

THE CALL OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN

-submitted by Cheryl Morris-Putman

On Thursday, October 19, 2017 at 7:30 pm., the Mississippi Valley Field Naturalists (MVFN) will host the second presentation of the season, reflective of the theme “**Things That Go Bump In The Night**”. The event will take place in the Social Hall of Almonte United Church, 106 Elgin St., Almonte, Ontario.

At that time and place, we will cross a threshold into two remote and majestic lands, the Arctic and the Antarctic, “**the lands of the midnight sun**”! The 'expedition' will be led by **Dr. Shelley Ball**, PhD, a biologist, educator, explorer, photographer, and environmental storyteller. Shelley has entitled her presentation “**Unforgettable Places: A Biologist's Explorations of the Arctic and Antarctic**”.

We will explore the **Arctic** region, which encompasses the northernmost part of the planet and is defined as the area above the Arctic Circle (66 degrees, 33 minutes north). The term “Arctic” comes from the Greek word, “**arktikos**”, meaning “**near the bear**”, and refers to the expanse of the Arctic Ocean and northern parts of eight countries: Canada, Russia, USA (Alaska), Greenland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Iceland. It is one of the world's last great wildernesses. Each year, within the Arctic Circle, there is at least one polar day (24 hours) of full darkness and at least one full day in summer of complete light. Some 4 million people live in the Arctic regions and share their land with a population of wildlife that includes whales, arctic fox, polar bear, walrus and narwhals (the unicorn of the sea). The treeless tundra of the Arctic encompasses an area of 11 million square kilometres and is covered by herbs, mosses, lichens, grasses and some shrubs, all of which are adapted to growth on frozen ground. The coldest temperature ever recorded in the Arctic winter was -68 degrees Celsius, but the summer days can record temperatures well above freezing.

Dr. Ball will then have us step into another mysterious, daunting, frozen land, the continent of Antarctica, first discovered in 1820. It is the coldest region on earth; the lowest winter temperature on record is -89.6 degrees Celsius (-129 degrees Fahrenheit). There are no permanent human residents living in this harsh environment, which contains the largest desert in the world, but up to 1000 people at any one time may be wintering over at various research stations. Approximately 60-70% of the Earth's fresh water is found in the Antarctic ice cap, a frozen mass of some 29 million cubic kilometres. If a glaciologist was to offer you a drink of water harvested from Antarctic ice, you could be sipping something that was frozen during the time of the Roman Empire! Scientists routinely remove long cylinders of ice called “**ice cores**” from the Antarctic to analyze dust and even air bubbles trapped in the ice, which in turn yield valuable information about the earth's climate at various times in the past. It is hard to imagine anything surviving in this cold, inhospitable domain of ice and snow, but in fact there are numerous wild creatures who call Antarctica home. These include penguins, some 200 species of fish, squid, seals, whales, and even insects. Approximately 60% of the world's seal population resides in Antarctica and seal fur was undoubtedly what enticed explorers to come to call on Antarctica's shores in the 1800's. One of the smallest of the sea creatures living in Antarctic waters is the **krill**, only 6 centimetres in size and a favourite meal for whales, seals, and birds. It in turn feeds on phytoplankton, algae, and diatoms, which keeps the seawater clean.

Dr. Shelley Ball is passionate about sharing her insights and experiences in education, nature conservation, photography, and environmental storytelling with audiences around the world. She is founder and president of **BIOSPHERE Environmental Education**, an organization focused on connecting people, young and old, with nature, thus inspiring them to cherish and protect it. Her **Youth Environmental Ambassadors Program** takes youth around the world on environmental leadership expeditions. Shelley will enchant us with photographic images and stories from her own experiences as she leads us on a journey to both the Arctic and Antarctic, to explore the landscapes and natural environments of these lands, and to better understand the impacts of climate change within these two vast regions.

Please join us for a relaxing and informative evening. Doors will open at 7 pm. Refreshments will be available throughout the evening. A discussion will follow the presentation. There is a non-member fee of \$5 and no charge for youth under 18. For further information, please contact MVFN's Program Chair, Gretta Bradley at gbradley@icloud.com.