

Huntington-Oyster Bay Audubon Presents



The Ecology of Snow: Nature's Down Comforter with Michael Bottini December 14, 2011 7pm

A snowpack contains a large volume of air, enabling it to trap the radiant heat from the earth and create a micro environment that can be significantly warmer than the air above. In regions of the world with snow cover that persists for several months each year, this microenvironment is so important to the survival of many members of the region's flora and fauna that ecologists have given it a specific name: the subnivean zone. The insulation value of snow is also exploited by native people in northern climates, explorers and mountaineers; these groups create artificial subnivean zones called igloos, snow caves and quin-zhees that are key to their survival in cold temperatures.

Snow can make traveling in search of food more difficult for herbivores and carnivores alike. The snowshoe hare, lynx, and caribou have disproportionately large feet that enable them to survive in regions where their ecological counterparts - cottontail rabbits, bobcat and deer - would perish. Some species in regions with persistent snow cover, including the snowshoe hare, go through dramatic seasonal color changes to best blend in with their surroundings. In areas of significant annual snowfall, snow loading on trees has favored certain species and spire-shaped growth forms that more readily shed snow. This presentation will discuss these and other characteristics of snow that make it an important ecological factor in shaping the distribution and design of many plants and animals.

Mike Bottini is a veteran naturalist, outdoor educator, and environmental consultant. After completing graduate studies in wildlife ecology at the University of British Columbia, Mike worked for fourteen years at the Group for the South Fork, a non-profit environmental advocacy organization. He has taught field ecology, environmental science, and natural history courses at St. Lawrence University, Southampton College, and CUNY, has published three books, and is an award-winning columnist. Mike's wildlife research studies have included elk, spotted and tiger salamanders, spotted turtles, piping plovers, and river otters. At St. Lawrence, he designed and taught Winter Field Ecology, and has slept in igloos and snow caves in the mountains of New England, Colorado, Scotland, Labrador and Baffin Island. He continues to introduce people to the outdoors through his field naturalist classes, nature walks, and paddling trips



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