sewing holes. I spent hours on the computer responding to parent questions so they felt confident their kids would be in good hands.

Even though I spent every day making sure the trip would run smoothly, I knew that in reality, there would be a few bumps along the way. So I planned for that too. Each trip had detailed emergency and safety plans, including phone numbers for emergency contacts and who and



Libby Ames set up a "tent city" on campus this summer as she inventoried and repaired gear for 150 college students participating in Collegebound in August. KYLE RAUCH.

where the closest emergency responders and hospitals were located.

3. I can lead my peers. As Collegebound drew near the 36 facilitators moved in to start training. Everything went smoothly until each group had a chance to inspect their gear. Several tents, despite the repairs I had made to them, were on their last legs and would not be able to make it through another week

in the wilderness. Other groups stepped up and redistributed their tents to these groups, deciding their own groups could fit snugly into fewer tents.

Once we departed to the North Shore, the stress of planning began to dissipate. The campers and climbers, backpackers and canoeers all peeled off to their destinations. I was excited for all of the groups, including my own, to bond and create memories that would last a lifetime.

As all of the groups reconvened at a campground in Grand Marais, I got to hear all of the stories of crazy adventures and see peoples' faces light up as they talked about their week. And I got to put a face to all of the names I had looked at daily in emails and on numerous spreadsheets all summer. I had this strange, and admittedly slightly creepy, talent of already knowing all 114 participants' first and last names whenever I was introduced to someone.

4. I can canoe with jellyfish. In Minnesota. Looking back on this trip as a coordinator, I have a newfound appreciation for all of the work that goes into planning events for large numbers of people. With the added unpredictability of the wilderness and all of the things that could go wrong, Collegebound could not have gone any more smoothly than it did. This past summer has prepared me for my future in ways I could not have imagined, and I can't wait to watch next year's coordinator emerge from their experience with the same newfound sense of responsibility and confidence to begin the next chapter of their life. Oh, and if you ever find yourself in the BWCA and you think you see a tiny jellyfish, you do. Trust me, they exist.

LIBBY AMES is a junior environmental studies major at the College of Saint Benedict.

Get Involved

SAINT JOHN'S OUTDOOR UNIVERSITY

BANFF MOUNTAIN FILM FESTIVAL WORLD TOUR

Tickets on sale beginning Sept. 18

Films shown on Wed. & Thurs., Nov. 15 & 16

7:30 p.m., Pellegrine Auditorium, SJU

Journey to exotic locations, paddle the wildest waters and climb the highest peaks. The Banff Mountain Film Festival World Tour begins immediately after the Film Festival held every November in Banff, Alberta, Canada. Attend one or both nights of inspiring films.

COLLEGEVILLE COLORS

Where art and nature invite you for a walk.

FREE thanks to support from St. Cloud Subaru!

Spend the afternoon hiking in the woods of Saint John's Abbey Arboretum as you enjoy the fall colors, artwork, live music, nature activities, and more along the Chapel Trail - rain or shine!

Sunday, Oct. 1

1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

ANNUAL OUTDOOR U PHOTO CONTEST

Free and open to the public

Submit your outdoor photos from CSB/SJU! Five photos can be submitted in each of three categories. Plants & Critters; Earth, Lake & Sky; and People. A panel of judges will pick the best photos from each category in three age groups: Under 18; 18-22; 23 & Up. Best in Show will be voted for on Facebook.

Entries due Nov. 7

MEMBER & VOLUNTEER OPEN HOUSE

Invitations will be mailed by early November

Celebrate the holiday season with good food, entertainment and conversation with friends, new and old. Fundraiser valet service, silent auction and other opportunities to support Outdoor U and the Abbey Arboretum at the best party of the year.

Friday, Dec. 8

LANGLAUF NORDIC SKI RACE

Skate 25K or 9K OR Classic 16K or 7K Collegiate and Citizen Races

The Langlauf @ Saint John's starts and ends in Clemens Football stadium and skis through the hills of Saint John's Abbey Arboretum. This is a naturally challenging hilly and wooded course. Collegiate racers can choose between skate 25K and classic 16K; citizen racers can choose technique as well as the shorter distances. Electronic chip timing provided by Pickle Events.

Sunday, Jan. 21

LIVING IN THE AVON HILLS CONFERENCE

Registration brochures mailed in January

Join us in 2018 for this popular conference, convening outdoor enthusiasts of all ages. The conference price includes the keynote presentation, your choice of a variety of sessions, lunch, refreshments and access to the Exhibit Hall. Bring the kids for sessions designed specifically for them - a conference for the whole family!

Saturday, Feb. 10

9:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.

SKI & SPIRITUALITY RETREAT

Single room: Fri-Sun, \$229 | Sat-Sun, \$159

Double room: Fri-Sun, \$399 | Sat-Sun, \$299

Join Saint John's Abbey and Outdoor U for a weekend of skiing and reflection. Fill your weekend with learning, walking, meditating, reading, relaxing and of course, skiing. Ski the Abbey Arboretum trails on your own, with a monastic guide or have lessons targeted to your interest and ability.

Friday - Sunday, Feb. 16-18

Prices include lodging, meals, spirituality classes, ski guides, ski equipment and ski lessons.

MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVALS

Join us for what has become our most popular event of the year! Sap collecting, syrup cooking, horse-drawn rides, demonstrations, and hot maple syrup sundaes await the whole family during this fun-filled event! Preregistration for families is preferred but not required.

Saturdays, Mar. 24 & Apr. 7

1:00 - 4:00 p.m.

Saint John's Outdoor University Staff:

JOHN GEISSLER
Saint John's Outdoor U Director
Abbey Arboretum Land Manager

SARAH GAINEY
Assistant Director
Envr. Education Coordinator

KYLE RAUCH
Assistant Director
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Abbey Arboretum Forest Technician

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2 LAND LABORERS
6 NATURALIST AIDES
10 NATURALISTS
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SAGATAGAN SEASONS

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THE PROGRAM

Saint John's Outdoor University provides environmental and outdoor education through classes, events and initiatives with the Abbey Arboretum, Saint John's University and the College of Saint Benedict.

THE PLACE

Saint John's Abbey Arboretum is more than 2,500 acres of lakes, prairie, oak savanna and forest owned by Saint John's Abbey and surrounding Saint John's University.

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BANFF
MOUNTAIN FILM
FESTIVAL
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NORDIC SKI RACE

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