

YOUNG EXPLORERS

CONIFEROUS CONES

A pine cone comes from a pine tree, but not all cones do! In the forests, parks, and backyards of Massachusetts, you might find cones from spruce, fir, hemlock, and larches (all cousins of the common pine).

Trees that produce cones are called conifers. They have needle- or scale-like leaves, and produce separate male and female cones to reproduce. Inside the female cones are seeds, which, if the weather is right and timing is good, will be the start of a new tree.

But before a seed develops fully, pollination must occur. That happens when the pollen from a male cone is released. With help from the wind, the pollen reaches the larger, more obvious female cone. In the pine family, this cone has scales set in a spiral pattern, which protect the developing seeds until they're ready to be released.

TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

- Have you ever found a pile of chewed up cone scales on a rock or log? This pile is called a midden and it contains the remains of pine cone scales most likely left behind by a hungry squirrel using its sharp teeth to take apart the cone and eat the seeds.
- Take apart a dried woody cone and you might find a seed inside each scale. Or, maybe you won't. Where do you think the seeds went?



GET CRAFTY SNOWY OWL CONE CRITTER

1. Find a small to medium-sized pine cone
2. Use cotton balls to stuff the pine cone
3. Use the template found online to cut out the felt
4. Glue the felt onto the cone as shown below



Visit massaudubon.org/youngexplorers to learn more about the life cycle of pine trees, find instructions for making your own Nut Butter Cone Birdfeeder, and download the Snowy Owl cone critter template.