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## **ROGER TORY PETERSON INSTITUTE ANNOUNCES SCHOLARS-IN-RESIDENCE Canisius University Faculty to Expand Spark Bird Project**

Jamestown, NY – March 5, 2024 – The Roger Tory Peterson Institute proudly announces the naming of Dr. Jennifer Lodi-Smith and Janet McNally, professors at Canisius University, as the inaugural RTPI Scholars-in-Residence.

As Scholars-in-Residence, Lodi-Smith and McNally will expand the focus of The Spark Bird Project to include the perspective of artists.

The Spark Bird Project (<https://www.spark-bird.org/>) is designed to gather and share the stories of people’s passion for birds while gaining scientific insights into a critical missing piece in the ecology of birds: birders themselves.

“When Roger Tory Peterson was 11 years old, he had an unexpectedly up-close encounter with a northern flicker,” said Arthur Pearson, CEO of the Roger Tory Peterson Institute. “That ‘spark bird’ experience changed his life, setting him on a course to becoming the father of the modern field guide and international ambassador for birds.”

In the United States, 45 million people identify themselves as birdwatchers. Many if not most of them had a similar “spark bird” experience – some encounter with a particular bird that transformed them into life-long lovers of birds. Along the way many of them also were sparked and supported by field guides like Peterson’s as well as specific individuals and their local community birding groups.

“As a Professor of Psychology,” Lodi-Smith shared, “I was struck by the spark bird story of Peterson and so many other birders, but dismayed that there is scant academic scholarship on this topic. While we are doing a great job of understanding birds, we know very little about birders themselves. The Spark Bird Project aims to better understand who birders are and who potential birders may be – insights which can help shape how organizations such as RTPI engage more people in the beauty and wonder of birds.”

As part of the project, Lodi-Smith and McNally will host a series of podcasts with birders, environmentalists, educators, and artists, to share and discuss their spark bird experiences.

“Roger Tory Peterson is one of countless artists whose future careers were fueled by a spark bird experience,” Pearson added. “As a museum dedicated to nurturing the next generation of nature artists, RTPI is particularly looking forward to learning more about the artist perspective on spark birds – to further inform our mission, strategy and goals.”

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About the Roger Tory Peterson Institute: 2024 marks the 90th anniversary of the publication of the first Peterson Field Guide and the 40th Anniversary of the founding of the Roger Tory Peterson Institute. Home to the largest collection of Peterson’s original artwork, RTPI is the living embodiment of the Peterson Field Guide. Through art exhibitions and programs, RTPI illuminates the beauty of nature; challenges us to confront environmental issues of regional, national and global concern; and inspires us to preserve the earth’s biodiversity – with a particular emphasis on the natural area wonders of Western New York.

About Dr. Jennifer Lodi-Smith: Jenn Lodi-Smith, Ph.D., is a Professor of Psychology at Canisius University. She is a personality developmental psychologist who uses mixed methods research to study identity development over time. She serves on the executive board for the Association for Research in Personality, as associate editor of the Journal of Personality, is a board member for the Friends of Reinstein Woods, and mentors the Western New York Young Birders Club.

About Janet McNally: Janet McNally is associate professor of English and Creative Writing and director of the All-College Honors Program at Canisius University in Buffalo, NY. A novelist and poet, she is the author of the novels *Girls in the Moon* and *The Looking Glass* (HarperCollins), and a collection of poems, *Some Girls*, winner of the White Pine Press Poetry Prize. She is a longtime studier of storytelling, and her spark bird is the Great Egret, a bird so beautiful and weird it almost seems fictional.

About Canisius University: Canisius was founded in 1870 in Buffalo, NY, and is one of 27 Jesuit colleges and universities in the U.S. Consistently ranked among the top institutions in the Northeast, Canisius offers undergraduate, graduate and pre-professional programs distinguished by close student-faculty collaboration, mentoring and an emphasis on ethical, purpose-driven leadership.

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