



Frozen Art

While out doing field work, we came across this ice sculpture. It's near Otisco Lake and is about 12 feet tall. It was really amazing to see, but how did it get there?

Marie C. Hebdon
Syracuse

Thanks for the great photo. What you have here is actually a frozen artesian well. This kind of well occurs when groundwater in an aquifer is confined under pressure in poorly permeable rock. Water rises to the top by natural occurrence or if the aquifer is tapped by a well. If the pressure is great enough, water may even flow freely onto the surface, creating a waterfall-like nature piece. During winter, the water can freeze, creating an interesting ice sculpture like the one pictured here.

—Jenna DuChene, Staff Writer

Icy Lodging

While out cross-country skiing across a frozen pond, I noticed this hole in the ice. Upon closer inspection I saw a number of sticks that appeared to have been cut by a beaver.



The beaver lodge was nearby, tucked under the trees. Is this hole an access to their home, and what were the sticks for?

Janet Quinn
Sackets Harbor, Jefferson County

My family has had the pleasure of living on an active beaver pond for more than 20 years, so we've learned a lot about beavers' winter habits. What you're seeing is their access hole to and from the pond (through the ice). If winter deepens, the ice may freeze too solidly for beavers to break through. In that case, beavers can be "shut-ins," locked into their above-ground lodges and the pond below the ice surface until the weather warms.

Not to worry, however. Before freeze-up, beavers make a "food cache," a generous supply of twigs and branches they will use as food throughout the coldest months. These food caches are partially submerged. Winter's gathering ice freezes them in place, both preserving their food quality and making the submerged parts available as food to the "locked-in" beavers. Beavers eat the cambium or growing inner bark of twigs and branches, and leave the dead heartwood behind, which are the sticks you see in the photo.

As long as beavers can break through the ice, they will continue to cut and eat fresh trees. In all but the coldest temperatures, their activity will keep a hole open in the ice, often near the pond's edge. I expect the sticks you saw are from freshly cut trees, given that the beavers are able to get in and out of the pond.

Beavers are good recyclers, too. They will use the dead sticks as support material in both their lodges and dams.

—Dave Nelson, Editor

Owl House

Three years ago, in hopes of attracting woodpeckers, I made this large birdhouse. The house is 25 feet up in a large tree by the road. Each spring I've removed European starlings, but no woodpeckers. Then one sunny cold day in December I looked up to see this owl. Is this a screech-owl and would it use this house to have young? Also, will starlings chase the owl away?

Roy Vandenberg
Rush, Monroe County

Thank you so much for sharing your photo. How thrilling it must be to have this bird in your yard. It is a gray phase of the eastern screech-owl. According to the Birds of North America, this species comes in two color morphs, gray and rufous. Paired males and females are usually the same color, making it difficult to tell them apart, but females tend to be a bit larger. Eastern screech-owls nest between March and June, sometimes choosing human-made cavities such as bird boxes. I remember having a screech-owl nest in a box in my yard one winter when I was growing up on Long Island,

but I don't think it nested. Your bird may just be roosting in your box during the winter. However, it's possible it might stay and nest; some folks I know in the Albany area had one nest in a wood duck box in their yard. I am not sure if the starlings would affect the owl in your yard, but we'd be interested to hear of any updates.

—Scott J. Stoner, DEC Research Scientist



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REVIEW by Ray Minnick

Letchworth State Park: Images of America series

by Thomas A. Breslin, Thomas S. Cook, Russell A. Judkins, and Thomas C. Richens
128 pages; softcover \$19.99
Arcadia Publishing
www.arcadiapublishing.com; (888) 313-2665

The year was 1858. From high on the wooden Erie Railroad bridge overlooking the falls of the Genesee, Buffalo industrialist William Pryor Letchworth had his first view of the valley that was to be his home. His story and the story of how his estate, Glen Iris, would become the crown jewel of New York State Parks, are told in words and photographs in the new book, *Letchworth State Park*. As part of the Images of America series of local histories, this fine work chronicles the history of the 17 miles of the Genesee River Valley that makes up today's park.

Whether you are a first-time visitor to Letchworth, a seasoned veteran of its trails, or simply fascinated by its colorful history, *Letchworth State Park* will be a welcome addition to your bookshelf. The Letchworth State Park story is told in vintage black-and-white photographs of the people and places of the period, accompanied by appropriate and informative text.

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Letchworth State Park opens the door to the past in She-ga-hun-da, the "vale of three falls," beginning with the formation of the gorge after the last ice age. Progressing through Seneca Indian occupation, it highlights the life and influence of Mary Jemison, the "White Woman of the Genesee," an Indian captive who lived most of her life in the valley. Next came early pioneer farmers, who cleared and farmed much of the land, which later became the park.

William Pryor Letchworth was revered by the Senecas, who called him Hai-wa-ye-is-tah, "the man who always does right." The four authors of *Letchworth State Park* have done many things right as well, as each brings his own areas of expertise into play in this book.

One hundred years ago, at the close of a life of humanitarian good works, William Pryor Letchworth donated his 1,000-acre estate, Glen Iris, to the people of the state of New York as a park. Relive the history of this beautiful park through the eyes of photographers of the day, and find your connection with the past in *Letchworth State Park*.

Ray Minnick is a retired postmaster and previous *Conservationist* contributor. He remains active in local arts organizations in central and western New York.

