

## DECEMBER 1- 14, 2021 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

### BIRDS OF WINTER

some winters we get a chance to see these beautiful birds.



**Snowy Owl, *Bubo scandiacus*, immature.** © Dick Harlow

From time to time, Snowy Owls have a winter population irruption that results in their expanding distribution during winter. Here in Vermont during winter, we can be the beneficiary for such irruptions when they occur. This species is an arctic breeder, and its irruptions are dependent on the expanding Arctic Lemming population. These Snowy Owl irruptions mean that the offspring need to move to other areas that they are not familiar with to hunt and survive. Consequently, during



**Dark-eyed Junco, *Junco hyemalis*,** © Dick Harlow

Dark-eyed Juncos in the past were called Slate-colored Junco. This species is a mountain breeder in coniferous and mountain mixed woodlands. Therefore, we see this species come late Fall and early Winter.

In the past we have had individuals who have stayed with us all winter because of the ample supply of bird feeders here at EastView. Once Spring arrives, they will be off again for the higher elevations.

For winter sparrows ground feed is the best food to purchase. When attracting winter sparrows or finches to your feeder or yard try to stay with ground seed. Ground seed will also attract Snow Buntings another winter visitor.

However, you will not attract Snowy Owls with seed in feeders. Their primary food are rabbits, squirrels, ducks, grouse or even fish.

## DECEMBER 1- 14, 2021 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow



**American Tree Sparrow**, *Spizelloides arborea*,  
© Dick Harlow

The American Tree Sparrow breeds in Canada and the Arctic, but winters here in Northern U.S. EastView has been fortunate to have Tree Sparrow individuals that have stayed with us throughout the winter. Come spring they will be on their move north to breed.

## CHRISTMAS



© Freepik, close-up of burning candles in a saucer on a natural Christmas Tree.

According to the internet, it is widely thought that the Protestant reformer Martin Luther was the first to add a fire lighted candle to a Christmas Tree around 1525. The candle was lit on Christmas Day itself to symbolize Christ's arrival as the "Light of the World".



© Safestart.com. different style of fire lighted candles and Christmas Ornaments on a combustible Fir Tree.

Is anyone old enough to remember fire lighted candles on Christmas trees? Before electric Christmas lights were invented and became the norm for people to use, fire-lighted candles on their very combustible Christmas trees, was what was used. That was the custom! Not until the 1920's and 1930's when electric lights came into being did that tradition begin to wane. Yet, I can remember my parents talking about when they as children used to see burning candles on Christmas trees. It is amazing to me more homes didn't catch fire.

Today, although we use electric lights and there is less chance of a fire, we still need to be careful. Natural trees brought inside a warm house will dry out rather quickly if water isn't kept in the tree stand.

## DECEMBER 1- 14, 2021 NATURAL HISTORY NOTES

By Dick Harlow

It is interesting to see how Christmas tree decorations have changed and yet stayed the same over the years and centuries. It is not my intent to give a synopsis of those events but simply to say we all need to be cognizant of how Christmas has changed over the years and put stock in what the original meaning was for Christmas.

Christmas for Christians is always a celebration of the birth of Jesus, the Christ. Family gatherings are paramount, but not always possible for some. When you can gather it is even more of a celebration because of these times of COVID and its variants.

Remember Hanukkah, the Festival of Lights, and Kwanzaa the celebration of African American heritage.

Blessings to all!

**Note:** For those that are interested in the planets when the night sky is clear there are three planets that are easy to see at dusk.

As the sun sets on a clear night in the west and dusk begins there are three planets Venus, Saturn, and Jupiter that are visible. These planets are all on a line with each other from the lowest which is Venus very bright above the Western horizon. The line of three planets is slanted upward and bending to the south you then will see Jupiter also bright. On that line in between both Venus and Jupiter, as the sky darkens, there will be a fainter star between the two brighter planets. That is Saturn. Good Luck!

## OBSERVATIONS

### MAMMALS

Red Fox- tracks in snow  
Eastern Cottontail Rabbit- tracks in snow  
Meadow Vole- eating seed

*All Measurements taken at solar noon (1230 EST).*

### PRECIPITATION

**Average December Precipitation for Vermont = 2.36 inches.**

**Precipitation for December 1-14 was 23.0 mm or 0.9 inches.**

**Overcast Days 1-14: We had 10 days of overcast skies. Of those overcast skies 9 days produced snow or rain.**