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Winter 2025

Friends of the Fossil Beds

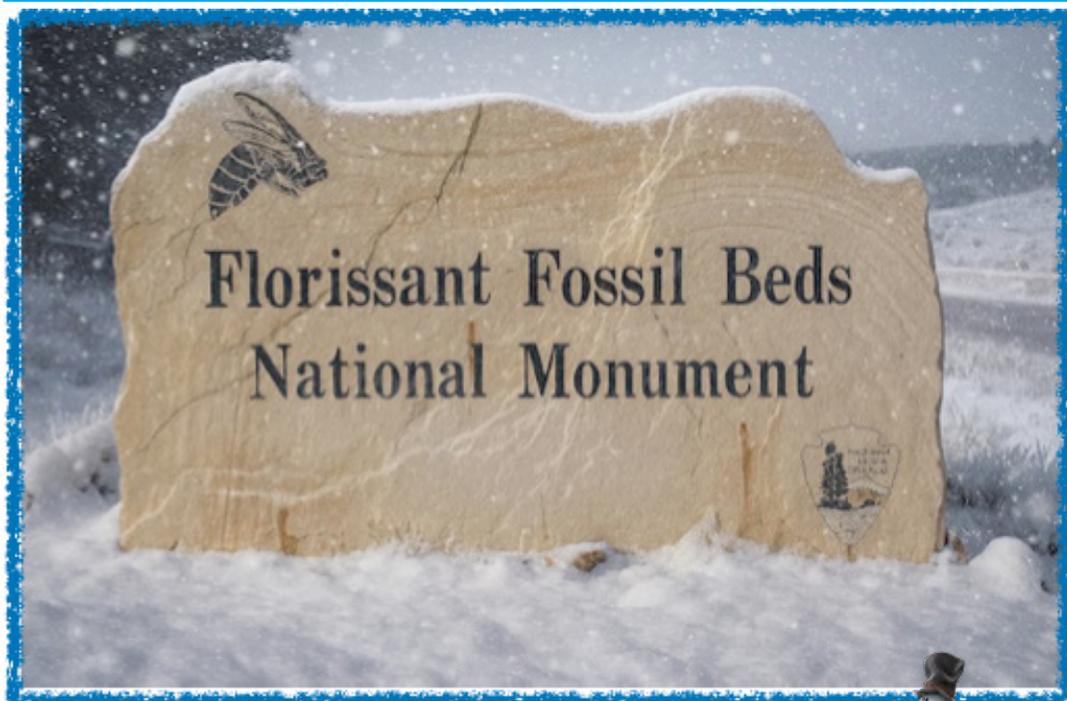
Newsletter

Winter season is a great time to visit the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument.

There are days of wonderful weather and those occasional days of challenging weather. Winter welcomes.

Please dress appropriately for the predicted weather and always remember that Mother Nature enjoys an element of surprise.

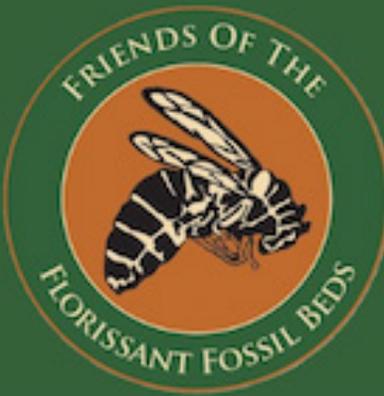
Call ahead for weather and Monument information:
(719) 748-3253





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Zoom Seminar Series 1/14 at 1pm MST

Please note this seminar will not be presented at the Florissant Fossil Beds, you must register using the link below or by clicking on the flyer.

Join us on 1/14 at 1pm for a Zoom seminar with Mark Harter!

Dark Skies Matter

Mark Harter is the Night Sky Astronomy Lead at the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. This webinar will focus on the importance of preserving Colorado's Dark Night Skies and highlight the sensational dark skies of the Fossil Beds. In addition, webinar will provide 5 simple ways all of us can help reduce light pollution and educate our friends and neighbors on preserving night skies.

All views expressed during this presentation are that of the presenter and do not represent those of the National Parks Service, the Florissant Fossil Beds, or the Friends.

Registration link available below or by clicking on this flyer.

[**Register Here**](#)





The Visitor Center is information central for Monument visitors.
The Visitor Center:

- ◆ Provides a welcome atmosphere for all visitors.
- ◆ Is staffed by National Park Service Rangers, paid staff members, and volunteers that are standing at the ready and fully prepared to answer your questions and / or suggest a possible trip itinerary for your visit.
- ◆ Supplies a Hiking Trail map that includes trail distance, difficulty levels, and what to see on your hike.
- ◆ Provides an assortment of gifts, books and general merchandise related to the Fossil Beds and related fields of interest for purchase.
- ◆ A museum the exhibits fossils, locally discovered and preserved, that are displayed for educational purposes. An informative movie, *“Shadows of the Past”*, is offered that highlights the geological history of the region.
- ◆ ...and, of course, the Visitor Center maintains clean restrooms for Monument visitors.



Winter Astronomy - Florissant Fossil Beds Night Sky Mark Harter, FLFO Volunteer Ranger, Astronomy Lead December 2025

Winter – this is the time of year that FLFO boasts the clearest night skies of the year that earn the highly coveted International Dark Sky Park (IDSP) designation. The cold, long Rocky Mountain nights are usually clear of dust and moisture which make the stars shine and twinkle like no other time of the year. The constellations of mighty hunter Orion, his faithful dogs Canis Major and Canis Minor, the Gemini Twins, Queen Cassiopeia, Taurus the Bull, the Pleiades (7 Sisters), Andromeda Galaxy, and numerous rich stellar nebulas and planets are all in season and worth the chill to view.

Three Very Special Fall Visitors. This fall, the Fossil Beds had three very special astronomy events: two comets, and a spectacular showing of the Northern Lights. Comets Lemmon (C/2025-A6) and Swan (C/2025-R2) both peaked on October 20-21 in the western sky after sunset, and could be easily seen with binoculars. A comet is simply a dirty ice ball mixed with rock, and as it orbits the sun it starts to melt, creating a trail of moisture, debris, dust, and gasses. Both of these comets orbit the sun in highly elliptical orbits of 1,350 years and 22,554 years respectively, which means we'll never see them visibly again in our lifetimes. Below is a picture that Mark Harter took of Comet Lemmon from the Fossil Beds on October 21, 2025.



Comet Lemmon, C/2025-A6 (photo credit: Mark Harter)



The third special astronomy event this fall occurred on Veterans Day, November 11, with a spectacular display of the Northern Lights, thanks to a major eruption of solar energy from the sun, known as a coronal mass ejection. This is part of the sun's highly active solar maximum, which occurs every 11 years. For the last year, the sun's stronger than usual solar activity has been reaching the earth's magnetic field, creating geomagnetic storms of intense nature. When this happens, the solar bursts interact with the upper atmosphere (thermosphere), causing intense Aurora Borealis that sometimes push south into the continental United States. You may recall this happened in May and October of 2024, but this 2025 Veterans Day event was even stronger, as a G-4 geomagnetic storm produced spectacular Northern Lights reaching into the mid-latitude states, including Colorado. The sight was a beautiful display of aurora green and red sheets of ionized particles in the thermosphere that lasted several hours on the night of Nov 11. These geomagnetic storms also cause issues with power systems, GPS signals, and orbital satellites. Below is a picture taken from the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument by Mark Harter on November 11, 2025.



Aurora Borealis / Northern Lights, Florissant Fossil Beds
(Photo Credit: Mark Harter, 11/11/25)



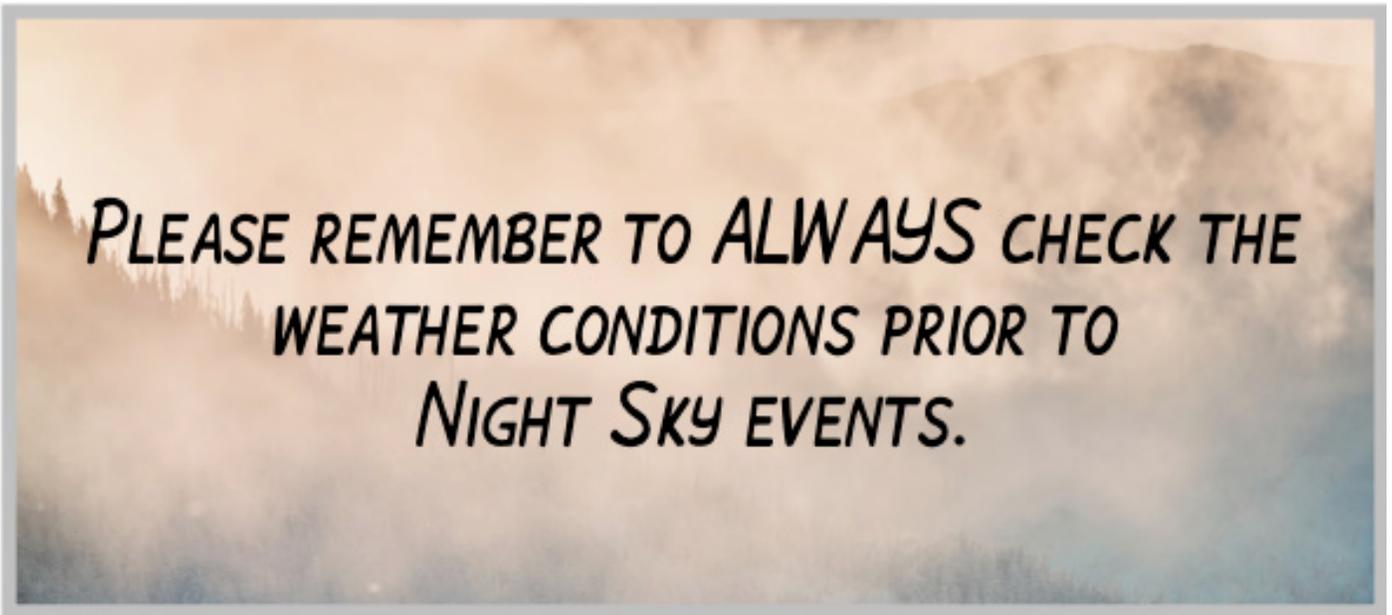
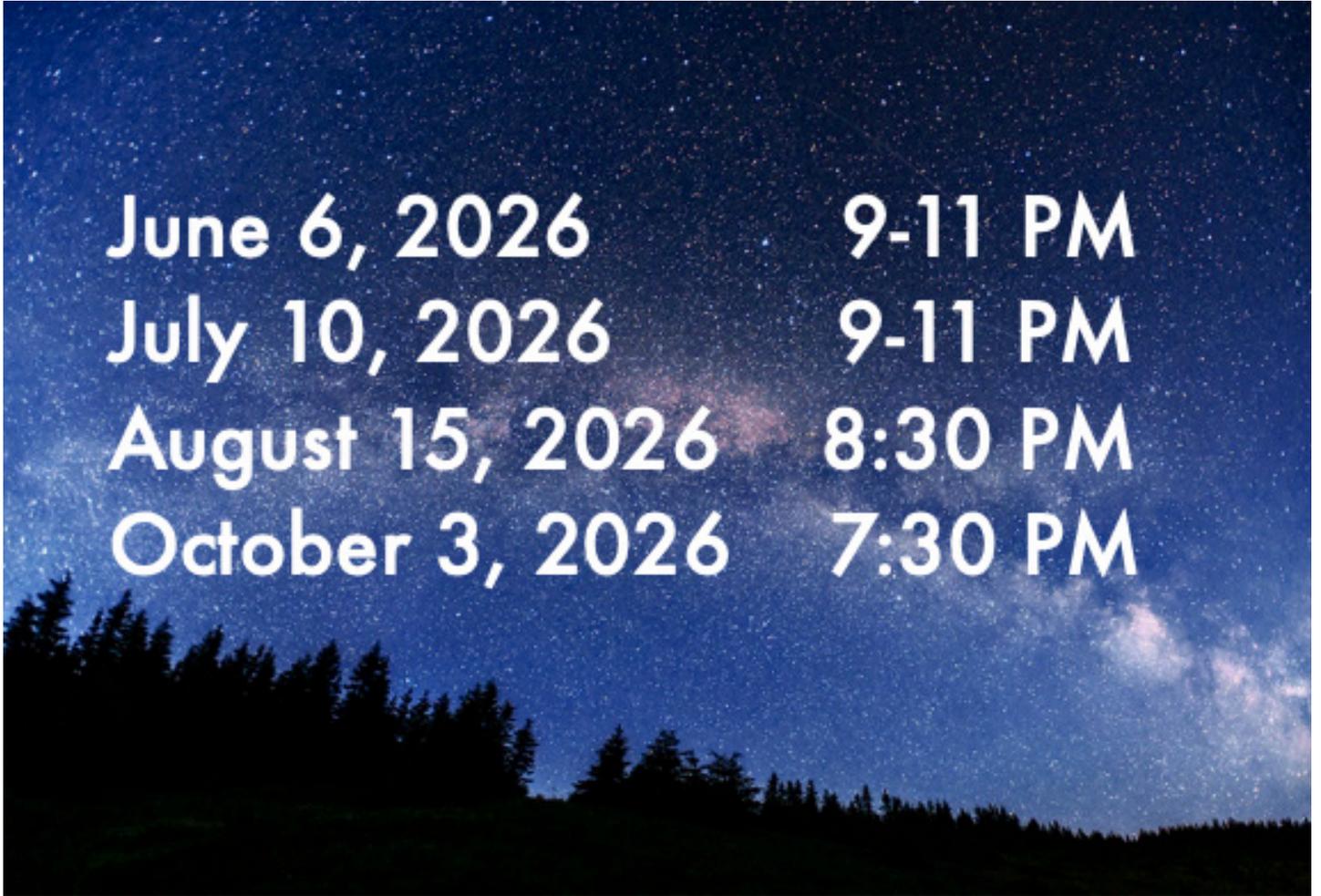
We completed our 2025 Night Sky Astronomy Program at Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument with over 1,100 visitors attending our public outreach Dark Sky Astronomy programs. We have 4 planned events for 2026 in partnership with the Colorado Springs Astronomical Society, so please come out and join us! Stand by for details in the Spring 2026 Friends Newsletter.

** If you want to learn more about FLFO as an International Dark Sky Park and how to reduce light pollution, please join the Friends' Webinar on January 14, 2026, 1:00pm for a "Dark Skies Matter!" presentation. You'll enjoy this highly informative presentation on the spectacular astronomy viewed from the Fossil Beds, our prestigious International Dark Sky Park designation, and how we can all protect our Dark Skies by reducing light pollution.

Mark Harter is a Florissant resident, and is the FLFO Astronomy Lead. He is an Aerospace Engineer, retired military Veteran (Air Force), and certified FAA Remote UAS Drone Pilot.



Dates for the Florissant Fossil Beds
Night Sky Program



CO Gives Day 2025 Early Results

Patty Glatfelter, Treasurer

Enthusiasm and commitment were on full display this year for the Friends and supporters of the Florissant Fossil Beds NM (FFBNM) pre-, during-, and post- fundraising day on December 9th. At the time of the writing of this article, The Friends received \$615 in November from early giving and an additional \$2998 as of December 12th. This generosity almost quadrupled the donations from our first year of fundraising in 2024 with the CO Gives Day effort.

These dollars are in addition to \$1050 directly provided to the Vim Wright Legacy Fund (VWLF), which was initiated by our generous donor, John Wright. John provided a \$50,000 gift in memory of his mother's efforts to preserve and protect the land which is now the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument. This will stand as the seed money for additional matching donations to support the interns and future environmental stewards. They will contribute their knowledge and efforts to enhance the National Park Service mission at our Fossil Beds.

The CO Gives Foundation will continue to support and invest in the VWLF as the Friends continue to fundraise for sustaining the Legacy Fund in perpetuity. We are so fortunate to have this active science park as a site of the National Park Service (NPS) right in our rural community. The value of the education and scientific discoveries provided by individuals who benefit from these funds is incalculable.

A BIG THANK YOU to all our current and future donors!



Donation Corner

June 3 --> December 12, 2025

To our Donors, we are thankful for your generosity and support for our mission. Much of what we do would not be possible without you.

Katy	Ayers	Aurora	CO
Crystal & John	Babos	Sedalia	CO
Frani	Bikant	Golden	CO
Kent	Borges	Colorado Springs	CO
Gary	Censoplano	Woodland Park	CO
Colorado Springs Mineralogical Society		Colorado Springs	CO
Cynthia	DeMore	Divide	CO
David	DeWeese	Vancouver	WA
Andrea	Engler	Brier	WA
Anita	Flindt	Florissant	CO
Patty	Glatfelter	Florissant	CO
Dana	Griffen	Fort Collins	CO
Fred & Pat	Gustafson	Colorado Springs	CO
Linda	King	Florissant	CO
C. Joseph	Long	Loveland	CO
Sally	McCracken	Woodland Park	CO
Jerry	McLain	Woodland Park	CO
Wendy	Meister	Evergreen	CO
Michelle	Melville	Florissant	CO
Sarah	Miner	Colorado Springs	CO
Brad	Mohre	Malo	WA
Isabelle & Steven	Mollien	Denver	CO
Sheila	Nitzel	Aurora	CO
Beth	Omenhiser	Divide	CO
Rod & Toni	Ratzloff	Florissant	CO
Peter	Rudy	Berkley	CA
John	Schwabe	Florissant	CO
Mark & Linda	Silas	Florissant	CO
Daniel	Stephenson	Clearwater	FL
Amy	Wolin	Woodland Park	CO
Deborah	Woodcock	Lexington	VA
Thomas	Wylie	Centennial	CO



Submitted by Gary Censoplano



TOC



Submitted by John Schwabe

“Art in the Park” continued this year with five dates. It began in the last week of June through the end of July. It was once a week on Wednesdays from 10am to noon. Four NPS volunteers prepared, set up and supervised the art activity. They are Michelle Melville, John Schwabe, Holly Samples and Laine Weber. Each volunteer brings their unique artistic talent, enthusiasm, and teaching ability while working with the young and older visitors. One hundred and forty-six visitors participated, ranging in age from three to **101** years of age.

The art program is designed for all ages; young visitors were the majority. Several summer camp youth groups participated. The Friends of Florissant Fossil Beds paid for this year’s art supplies, which included card stock paper, large crayons, colored pencils and a fold-up wagon. The Park Service provided watercolor brushes, paint kits and clipboards.

The Program is on a drop-in basis at the Stump Shelter. Wildlife, flora and fauna drawings are printed on card stock which works well for watercolors and colored pencils. There is a wide variety to choose from, from columbine to bears. We also have rubbing plaques with insects and vegetation available. The younger kids really enjoyed the rubbings with the large crayons.

If families needed to leave, we sent blank drawings to take home and finish later. When young artists completed their works, they were sent to the visitor center to have their drawings receive the park date stamp to help them remember their visit to the Florissant Fossil Beds.

Overall, “Art in the Park” was very successful, with lots of smiles, laughter and budding artistic fun. Our thanks goes out to our new NPS volunteer, Holly, and the great job she did.

We would like to continue the program in 2026. Dates, times and overall approval will be determined by the Park administration and the Friends’ volunteers. The volunteers, NPS staff and Friends’ board consider it an inexpensive, sustainable Park visitor experience.





"I CAN DO THAT!" IS A POSITIVE THOUGHT.



THERE WAS A TIME WHEN
LEONARDO DA VINCI
FIRST PICKED UP THE BRUSH.



Art in the Park 2025



Special thanks to Michelle Melville, John Schwabe, Holly Samples and Laine Weber for their help in making Art in the Park the success that it is.





A Long-Tailed Weasel on a Winter Day

J.J. Huie, Naturalist

When I'm hiking or snowshoeing, often I'm too lost in my thoughts to notice wildlife. In winter, my wildlife sightings are usually non-existent except for the occasional mule deer. This winter, however, I was fortunate to spot what I believe was a long-tailed weasel (*Mustela frenata*) while cross-country skiing with a friend near Steamboat Springs.

I recently moved to Steamboat from Colorado Springs to seize a job opportunity and satisfy a desire to explore new trails. Fortunately, I'm still able to contribute to and help edit the Friends' newsletter and so maintain my connection to the wonderful Fossil Beds where I was an intern back in the summer of '03. It's not as easy to write articles that pertain to the Pikes Peak area while living in Steamboat, where there isn't a ponderosa

pine to be found. That's part of the reason I was so excited to watch the long-tailed weasel in summer coat which potentially could be found at the Fossil Beds and on Pikes

Peak, run across a snow-covered meadow next to Steamboat Lake.



While *M. frenata* is only about a foot long (including the tail) with a slender body, it is one of the

most ferocious mammal predators. Chiefly feeding on mice, the long-tailed weasel can also prey on rabbits, squirrels, and birds. Its potential predators are many: hawks, owls, cats, coyotes, foxes, minks, and martens. However, the scent glands of weasels make them unsavory and thus cause predators to avoid them.



From The Archives March 2006

Observing a long-tailed weasel during the day was a special treat because they are primarily nocturnal. Nevertheless, they can be active during the day, when they are most likely to be found in brush or in the forest near water or talus (deposits of large, frost-wedged rocks that are often found at the base of steep slopes.)

In the winter, the pelage of *M. frenata* is all white except for the black-tipped tail, while the rest of the year it shows off a coat that is chestnut brown above and golden buff on the undersides. The hunter I witnessed had a bounding gait as it traveled across the snow. Life is much more of a challenge for weasels,

even if they don't have to pay taxes. Because of its long, thin body and consequently high surface area-to-volume ratio, the long-tailed weasel must constantly expend metabolic energy to stay warm. While its body allows it

to hunt in tight quarters, hunting requires much more energy than resting. That I witnessed *M. frenata* moving about at all was fortuitous, considering that it restricts its hunting time in the winter in order to save energy. While many of us may go into the winter mountains with the hope of spotting

bobcats, coyotes, or maybe even a mountain lion, we may end up discovering a predator, the long-tailed weasel, that is a little more humble in stature but no less impressive.



Long-tailed Weasel in summer coat



Great Backyard Bird Count



The International Great Backyard Bird Count will be held Friday, February 13th - Monday, February 16th.

The Friends of the Fossil Beds will be sponsoring our usual event for the count at the Florissant Fossil Beds National Monument on **Valentine's Day from 9 AM - 1 PM** with walks to count birds and activities for children and families.

Come join us for this very important Citizen Science event.

You can learn more by visiting the [Great Backyard Bird Count website](#).

Information from 2025 GBBC events

- ◆ 8,078 species of birds identified
- ◆ 217 countries or eBird subregions
- ◆ 387,652 eBird checklists
- ◆ 655,549 Merlin Bird IDs (step-by-step, sound, or photo)
- ◆ 189,741 photos, videos, and sounds added to Macaulay Library
- ◆ 838,113 estimated global participants
- ◆ 409 reported community events

[\(Great Backyard Bird Count\)](#)



Local Artist Spotlight



“Weathering the Storm”

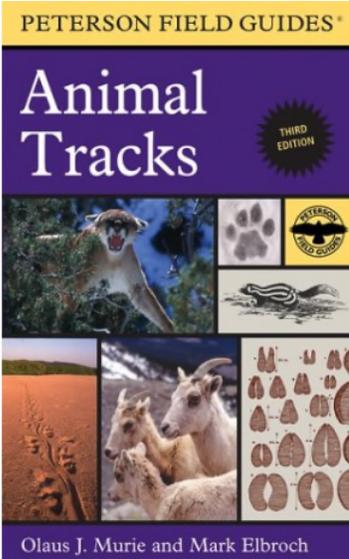
A watercolor by Michelle Melville depicting the resilient nature of the Florissant Fossil Beds Monument and the people who love it.

We welcome art from local artists.





The Reading Room



Peterson Field Guides Animal Tracks 3rd Edition Olaus J. Murie & Mark Elbroch

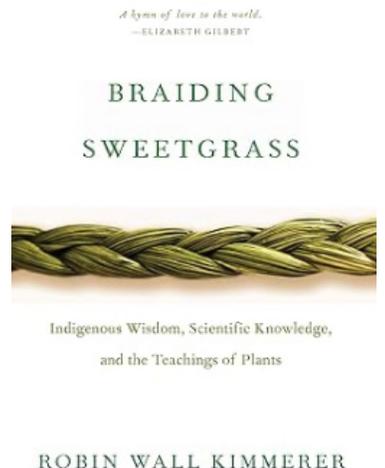
“This all-new edition includes descriptions of the habits, habitats, tracks, signs, and ranges of all the mammals of North America, as well as of selected birds, reptiles, amphibians, and insects. More than one thousand line drawings show individual tracks, track patterns, droppings, and gnawed trees. One hundred color photographs further enhance the text. The authors use an anecdotal approach, and the text is filled with inspirational stories, wonderful natural history, and relevant information about the tracks and signs of North American animals.” [Amazon](#)

Available in hardcover and paperback versions.

Braiding Sweetgrass Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants. Robin Wall Kimmerer

“As a botanist, Robin Wall Kimmerer has been trained to ask questions of nature with the tools of science. As a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, she embraces the notion that plants and animals are our oldest teachers. In Braiding Sweetgrass, Kimmerer brings these lenses of knowledge together to show that the awakening of a wider ecological consciousness requires the acknowledgment and celebration of our reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world. For only when we can hear the languages of other beings are we capable of understanding the generosity of the earth, and learning to give our own gifts in return.” [GoodReads](#)

Available in hardcover, paperback, and audio book - [Amazon](#).





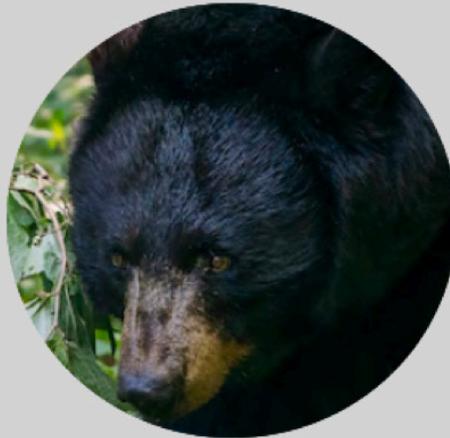
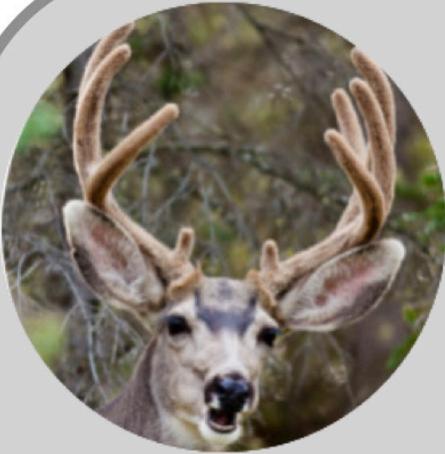
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|--|---|

Not every item will be needed on every winter hike, but, in general...

Better to have and not need than need and not have.



We hope to
see you soon!



*Please
respect
distance.*

Images are representative of animals that choose to visit or live within the Fossil Bed boundaries.



CODA



National Park Service Photo

