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**Rural Awareness Annual Essay Awards
Recognize Franklin Township Students**

Winners of the 18th annual Rural Awareness Scholar Awards essay competition for Franklin Township students in grades 3, 4, and 5 were announced at an assembly held June 10 at the Franklin Township School.

Rural Awareness judges read all the essays and determine winners depending on which essays best convey the year's theme. This year's students were asked to write about the many types of wildlife that live and roam in their community and to describe any personal experiences or encounters they may have had with wildlife in Franklin Township.

All nine winners are invited to read their essays aloud at the Frenchtown Bookshop, 28 Bridge Street, Frenchtown on Saturday, June 15 starting at 6:00 pm. Family members and friends are welcome. Winning essays will be posted on the Rural Awareness website, www.ruralawareness.org, and also sent to newspapers and social media.

All prize winners receive gift certificates for The Frenchtown Bookshop. First place in each class gets a \$50 gift certificate, second, \$30, and honorable mention, \$10. The grand prize winner is selected from the three first-place winners and additionally receives a gift certificate for a family pizza night at Duke's Pizzeria & Restaurant in Pittstown.

First place winner for the fifth grade, Arzan Cama, feels that seeing so much wildlife is "one of the advantages of growing up in a rural town like Franklin Township." He wrote about Sid, the wild turkey of Sidney Road, that became well-known for stopping cars. He also described a sad scene of a redtail hawk that plucked a baby bird out of a nest in a blue spruce tree.

The fifth-grade second-place winner is Jackson Krehely. His favorite experience was finding a baby deer in a bush on his family property. He also mentions hearing coyotes howl at night and an incident when some aggressive geese chased him and his family at a nearby pond.

Third prize winner, Sophia Vachon, informs the reader about certain characteristics of white-tail deer, local birds such as cardinals and blue jays and the habitats of the red fox. She states that these "are all amazing creatures that roam all over Franklin Township"!

The first-place winner for the fourth grade – and Grand Champion of the Contest – is Emma Mielo with *Ellie the Eagle*. The story is told from the perspective of a bald eagle that, while flying, enjoys a good view of all types of wildlife, including several it likes to eat. Ellie quips: "Look for me next time you come to Franklin Township; just look up and watch me soar!"

Second-place winner, Ava Kvarta, states "my windows are like a passageway to nature". Watching two baby kits playing in her backyard and finding a family of bunnies near her fort in the woods were special moments for her.

Third place was awarded to Zachary Stasyshyn who wakes up hearing birds singing and mentions seeing snapping turtles, foxes, deer and skunks on his property. "During the

day, I hear woodpeckers pecking at the trees and I can hear two owls hooting away in the night”.

The first-place winner in the third grade is Carmela Toolan with *New Jersey: More Wild Than You Know*. A family of nine foxes under her barn “will always be most special to me”. Exploring the nearby Raritan River with her family, she finds minnows, sunnies, bluegills, bass, trout, and much more.

Jack Kvarata, second-place winner for his essay, *I'm a Wildlife Scientist*, finds frogs and toads everywhere in his backyard and he sometimes even names them! He cautions the reader about snakes that “like to lay on rocks and bask in the sun”.

Third place was awarded to Evan Thompson. *In Cool Wildlife*, he speaks of a fox and raccoon fighting on his driveway one night. He also saw a mother fox moving her babies as “it must have been flooding under the shed, so she wanted to move them to a safer spot”.

Teachers of the winning students are Sara Fortunato, Jon Huber, Susan Rainaldi, and Alyssa Zollinger.

THE IDENTIFICATION OF EACH STUDENT IN THE PHOTO IS AS FOLLOWS, FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:

Jack Kvarata, Jackson Krehely, Ava Kvarata, Arzan Cama, Emma Mielo, Carmela Toolan, Sophia Vachon, Zachary Stasyshyn, and Evan Thompson.