



River Reflections

The Hudson River Almanac turns 15

by Steve Stanne

Writers have seldom been at a loss for words to describe the Hudson River. Poems, essays, novels, scientific treatises, and even histories—millions of words have been printed about the Hudson’s splendors. But one of the most engaging and illuminating forms of writing about the river is also one of the briefest and simplest: the journal entry.

For the last fifteen years, The Hudson River Almanac has

served as a journal of the river’s natural history. Its entries—concise observations and reflections from hundreds of river lovers—capture the spirit, magic, and science of the Hudson from the High Peaks of the Adirondacks to the sea. Its present format and distribution take advantage of modern technology; the Almanac is a digital journal distributed weekly via e-mail. However, its entries bring to mind those in the first written record of the Hudson Valley:

“The eleventh, was faire and very hot weather. At one of the clocke in the after-noone, wee weighed and went into the Riuer, the wind at South South-west; little winde. Our soundings were seuen, sixe, fiue, sixe, seuen, eight, nine, ten, twelue, thirteene, and fourteene fathomes. Then it shoalded againe and came to fiue fathomes. Then wee Anchored, and saw that it was a very good Harbour for all windes, and rode all night.” Robert Juet - September 11, 1609

Four hundred years ago, Robert Juet's journal entry for September 11, 1609, marked the entrance of the Dutch ship Half Moon into the river later named for his captain, Henry Hudson. (To read Juet's journal, go to the New Netherland Museum website at www.halfmoon-mus.ny.us/.) Over the next few weeks, Juet noted the river's physical characteristics: its depths, shoals, winds, tides and currents. His entries describe fish "...they took four or five and twenty Mulletts, Breames, Bases, and Barbils..." and trees "...goodly Oakes, and Wal-nut trees, and Chest-nut trees, Ewe trees, and trees of sweet wood in great abundance..."

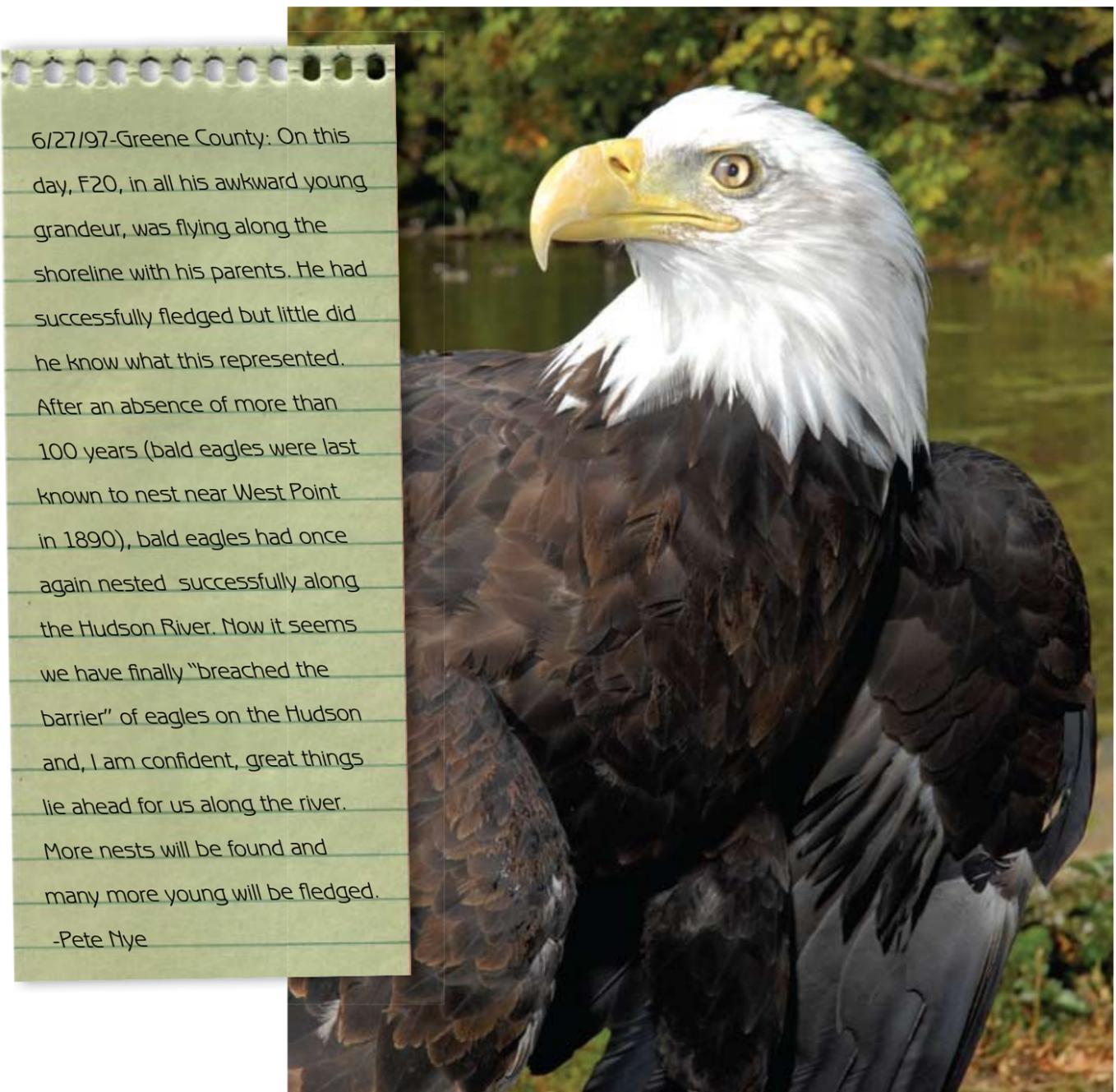
Reporting on an exploration of the Kill Van Kull between modern day Staten Island and Bayonne, Juet wrote: "The lands they told us were as pleasant with Grasse and Flowers, and goodly Trees, as euer they had seene, and very sweet smells came from them."

Hudson's own logs of the Half Moon's voyage were eventually lost, so Juet's writing conveys the earliest European impressions of the Hudson Valley. It speaks of beautiful landscapes and a river richly endowed with natural resources. It allows readers to visualize scenes long since vanished—the Kill Van Kull is now lined with tank farms

and shipyards—but also to see through fresh eyes terrain that is familiar to today's nature journalist.

3/20—Preston Hollow, Catskill Mountains: Between "peents" of the calling woodcock you can hear the snowmelt drip from the spruce limbs, the water move through the soil where the ground is bare. From limb to soil, through soil to roadside ditch, then down to Potter Hollow Creek, Potter Hollow to Catskill, Catskill to Hudson's tidewaters. So the water flows. -Dennis Mildner

Fifteen years ago, Dennis Mildner's March 20, 1994 observation was the first entry in a new journal—The Hudson



Susan L. Shafer

6/27/97-Greene County: On this day, F20, in all his awkward young grandeur, was flying along the shoreline with his parents. He had successfully fledged but little did he know what this represented. After an absence of more than 100 years (bald eagles were last known to nest near West Point in 1890), bald eagles had once again nested successfully along the Hudson River. Now it seems we have finally "breached the barrier" of eagles on the Hudson and, I am confident, great things lie ahead for us along the river. More nests will be found and many more young will be fledged. -Pete Nye



James Clayton

9/7/07—Manhattan, Hudson River Mile 115: The Hudson River in Manhattan has few beaches where one can haul a seine net. We had gotten wind of at least one in Fort Washington Park just a short distance south of the little red lighthouse and the great gray bridge, and decided to explore. At low tide on this bright and sunny afternoon we made five hauls with a 30' seine at two sites in the park. The catch was amazing. Along with the ubiquitous Atlantic silversides, striped bass, and blue crabs (dozens and dozens of these, in all sizes), we found 3 inshore lizardfish (the largest about 6" long), 2 striped sea robins, a 5" long northern kingfish, a very small (45 mm) black sea bass, 3 northern pipefish, a winter flounder, several snapper bluefish, a bunch of white perch, and one goby (species uncertain). -Margie Turrin, Steve Stanne

River Almanac—intended to reawaken New Yorkers to the natural character of the Hudson, chronicling sturgeon and shad, loons and larks, sunsets and snowstorms. The project was initiated by Robert Bendick, a former Deputy Commissioner of DEC. He saw the Almanac as a way of documenting natural history changes on the Hudson, but also as a way of creating a cooperative network of perceptive people, each providing a piece of the mosaic that is the Hudson from the Adirondacks to the Atlantic.

Judging from readers' reactions, the Almanac is realizing Bendick's vision. Contributor Dan Wolff harkened back to Juet's journal when he commented that "The Hudson River Almanac has

always seemed to me to be a kind of ship's log: a working diary of events and observations noted down to show those who follow where we've been. Here we can find the latest sighting of a flock of brant, how many eggs a pair of bald eagles have produced, the arrival of the coyote or the sudden absence of bluebirds. From these specifics, the Almanac has, over fifteen years, helped create a larger picture: a picture of how the river's doing—and how we're doing."

For eight years DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program published the Almanac annually as a softcover book, compiling entries starting and ending on the vernal equinox one year to the next. Complete with photographs and illustrations, it was something readers could curl up

HAPPY 400th, HUDSON RIVER!

2009 marks the 400th anniversary of the explorations of Henry Hudson and Samuel de Champlain. They changed America forever and helped shape New York State's future with their discoveries of the Hudson River and Lake Champlain. In honor of the voyages, DEC and the Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial Commission are overseeing



a year-long celebration of New York State's historical, cultural and environmental achievements of the past four centuries. Many exciting activities and events are planned from New York harbor to the Canadian border. Check the official Quadricentennial website www.exploreny400.com for detailed information about upcoming events and programs.

with before turning off the bedside light. However, at least six months would elapse from the date of the last entry each year to the publication of the finished volume, making that edition's earliest entries a year-and-a-half old. In 2003 the Estuary Program revamped the Almanac as a weekly e-mail publication. In addition to improving the journal's timeliness, the change made it easier to mine information from issues archived on DEC's website.

From the first Almanac on, compilation of the many contributions to the journal has been in the capable hands of Tom Lake, naturalist for the

Hudson River Estuary Program. Tom has probably logged as much time on the Hudson as any long-lived Atlantic sturgeon of the estuary. He is an angler, archaeologist, birder, commercial shad netter, researcher, and teacher who has repeatedly traveled the length of the Hudson from its headwaters in the Adirondacks past the head of tide at Troy and the harbor at New York City all the way to the Hook—Sandy Hook, New Jersey—beyond which lies the open Atlantic.

Tom is a firm believer in the value of journaling. Asked why, he replied, "Perhaps the best argument is to make

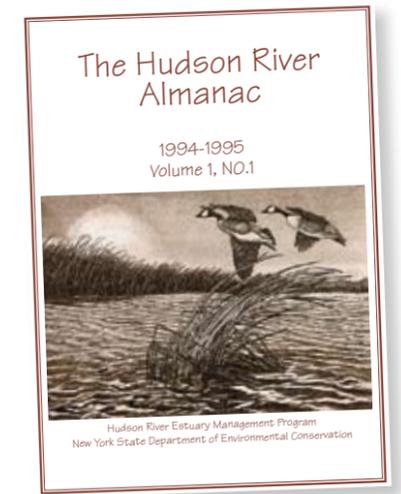
a personal connection to the natural world, that community of life in which we exist, and without which we could not survive. For most, the joy of keeping a daily natural history journal allows them to get to know the other members of the community on a first-name basis—not our human neighbors, but the flora and fauna and natural phenomena that occur all around us."

That said, the Almanac has been the catalyst for the growth of a diverse community of people interested in the Hudson. Almanac reader and contributor Robin Fox sums up the feelings of many: "It amazes me to learn about

orchids at the mouth of the Hudson, and moose 300 miles north...The delight and wonder I find in the world around me is all the richer for the many people sharing and describing their experiences of this splendid region." Naturalist and educator Leslie Day expands on this thought: "I have lived on the river for 33 years, snug in my boat at the 79th Street Boat Basin in Manhattan. I felt isolated in my sightings of amazing wildlife, that is, until I subscribed to the

Almanac several years ago. Since then I have felt part of a passionate community of people from the Harbor to the Adirondacks who love the river and its animals as much as I do."

Steve Stanne coordinates the education efforts of DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program through a partnership with the New York State Water Resources Institute at Cornell University.



4/7/2008—Hunter's Brook, HRM 67.5: As the sun set over Wappinger Creek tidewater, five Roy C. Ketcham High School A.P. Biology and Environment students helped us check our eel net in Hunter's Brook. This was the evening after the new moon, and with the strong tides and rise in water temperature (52° F) we had high hopes. We felt more than saw the elusive glass eels in the bag of the net and carefully moved them to our collection bucket to be counted and weighed. We put 9 of them into a small glass jar and then watched as they performed an enthralling ballet, a graceful writhing.
-Chris Bowser, Samantha Deger, Jennifer Edwards, Amanda Faughnan, Kathryn Goerge, Kayla Rath, Tom Lake

Chris Bowser



Hudson River Estuary Program naturalist Tom Lake teaches a group of students about the Hudson's diverse aquatic inhabitants.



It is easy to join this community of thousands of river lovers who read the Almanac and the 500 who have contributed entries to date. To subscribe, simply send an e-mail with "HR Almanac" in the subject line to hrep@gw.dec.state.ny.us. Subscriptions are free, and the distribution list is used only to send out the Almanac—it is not shared, sold, or traded for any other purpose. Visit the DEC website to learn more and to view archived issues.