

Welcome to Naturally Speaking - Season 1 Episode One

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Erika Barthelmess: One of the hallmarks that I think makes Nature Up North really valuable and interesting is our focus on place. So let me just give you an example of why I think this is really important when we teach about nature in a formal educational setting, we often either teach depressing stories about how nature is being destroyed, and so, boy, if I'm a fifth grader and I'm hearing that all the time it's not going to give me a lot of hope, or we teach about places that are far away from here. And so, for example, the New York State fifth grade English language arts curriculum has kids learning about the rain forest, and I've been to the rain forest. I love the rain forest; the rain forest is super cool. But the reason I can know that the rain forest is cool, is because I know about our northern forests, by comparison. And we also have these amazing for us all around us that do amazing things for us that our students don't really ever learn about. And so, the idea about place-based learning is using your own home place as a lens through which to explore your education. So, what would be amazing is if what you actually learned in school was really relevant to your day to day life and your place where you live. And so, you could on your way home from school be reinforcing the lesson that you learn about local forests, because you might walk past a local forest, but you're not gonna walk past a rainforest.

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Kayla Edmunds: And therein I'd say lies the mission of Nature Up North Hello everyone, my name is Kayla Edmunds I'm an intern at Nature Up North and a rising senior studying Conservation Biology at St. Lawrence University. Welcome to the very first episode of Naturally Speaking, a new podcast from Nature Up North. In this episode we're going to introduce you to the Nature Up North project and our inspiration for this podcast. Today we'll be talking with Dr. Erica Barthelmess founder of Nature Up North and professor of biology at St. Lawrence University, along with Madison O'Shea project manager at St. Lawrence University alum class of 2019.

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Kayla Edmunds: To start off Erika can you just tell us a little bit about yourself so listeners can get to a bit about Nature Up North's founder.

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Erika Barthelmess: My name is Erika Barthelmess, I'm a Professor of Biology at St. Lawrence University and the director of the Nature Up North project. I grew up in suburbia outside of Cleveland, Ohio and moved progressively south for college and graduate school, which fit well with my personality. I like four distinct seasons, so I was really excited to move to the North Country in 1999 I moved up here and, I'm 52, so it's the longest I've lived anywhere, relative to like how long I lived in my hometown growing up and that sort of thing. So this is definitely what I think of as home here in the North Country.

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Kayla Edmunds: And what inspired you to start nature North North?

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Erika Barthelmess: I started Nature Up North in response to what I saw as three competing pieces of information in my brain, and part of it was based around and experience I had on vacation with my older brother. He loves nature, but he doesn't love to be in nature. So, if indoorsy could be used to describe someone, my brother is indoorsy, and Tom if you're listening to this podcast, you know I love you and you know it's true. I don't think he'd argue with me about that. Anyway, he's also a super good sport and my family went on vacation in Maine to Acadia National Park, and we were hiking. And at the top of this beautiful mountain where you looked around and you had a 360-degree view of the sea, and the mountains, and the rocks, and the trees, and it's a beautiful, beautiful sunny day and my brother was on his phone. And he was doing live Facebook updates about the hike, because this was like 2010 or something so Facebook was more of a thing, and I was just aghast, like, what are you doing, brother!? Look around! We're in this beautiful spot. Why are you on your phone. What's the matter with you? And the more I thought about it after the hike ended, the more I realized, you know that piece of technology is helping my brother engage with the environment and that's part of his experience, and who am I to judge? He actually ended up taking these really neat photos of I don't remember how he did it, but it was like the same person was in the photo multiple times. Like, you know, jumping up and down and whatever. And it was really cool. And there I was feeling kind of judgmental about you're not experiencing nature, the way I think you should. And you're using technology to interact with nature and that seems bad. And so there's that whole piece. A second part was that, you know, I'm a field biologist and I went to college before there were such things as cell phones. Nobody had any little toys like that, and so when we went out in the woods for lab, for let's say a botany class, we just went out in the woods and we had a magnifying glass or a little hand lens for looking at things, but there were no field guides on your phone, you had a paper book that you want to do identify something you looked it up and that was how we did it. And there was quite, as technology developed, the sort of old school view was oh, people can't experience nature, they're distracted by their technology. And so, because I was teaching during this transition from no cell phones to cell phones, I always personally struggling with, "Do I ask students to leave their technology in the lab when we go out into the woods?" And you know, I thought about that at first, but that ship had sailed and especially now where you know when I started when cellphones came online. Most of my students didn't have them and if they did have one, they had only just gotten it as a college student, and now kids see cell phones from the time they're like two years old and they grow up with it as almost an extension of their body. And so, asking people not to take that with them seemed like the wrong choice. So, there was that question in my mind I was grappling with about, well, here's my brother and the phone is helping him engage with nature. Here's all these amazing things that you can do with your phone, you can identify plants, you can carry, instead of a heavy backpack with 15 field guides in it, you can carry one little phone and have all those field guides, just in your

phone. It's got a camera; it can be a magnifying glass. It can do all these things. Maybe we could leverage that interest in technology to help people engage more with nature. And so that was the second piece was thinking about how I approach teaching students about being outside and learning about the local environment. And then the third piece was really, you know, when you teach you learn. I think anybody who's an experienced teacher, whether they teach kindergarten or graduate students knows that you learn as much from your students as teach them and I teach Conservation Biology, which is a capstone course for our senior Conservation Biology majors and I've taught it basically since I started at St. Lawrence in 1999, and there's a lot of depressing content in the class. And so one of the things I do is talk with students about, well, what are we going to do, how do we fix these problems. And year after year after year what came up was, well, we need to get people connected, people are disconnecting from nature and you're not going to take care of something that you don't feel a connection to and education came up again and again and again, we've got to get people more connected. We've got to educate them. And I thought about the role of a traditional academic which for people who don't understand how the professorate works, my job involves three pieces: teaching, research, or scholarship, and service to the university and my profession and the research piece usually means it means I'm trained as a scientist and I love to do scientific research. But it means collecting data and writing up data for a technical audience and sharing those findings with a fairly narrow technical audience and the impact that has on conservation can be pretty minimal. And so, I just started thinking about, well, I need to put my money where my mouth is and if I'm really concerned about protecting the environment and if, year after year, students and I are all agreeing that people need to be more connected, and if technology is this way that people are connecting, then we need to put those together and do something. And so that's where the idea for Nature Up North came from.

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Kayla Edmunds: And what a great resource it's become for the North Country. I know personally, I love that it offers a way for St. Lawrence students to connect with the community and just kind of avoid getting stuck in that campus bubble. Madison can you tell us a little bit about yourself as well just so listeners can get to know our current project manager bit more.

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Madison O'Shea: Yeah so, I'm a St. Lawrence University alum of class 2019. And I grew up in the North Country. I live sort of halfway between Canton, and Russell, I would say. At St. Lawrence I studied biology and education, and my goal was to be a high school biology teacher and after student teaching, I realized that the schedule of the day to day teaching life wasn't necessarily for me, but I did love working with kids. That was something that didn't change at all. And then my last semester I actually worked with Erika and in Nature Up North, and I was helping to take Monitor My Maple and make it something that teachers could use

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Kayla Edmunds: Quick side note: Monitor My Maple is one of Nature Up North's science projects visit www.natureupnorth.org and check out the Citizen Science tab to learn more.

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Madison O'Shea: So one of the really valuable things I learned while I was student teaching is the standards that teachers have to use to teach the kids. And while it's really helpful in some ways, sometimes it makes you feel kind of confined. So my goal was to take Monitor My Maple and find out ways that teachers can use it in the classroom. So I created a teacher's guide. And I broke down each unit they have to teach, and I found the standards and I connected the two that way teachers could see how Monitor My Maple could be used in the classroom to teach the standards that they have to teach. And so my goal was to try and make it Monitor My Maple could be used in the classroom setting, and I actually did Monitor My Maple with my students when I was student teaching and they loved it and they loved being outside and is one of the times I've seen the most, the most engaged and I realized that kids really are curious about the outside world. And so I was very excited to start this position this semester and combine my love for place-based education and working with kids and nature and also get a chance to work with the North Country community which I grew up with in love. So, it was definitely a way to connect all of my passions, this semester. So I've loved working for Nature Up North this semester.

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Kayla Edmunds: So we've talked a little bit about learning Monitor My Maple, teacher resources, and the origins of Nature Up North. But what is Nature Up North actually?

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Erika Barthelmess: Nature Up North is an education and outreach project based at St. Lawrence University, that has really the sole purpose of helping members of the North Country community, whether they are St. Lawrence students or folks living in Russell or Messina, kids who are, you know, elementary school students senior citizens, it doesn't matter, if you live up here in the North Country you are our audience who we are trying to work with. And our goal is to help North Country residents connect for the first time, or reconnect with our amazing local natural resources, with the hope that that will increase people's commitment to stewarding those natural resources into the future. So, Kayla, I have a question for you.

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Kayla Edmunds: Yes

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Erika Barthelmess: You're one of our interns and we said, "Hey, thinking about a podcast and you just jumped right in and said, ooh, I want to help with that." So what makes you excited about the nature of North podcast?

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Kayla Edmunds: The thing that makes me excited about a Nature Up North podcast is just a great resource, I found for learning, kind of on the go. So you can listen to it in the car. That's my favorite place to listen to podcasts, you can listen to it while you're doing chores, or if you don't have the time to sit down for 20 minutes and read a blog on your way to work, you can just pop our podcast up in your car and learn about stargazing.

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Erika Barthelmess: Madison what are you excited about starting Nature Up North podcast?

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Madison O'Shea: I think it's just a really great new way to get information. And I think part of it, you can take Nature Up North with you wherever you go, which is really fun. I think that it really helps you know, all different kinds of learners. So we have the blogs, people that like to read. And now we'll have the podcast, people that like to listen, our auditory learners, and with a background in education that's really exciting to me. And so yeah, I would just say the fact that we're able to offer a new way for people to get involved with nature, is just really great and it's becoming more and more popular and, as much as COVID-19 and quarantine has, you know, brought a lot of struggles I think it has really forced us to continue getting engaged in technology, and if our mission is to connect technology and use technology to get people outside I'm really excited that we have an opportunity to grow off of that and keep updated with the times and offer what people are most interested in hearing so I'm very excited about this new journey that we're starting on

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Kayla Edmunds: Not only, not only connecting people listening and community members via technology, but I think it's going to be a great way for Nature Up North to connect with other organizations and people in the North Country who wants to talk about and teach others about the things that inspire them and what they love.

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Madison O'Shea: And I think a lot of the time when we think of science and scientists, we imagine people far off in a lab. And so it will be very exciting to connect all the scientists that we have here in the North Country and also, you know, our local community scientists that are hopefully going to be jumping on board and helping us with our community science projects. Um, so I I'm very excited about that connection that you're talking about Kayla.

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Erika Barthelmess: Yeah, I'm excited to hear from some of my friends and colleagues and people that I don't know yet about what they do in the north country and how it connects with the environment. And having I like the time of the podcast because Kayla as you're saying you know you can. I like to listen to podcasts while I'm washing the dishes, for example, and you can spend a little more time in the podcast. Our blog pieces are pretty short, and they're written to be read fairly quickly. But you're right. You can't do anything else while you're reading them for the most part. And so I really like the idea that somebody can do the dishes or be driving to work or, you know, working out at the gym and they could be listening and learning something local. I think one of the things I'm the most excited about is I listen to a lot of podcasts, but they're all about either continental scale or international topics and we have such a great wealth of resources here, both in terms of human resources, people who have deep knowledge of our place, and also the actual natural resources and I really like the idea of being able to learn more about that through a podcast and have something really that has a local feel.

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Kayla Edmunds: So we have a stargazing podcast in the works coming in a few weeks, and what are some other topics that we can look forward to podcast wise?

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Madison O'Shea: Yeah, Aileen O'Donoghue is a physics professor out of St. Lawrence and she's just a great ball of energy, much like the stars I'd say, and she's come to a lot of our campfires, (I know thank you I'm glad you enjoyed the pun - to Erika) So she's going to be coming and doing a stargazing podcast with us and for any of you that have had the fortune of coming to our campfires. She's been a guest often and she teaches us about the stars, and she shows us stars and tells us really great stories. So we're excited to be bringing her and for our next podcast.

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Erika Barthelmess: One of the things I love about Aileen one of those stargazing campfires that she did with us, it was super cloudy and you know somebody is a really great educator and passionate about what they do when they can give an absolutely captivating stargazing talk to see the night sky when you can't see the night sky. And she had this little laser pointer and she would point it up there and say, "well, if you can actually see past the clouds. This is what you would see." And you could have heard a pin drop, the audience was so taken with everything she was saying just hanging on your every word that I thought, wow, that's really good stuff if you can make people care about the stars during a stargazing talk where you can't see any stars, pretty good stuff. So I'm also really looking forward to that one.

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Madison O'Shea: Yeah, absolutely, I was actually there as just a community member and I was completely captivated. And I couldn't see the stars she's talking about, but the way that she was talking about. I could just picture. It was just there behind the clouds. So it was really great.

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Erika Barthelmess: Some other topics we might address, and of course this is a new podcast, so we'll see what comes when, in terms of scheduling and getting people on board. I think it'd be really neat to do something and talk with some local invasive species biologists and invasive species managers. You hear about invasive species all the time, but again, we don't always get the local view on what's going on. And now we've got Emerald Ash Borer, at least in St. Lawrence County and other places in the North Country that's going to be devastating for ash trees. Giant Hogweed, which causes phyto-burns. I mean, just some crazy stuff. Some of it that you can eat. We have been doing a workshop for a long time in which we harvest garlic mustard and then make pesto out of it. And so, garlic mustard is another example of one of these invasive species. I think it might be really neat to just feature some scientists and have them tell us about their environmental research and maybe take a walk into a wetland with a wetland ecologist or a forest ecologist and just hear about what they're studying. So, I like to imagine what I'm thinking of as the audio field guide the idea that you might we might do a podcast episode where we supplement it with some pictures on the website and you could, you know, sort of, prepare yourself by looking at the pictures before you go out and then go out and listen to the podcast while you look at the particular area that you're in, and, you know, learn some cool things about it, personally guided by an expert in that particular topic.

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Kayla Edmunds: We might also be hearing from our fairies that migrate through in the spring and the fall, passing down south to their home, they're Blossom and Thimble, they've sort of become our resident naturalists when they stop in our fairy houses on the way. Community members ask them questions and we're hoping that we can actually get them to come in for a podcast to answer those questions. So that would be pretty awesome.

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Madison O'Shea: Yeah, I know that they're generally pretty shy but I maybe we can get them excited about this podcast.

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Erika Barthelmess: Yeah, and I love the idea of getting to hear what their voices sound like, and that's one of the other things about an audio podcast that seems so cool is you get a different aspect of somebody's personality when you hear their voice and don't just read. I know that they have written back really nice responses to kids about their annual migrations, but you know, I just wondered that I have really high pitched

voice or is it a really deep voice, I don't know, it'll be so exciting to get to know Blossom and Thimble, I suspect we won't get to see them, because I'm not sure if you can ever see forest fairies, but at least hearing their voice would be kind of amazing.

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Kayla Edmunds: We clearly have a lot of great things coming out. Thank you all for listening along. I know I'm excited for upcoming podcasts. Besides new podcast episodes be on the lookout for other events such as campfires, a summer scavenger hunt adventure, our new coloring book, a photo contest and more. Check out our website natureupnorth.org and follow us on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter at Nature Up North to keep up to date on all of our events and programs. Get up and go outdoors with Nature Up North.