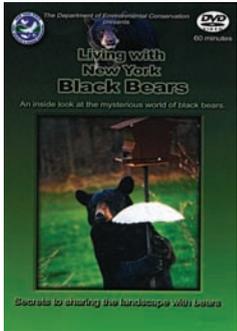


LETTERS Compiled by Alex Hyatt

Bear DVD?

I spoke with *Conservationist* staffer Alex Hyatt at the New York State Fair this summer about where I could get the DEC-produced DVD "Living with New York Black Bears" and he told me to follow up in late fall. Is the DVD available for purchase yet? It was nice meeting your staff and I appreciate your help.

Michael Petit
East Syracuse
Onondaga County



The DVD is not available for purchase, but it is available for loan from public libraries across the state. Also, in case you didn't see it, the October 2007 Conservationist contained an article on black bears as well. Thanks for writing and it was nice talking to you at the fair.

—Alex Hyatt, Assistant Editor

Shell Games?

I was curious why, of all the "state symbols" (October 2007) the bay scallop was shown upside down? In bivalve (two-shelled) molluscs the hinge is on the dorsal (top) side of the animal and the opposite side is the ventral side of the animal. Nearly all biological texts display images of bivalves with the hinge on top. Thanks for producing such a consistently fine publication.

Max Veritas
Smithtown
Suffolk County



Thank you for writing to Conservationist. Bivalve molluscs are typically shown with the hinge or dorsal end facing up out of convention. Biologists generally depict all animals dorsal side up, so that has been extended to molluscs. You wouldn't find a scallop in the field this way, nor would you find it hinge-side down, so you wouldn't really say that it is shown upside down. Scallops are found laying flat on the ocean floor, so the illustration is really a top-down view.

—Melissa Albino, DEC Marine Biologist



Amazing Owl Ouch

A bird hit my deck window this fall. Biologists here think it was a long-eared owl or a screech owl. The imprint shown above has an 18" wingspan. No body or feathers were found. I thought you might want to publish the photo.

Joanne March
DEC Region 7, Syracuse
Onondaga County

Wow....what an incredible shot! Birds of many species often mistake windows for open space and attempt to fly through them, usually badly injuring or even killing themselves. The difference here is that the owl seems to have escaped serious injury and he left quite an "impression."

—David Nelson, Editor



Write to us

Conservationist Letters
NYSDEC, 625 Broadway,
Albany, NY 12233-4502

or e-mail us at:
magazine@gw.dec.state.ny.us

✉ LETTERS

C4K is Cool

I was very pleased to see that you have started a children's version of *Conservationist* as I think it is a wonderful idea. I hope that it will inspire people to give gift subscriptions to children who might not have access to the magazine. Do you send complimentary copies of *Conservationist for Kids* to libraries or to schools? My concern is that if we don't get children interested in the out-of-doors, who will join the Adirondack Mountain Club, etc? And who will subscribe to outdoor magazines like *Conservationist*?

Edward J. Sidot
Norwich
Chenango County

Thank you for your interest in Conservationist for Kids. You've hit the nail on the head on the motivation for creating the magazine: connecting children to nature. Conservationist for Kids will be distributed free of charge, in class sets, to every 4th grade public school classroom in New York State. There has been such great interest by others who would like to receive the magazine that we are pursuing ideas to offer classroom subscriptions to classes other than 4th grade, at a minimal fee, and to include it as a regular insert in Conservationist three times each year.

—Gina Jack, *Conservationist for Kids*



📖 REVIEW by Brian Swinn

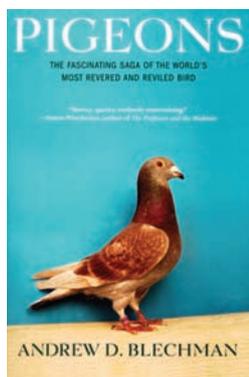
Pigeons: The Fascinating Saga of the World's Most Revered and Reviled Bird

by Andrew D. Blechman
239 pages, \$14.00 soft cover
Grove/Atlantic, Inc.
www.groveatlantic.com

Pigeons. Talk about a fascinating subject that hides in plain sight.

Andrew Blechman's topic is so mundane, yet so poorly known that his book manages to break new ground right under our noses. The book is comprehensive enough to offer lots of information, written well enough to make it go down easily, and interesting enough to entice you to fly cover-to-cover nonstop.

Blechman delves into the sport of pigeon shooting, which in most (but not all) places gave rise to and was replaced by...clay pigeons. He tells of a nineteenth-century Albany native who won fortune and nationwide acclaim for his pigeon-shooting prowess. Blechman also recounts the sad tale of the passenger pigeon, which once may have comprised 40 percent of the entire bird population in the eastern United States, yet was gone by 1914—perhaps the only species for which the exact date and time of extinction are known.



The author covers pigeon breed shows that rival the Westminster dog competition in intensity if not in scope; enthusiasts who spend massive amounts of time and money to compete in races like Brooklyn's annual Main Event, which generates thousands in prizes (and side bets), and a Big Apple-based society that strives to protect street pigeons using surveillance techniques and spy-like tactics. Blechman even devotes an entire chapter to a never-quite-scheduled interview with pigeon enthusiast Mike Tyson, yet manages to fill pages with interesting accounts gathered along the way. And yes, he covers the culinary aspect of the pigeon fancy.

David Roth, former public-relations man and now full-time pigeon advocate in Phoenix, Arizona, is quoted in the book as saying, "Pigeons bring out extremes in the human spectrum."

It's hard to believe that so many have been touched by the common pigeon and its fancier and faster relatives. Blechman's book goes a long way toward proving that pigeon fancy is a fever that's easy to catch and hard to shake.

Who knew there was so much to tell about this commonplace bird?

Brian Swinn, who passed away in August 2007, was a senior editor in DEC's Bureau of Publications and Internet.