

Conservation Corner

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Happy Valentine's Day! And the perfect time to encounter this popular holiday that falls smack dab in the middle of February. Well, except for Leap Years, of course, but that's a story for another day.

So, why do people around the world exchange cards, candy, and flowers on February 14? Legends tell the stories of at least three Catholic priests named St. Valentine. Perhaps the best known legend revolves around Valentine of Rome who was persecuted by Emperor Claudius II and martyred in 269 A.D. He refused to give up his Christian faith. Instead, he tried to convert the Emperor, and was sentenced to die. While on death row, he shared his faith with his jailer and healed his daughter's blindness. The jailer became a Christian and was baptized along with 45 members of his family. On the evening before his execution, Valentine wrote the girl a note and signed it, "Your Valentine."

It wasn't until the 14th Century and the writings of Geoffrey Chaucer that Valentine's Day became associated with romantic love. In 1382, he wrote the following poem in honor of the first wedding anniversary of King Richard II of England and Anne of Bohemia. "For this was on St. Valentine's Day, when every bird cometh there to choose his mate."

During the 1700s, Valentine's Day in England became a day for lovers to express their devotion by giving or sending flowers, candy, and greeting cards. In Europe, Valentine Keys are given to lovers "as a romantic symbol and an invitation to unlock the giver's heart." Today, Valentine's Day is celebrated around the world as a celebration of love and affection. In fact, more cards are sent on February 14 than any other day save Christmas, over 1 billion!

After our recent snowfall and bitter cold, I appreciate the Slovenia folk traditions in which St. Valentine is one of the saints of spring and the patron of beekeepers. One of their proverbs states, "Saint Valentine brings the key of roots" as plants and flowers start to grow on this day. Can't you just picture pale rootlets beginning to swell and emerge under the snow cover? In Eastern Europe, February 14 marks the beginning of work in the vineyards, and birds propose to each other or marry on that day. I'm ready for spring!

For now, though, it's still winter, so why not make the best of it with some snow shoeing or cross country skiing along Three Rivers Trail? Everyone is invited to a Free Family Fun Day this coming Sunday afternoon, Feb. 18, from 2:00 to 4:00 p.m. Join Pocahontas and Humboldt County ISU Extension and Outreach at the Rolfe RAM Center for crafts, indoor games, snacks, and basketball. Or meet at the Three Rivers Trailhead in SE Rolfe where snowshoes and cross country skis will be provided by the Pocahontas and Humboldt County Conservation Boards.

Maybe we'll glimpse some birds proposing to each other along the trail!

