

C H A U T A U Q U A



BIRD  
TREE  
&  
GARDEN  
CLUB



**What's  
A-Float?**

# Tundra Swans

by Jeanne Wiebenga

Each year in late fall, we anticipate the arrival of the Tundra swans on Chautauqua Lake, on the way from their breeding grounds in the arctic tundra to their overwintering sites along the east coast. This year we **first spotted them in small flocks north of the Bell Tower on November 21st, on the day we had our first heavy snow fall.**

**Tundra swans, also called Whistling swans (*Cygnus columbianus*) are the most abundant** of the 2 species of swans in North America, with the Trumpeter swans (*Cygnus buccinator*) a distant second. They can be distinguished by their size and several physical characteristics. The **Tundra swans are smaller, have a shorter beak with a small yellow patch (called the Lore) between eyes and nostrils** and they also have a **different call**. Since they are quite noisy it is no surprise that many people confuse them with the Trumpeter swans, as I did, until I recently listened to the sound recordings of both species replayed on the Birds of the World website of the Cornell Lab of Ornithology.

**In the spring the Tundra swans nest near shallow pools, lakes and rivers of the of the Arctic tundra of the northern hemisphere.** They stay close to water to fend off predators, like bears and wolves, and may even sleep on water. Their diet consists almost entirely of **submerged vegetation.**

They form **monogamous, life-long pairs** and produce a **clutch of 4 to 9 eggs**, that hatch after one month in April and fledge 3 months later. **After fledging the young stay with the parents for a year or two.** In the fall, called by their instincts, the entire family joined by other groups starts the **3,000 mile migration south**, often in V-shaped flocks.

On their way to the east coast they make several stop-overs and that is when we get to enjoy these beautiful birds **on Chautauqua Lake, usually in small family groups**, with the youngsters recognizable by their brownish-grey feathers but otherwise the same size of their parents. They are always noisily interacting with each other, diving to feed, playing and perhaps with some fighting for dominance. **Usually they stay around for a few weeks, but this time they left after just a few days from the northern basin. However, at**



**present (mid December) they are still around at the Audubon Community Nature Center, almost 3 weeks after they left us!** Eventually they will fly on to the estuaries of the east coast to spend the winter. Then, next spring they will return again to their breeding grounds up north and the cycle will repeat itself.

Jeanne Wiebenga  
December 2022

Many thanks to Jeanne for this article and the tundra swan photos above and below. Jeanne also spoke at our Annual Lunch in August. Her topic was *Return of the Osprey to Chautauqua Lake*, a talk and slide show about the ongoing osprey photography project she began in 2020, which has exhibited at the Roger Tory Peterson Institute and at the Athenaeum. [Click here for more on Jeanne.](#)

### The Trumpet of the Swan

[Click here with SOUND ON to watch a video](#) Jeanne shot in late November of the **Tundra Swans** on Chautauqua Lake. The **audio is the best part** of the video. Plus, once you hear it, you will surely sympathize with those of us who thought maybe we were hearing Trumpeter Swans. No shame here - the Tundra Swans have a real trumpet vibe.





# What's in Berry?

Winterberry  
(among other things)

## The Gardens Through a Winter Lens by Betsy Burgeson

For as much as I knew about gardening before starting at Chautauqua, the learning curve has been steep and my views on gardening have expanded exponentially since 2015.

For example, before working here, I rarely planted annual flowers and couldn't tell you the difference between marigolds and mums. Now I design and help plant over 300 annual flower baskets, planters and garden beds each year.

*Spoiler Alert: tune in to January's BTG Newsletter for a behind the scenes look at how the planters come to be each year!*

As I was saying though, the ways I look at a garden now are much different than in 2015. Sustainability, ease of maintenance and aesthetics are obviously always in the forefront of my mind, however, it only took one winter driving around the grounds for me to realize just how important **four-season gardens** are. These perpetual beauties not only provide food and shelter (ie essential habitat) for our native wildlife, they help break up the monochromatic deep winter landscape with color and texture.

The brilliance of winterberries against the snow, the textural layers of ninebark shrubs and the ombre of evergreens create a feast for the eyes in a much-



needed time when “blah” is normally the best way to describe the scenery (and a lot of our moods too!)

Not only does gardening for year-round interest increase the beauty and happiness in the outside landscape though, it has the added bonus of supplying a cornucopia of cuttings that can be used to create winter arrangements that beautify interiors as well. A few sprigs of pine, holly and cedar, plus a splash of winterberry and voilà...a festive centerpiece.



I have always thought of plants as the means to aesthetically pleasing habitats. Now I add: “that will look really cool in winter arrangements” to that thought.

After 8 years of creating live wreaths, indoor and outdoor arrangements, swags and garland I now have a much bigger lens when designing plantings. I have started to use more evergreen plants in my designs and I think about where “bling” is needed to replace the “blah” in the landscape both on the grounds as well as my own gardens. I have also learned that winter “interest” isn’t simply improving aesthetics through color or texture. By creating winter FUNCTION, we attract wildlife, which adds interest on a whole other level.

Looking at the gardens through an off-season lens definitely makes walking or driving around Chautauqua Institution in the middle of winter, daydreaming

about the gardens, much more fun.

Designing for year-round function in the garden brings me hope and excited anticipation of what's to come and I couldn't think of a more appropriate idea to write about during the holiday season.

**May your gardens be varied and bright and may all your landscapes be "right."**

- photos and article by Betsy Burgeson, Supervisor of Gardens and Landscapes, Chautauqua Institution

For more information on Gardening for Winter Interest click on the links below:

[Winter Interest in the Garden by the Smithsonian Gardens](#)

[Winter Interest in the Garden by the National Gardening Association](#)

[SURPRISING COLOR, WELCOME TRANQUILITY by Cornell Botanic Gardens](#)







# Reconnecting with Nature

## Part 2: Cognitive Health Can Nature Really Make Us Smarter?

by Jack Voelker

In November's newsletter, the case was made for the positive impact that the natural world can have on our physical health. From strengthening our muscles and tendons to breathing in cleaner air and the restorative benefits of woodland aromatic *phytoncide*, it's not hard to make that case. But can experiences in nature positively impact our brains as well as our bodies? Can nature really make us smarter?



For the answers we have to look to neuroscience. Some years ago the claim that “Google” was making us all smarter was a hot trending topic on the Internet. Just recently a study touted video games as a brain booster. Unfortunately neither of these notions came from neuroscientists. While it is undeniable that electronic media can be shown to increase brain *activity*, arousal does not necessarily equal smartness. It seems that our brains can suffer from fatigue, just as surely as our bodies. And that fatigue is a price we increasingly pay for our modern lifestyle (a lifestyle, not coincidentally, disconnected from nature). Our daily routines are a whirlwind of choices, multi-tasking, and distractions, in or out of the workplace. How many emails, texts, news stories, and funny cat videos do we have to choose from, now that we have nearly constant attachment to electronic media? Even the screens themselves are an annoying distraction of ads, pop-ups and toolbars. At the same time, we attempt to remember our doctor’s appointment, buy a birthday card for our friend, pick up the kids from ballet lessons or basketball practice and stop at the supermarket to pick up...what was it again...oh yes, milk and cereal (only to discover we have to choose between 18 different types of raisin bran). Our complex contemporary society requires an immense amount of mental energy, and this price we pay is known as *inhibition fatigue*. Our brains are equipped with a natural inhibition function that helps us divert energy away from distractions and allows us to concentrate, to pay attention. But in the face of overwhelming stimuli, something has to give. One example is the loss of self-control, that part of the brain that constrains the impulse to engage in risky behaviors (like overeating). Drs. Selhub and Logan in their book, [Your Brain on Nature](#), offer a useful analogy. Think of our brain as an automobile. The natural inhibition function is the brake and the pervasive sources of arousal in our lives are the accelerator. Now think of applying the brake while stomping on the accelerator at the same time. Not good for your automobile, not healthy for your brain.

Enter the natural world. When we are in the midst of our daily overdose of attention-seeking stimuli, our brains are working overtime, expending great energy, often on things of no great interest or intrigue, and often in environments lacking in rich sensory exposure. For many, this describes the work environment. So much of indoor space is predictable and likely holds little fascination yet demands our attention. Over 100 years ago, the famous

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psychologist William James defined two major forms of attention: *voluntary attention*, requiring a sustained effort and *involuntary attention*, an effortless process characterized by piqued interest and excitement. So much of our lives is lived in the realm of voluntary attention and mental fatigue. Now go outside to a garden or woodland trail and consider the contrast. An environment full of color and texture and sound and smells and if you're lucky, tastes. An ever-changing environment where the stimuli are simply of more interest, more attractive, more naturally appealing, and most importantly requiring far less energy from your brain to take in.

In nature, removed from distracting thoughts and mental fatigue, we think more clearly. Studies have shown that workers improved their productivity, focus and accuracy when given "nature breaks". Even spending a few minutes looking at *photographs* of nature scenes produced positive results. Similarly, school children have demonstrated improved outcomes on tests given after an outdoor experience or even in classrooms with unobstructed views of nature through their windows.

So the next time you or someone you're with are frustrated or stressed and say, "I'm going outside to clear my head," know that you're on the right track. Far better than another energy drink or a fourth cup of coffee, nature can provide the path to the cognitive restoration you seek.

- Jack Voelker, BTG Life Member, Director (Retired) of Recreation and Youth, Chautauqua Institution, Aspiring Harmonica Player, Former Hop Farmer

Many thanks to Jack for this article, which is the second in a 3-part series. Part 3 will focus on emotional health. Look for that in a 2023 newsletter.

- photo of Miller Park by Doug Miller



# Historical Tidbit

## Sledding in Chautauqua



The photos are worth a thousand words, but here are a few more for context:



top photo:

Sledding Down Miller Avenue into Mt Herman on Toboggans, Flexible Flyers,  
and Flying Saucers

January 1993

Photo by Carol Ramsey of the Miller boys and Maren Miller

bottom photo:

Toboggan Run on Foster Ave

1916

Unknown photographer, Oliver Archives

note says: William B. Howland, publisher of The  
Independent and honorary Trustee of Chautauqua Institution standing on the  
right



# Help Us Grow!

**Many thanks to those of you who have already donated to the BTG this year! If you have not donated yet (or would like to donate again!), please consider a gift to the BTG as you plan your year-end giving.**

**We have raised about \$3,700 so far in our Year-End Fundraiser! Won't you help us meet our goal of \$5,000?**

**Last minute shopping? A Life Membership would make a nice holiday gift for a nature-loving person in your life.**