

Ice Fishing Fun | Green Grassroots | Cold Case Solved

NEW YORK STATE  
**Conservationist**

FEBRUARY 2010



Sunken  
**Treasure**

*Wings of*  
**WINTER**

**Conservationist for Kids!**  
See new issue inside



Dear Reader,

While many people associate Climate Change with things like melting glaciers and stranded polar bears, this environmental crisis isn't someone else's problem in some far off place. Its impact is being felt right here at home – affecting the types of species that can survive in our region, the health and productivity of our forests, tidal wetlands, agricultural crops, transportation systems and coastal infrastructure.

In December, I represented New York State at the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. As participants from around the globe worked to reach common ground on future actions needed to combat global warming, I was proud to be able to detail a number of critical initiatives already underway in New York State.

One of the most important actions New York has taken to reduce greenhouse gases is our partnership with nine other northeastern states in the groundbreaking Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), a cutting-edge agreement that uses the marketplace to set a price on carbon pollutants and limit greenhouse gases from power plants. Since 2008, RGGI's "carbon auctions" have generated \$180 million for New York to invest in energy efficiency and renewable energy programs, including Governor David Paterson's new Green Jobs Initiative, which features a weatherization loan program for homeowners and businesses and a green jobs training program that promises to put thousands of New Yorkers to work.

In this issue, you'll read about the more than 40 "Climate Smart" communities across New York that have pledged to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions in a variety of innovative ways. Whether it's through community-wide efforts like these, multi-state partnerships like RGGI, or simple individual actions like switching to LED light bulbs, every choice we make to reduce our carbon footprint can help ensure a healthier, safer environment for this and future generations.

For ideas and resources for making environmentally responsible choices, see the DEC Green Living pages at [www.dec.ny.gov/public/337.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/public/337.html).

Wishing you the very best for spring,

Commissioner Pete Grannis

David Paterson, Governor of New York State

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Susan Shafer

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*Feathered Friends*  
*of Winter*

*Photos by Jeff Nadler*  
*Text by Dave Nelson*



## *Short, brisk days and long, cold nights of winter*

can confine even the heartiest of souls. Donning another layer, we take pleasure in the hearth, warm drink, and the company of friends.

Friends of the feathered variety are all around us at this time of year, and a feeder brings them closer to our homes. If we know where to look, and what to look for, we can grow to appreciate more deeply those with whom we share our snowy surroundings.

In that vein, the *Conservationist* presents herein a compendium of winter birds common to most of New York

State, with one or two others thrown in for good measure. Through the patient and talented eye of photographer Jeff Nadler, we enjoy detail missed by the casual observer.

Are there others than those included here? Absolutely! But we'll mark those for another day.

Meanwhile, as the sun arcs ever so slightly higher in the southern sky, we'll watch—and we'll listen—for the unmistakable song of a chickadee, or a titmouse, or a cardinal, heralding the return of spring.



black-capped chickadee



### **Black-capped Chickadee:** *Poecile atricapillus*

Members of the titmouse family (Paridae), small, plump, and aggressive chickadees are full of personality. They are acrobatic as they dance around tree branches, never staying in one place for long. Their black bib and cap, combined with their white cheeks, gives their faces a striking appearance. Their loud “bi-dee-dee-dee” call belies their small size. On sunny days, a loud, whistled “phee-phurr” (first note higher) welcomes spring. In summer, they nest in tiny cavities in tree trunks or hollow limbs. They can be found throughout New York year-round. At feeders, they prefer black oil or striped sunflower seeds.

**Nature Note:** If you are patient, you can train chickadees to eat from your hand. Naturally inquisitive and bold, they will eventually light on, and take seed from your open hand, especially if you stand still near a birdfeeder they frequent.

### **Blue Jay:** *Cyanocitta cristata*

Bold, raucous and clever birds, blue jays are members of the crow family, Corvidae. They can be found throughout New York year-round. Larger than a robin, a blue jay adds a dazzling splash of color to New York’s winter landscape. When agitated, it holds its blue crest erect. A single “flight feather” from a blue jay is beautiful, with a striking combination of blue, black and white. Their calls are well known: a screaming “jay” call and another that mimics the sound of a hand-operated water well pump. Blue jays can eat a large quantity of food at feeders, making them less welcome to some birdwatchers.

**Nature Note:** I once trapped blue jays at my birdfeeder to help a friend with a study she was conducting. While I thought perhaps five or six blue jays were frequenting my feeder, I caught (and later released) more than twenty blue jays at that one spot in a matter of a few days!



### **White-breasted Nuthatch:** *Sitta carolinensis*

Much larger than its cousin the red-breasted, a white-breasted nuthatch has a black cap, white face, and slaty blue-gray back. Its call is a loud, nasal “Ank!” Nuthatches feed by carefully inspecting and removing seeds and insects from cracks and furrows of bark on trunks and branches of trees.

**Nature Note:** Nuthatches will store seeds from a feeder in the bark of trees for later use when food is not as plentiful.



### Downy Woodpecker: *Picoides pubescens*

Small birds with striking patterns of black and white on the back, downies are found on tree trunks supporting themselves in part with their stiff tail feathers. Similar to their somewhat larger cousins the hairy woodpeckers, male downies have a small red patch on the back of their heads. Like all woodpeckers, downies strike the same spot repeatedly with their bill, to excavate holes in soft wood for roosting and nesting sites, and to find insects to eat. At winter feeders, they will eat suet and sunflower seed. A sharp, ringing, descending alarm call announces a downy woodpecker is in the neighborhood.

**Nature Note:** The central shaft or “rachis” of each tail feather is overdeveloped and very strong; in fact, when the tail feathers are held against the trunk of a tree, they act as a brace to help support the weight of the bird.

### Carolina Wren: *Thryothorus ludovicianus*

New York’s largest wren, the Carolina wren is the size of a small sparrow. Its white eyestripe, long tail held up at a cocked angle, and unmistakable, oft-repeated, “teakettle-teakettle-teakettle” call announce its presence. Data from the 1985 and 2005 breeding bird atlases confirm the Carolina wren is expanding its range northward up the mid-Hudson Valley and into western New York. Populations at the northern edge of their range decrease southward after harsh winters. They dine almost exclusively on insects, which limits their winter range to southern parts of New York.

**Nature Note:** Boisterous and loud, a Carolina wren is easy to identify from a great distance by its call. Once, while talking on the phone to a colleague in Maine (where Carolina wrens are uncommon), a wren was calling so loudly near the open window that my friend asked what bird was making that music!



### Fox Sparrow: *Passerella iliaca*

New York’s largest sparrow, fox sparrows have a striped breast, a reddish tail and a wash of gray about the face and neck. Fox sparrows are so named because their coloration mimics that of a red fox, *Vulpes vulpes*. While they generally breed to our north and winter to our south, some can be found wintering in southern New York. Look for fox sparrows alone or in very small groups on the ground under feeders in late winter as they begin their northward migration.

**Nature Note:** Fox sparrows feed by kicking backwards with both feet, uncovering seeds in the leaf litter or snow.



### Red-breasted Nuthatch: *Sitta canadensis*

A black eye stripe, blue-gray back, and rusty underparts separate this small nuthatch from others. Its call note sounds like a tiny toy horn. Nuthatches glean seeds and insects from cracks and furrows in older tree bark as they walk down a tree trunk head-first.

**Nature Note:** Inquisitive by nature, a red-breasted nuthatch will approach fairly closely if you stand perfectly still.

### Tufted Titmouse: *Baeolophus bicolor*

A relative of the chickadee, the gray, mousy, tufted titmouse looks something like a cross between a chickadee and a blue jay. With a blue-gray crest and back, large dark eyes, and buff-colored underparts, the titmouse is unmistakable. The two breeding bird atlases of New York State show that titmice are expanding their range westward and northward, perhaps aided by winter feeders. They are found throughout New York, except the north country. Like chickadees, titmice are cavity nesters, and like cardinals, they are shy at feeders.

**Nature Note:** Another bird whose call heralds the coming of spring, its call is a loud, whistled “pheeer-pheeer-pheeer.”



## Watchable Wildlife



### Discover great wildlife viewing areas near you

Whether you're in the city or the suburbs, wildlife is never far away if you know where to look. Visiting a watchable wildlife viewing area is a great way to see a variety of wildlife. Many of the selected sites feature interpretive trails, visitor centers and nature-oriented workshops.

Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/55423.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/55423.html) for more information.

female goldfinch



### American Goldfinch: *Spinus tristis*

Small, brightly colored birds with a large, conical “finch” bill, American goldfinches are sometimes mistaken for canaries by some people. In flight, these finches undulate, and their “per-tee-dee-dee” call (second syllable emphasized), is choreographed to emphasize the undulation. Goldfinches can be found throughout New York year-round. They prefer nyjer (thistle) seed, so if you want to see them, hang a thistle or nyjer feeder in your yard.

**Nature Note:** Males’ plumage undergoes impressive change throughout the year, from bright gold in summer to drabber gray-green in winter, which females exhibit year-round. They nest later than most other songbirds, in mid to late summer when thistle down is available, which they use as nesting material.

male goldfinch molting into summer plumage



male cardinal



### Northern Cardinal: *Cardinalis cardinalis*

The unmistakable brilliant red, crested, black-faced male cardinal is a favorite of birdwatchers. Cardinals are sexually dimorphic: males and females do not look alike. Females are much browner, with a splash of red-orange on the wings, tail and head. Perhaps aided by bird feeders, cardinals are expanding their range northward, especially along Lake Ontario’s eastern shores and into the St. Lawrence Valley. Ground feeders, they often feed under birdfeeders, picking through seeds that other birds spill. Cardinals are a bit timid at feeders; they may be the first to leave at the slightest disturbance. Cardinals have several well-known songs, including “birdy-birdy-birdy” and “What cheer, what cheer, what?” sung loudly from a conspicuous perch.

**Nature Note:** When a friend and I were banding birds at Cornell University’s Arnot Teaching and Research Forest, we nicknamed cardinals “Cardinalis vice-grippius,” for their painfully strong beaks and proclivity for biting the fingers of the unwary biologist.

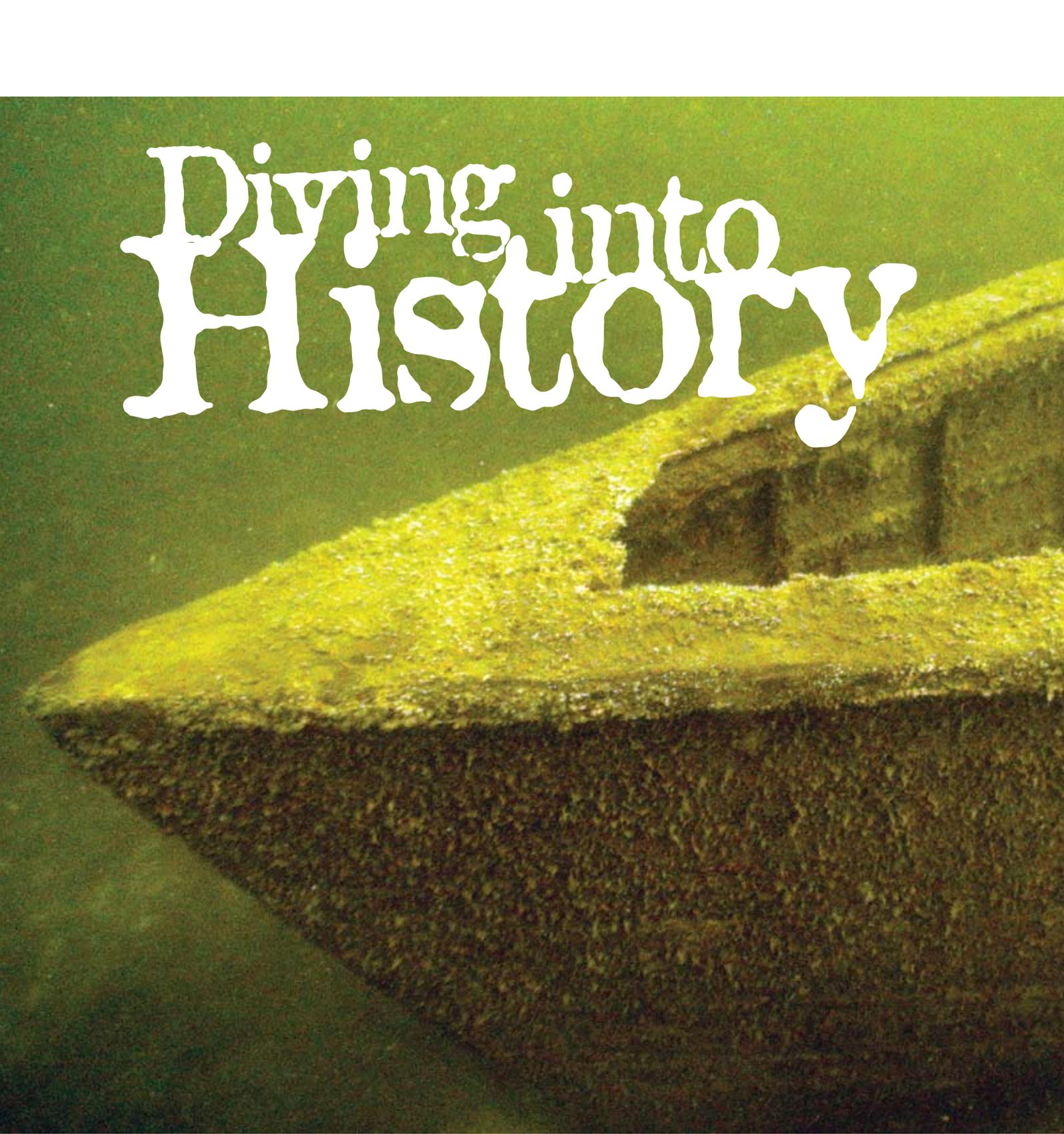
**Jeff Nadler** works in finance for General Electric in Schenectady. More of Jeff’s excellent avian portraiture can be viewed on his website at [www.jnphoto.net](http://www.jnphoto.net).

Avid birder **Dave Nelson** is editor of *Conservationist*.

female cardinal



For more information on birds, birdwatching, and wildlife photography, visit DEC’s web site at [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov) and click on “animals.”



# Diving into History

**A ghostly boatyard lies below  
Lake George's placid waters**

For most people, the word “shipwreck” evokes images of treacherous seas and lost treasure, not a popular lake in New York’s Adirondack Park. But in Warren County, on Lake George’s murky bottom, lie an estimated 300 shipwrecks, some more than 250 years old.

Three of the underwater sites are designated Submerged Heritage Preserves and are open to the diving public. Two of the preserve sites date to the French and Indian War (1756-1763). The third wreck dates to the early twentieth century and has been expanded as an “underwater classroom” where divers can learn more about the lake’s ecology.

The existence of the shipwrecks was first discovered in 1960 by two teenage boys who found a cluster of wrecks in 25 to 40 feet of water not far from the shore in the lake’s south basin. Subsequent archaeological and historic research revealed the find to be the remains of several British and provincial warships from the French and Indian War, part of a fleet of 900 *bateaux* (French for “boats”) the British used in the war against the French for domination of North America.

Intentionally scuttled to keep them out of French hands after the British defeat at Fort Carrillon (later called Ticonderoga) in 1758, most of the surviving bateaux are 25 to 36 feet long and 4 to 5 feet wide. Though all that remains are the bottom planks, some ribs and parts of a few other structures, they are still recognizable. Their dilapidated state reflects conditions at the shallow site, where sunlight and warm water have hastened the deterioration of the pine planks, oak framing and metal nails.

One cluster of seven sunken bateaux is called the Wiawaka Bateaux, named after the nearby Wiawaka Holiday House estate. The cluster was mapped from 1987-1991 by the research team Bateaux Below, Inc., and in September 1993, a shipwreck preserve called “The Sunken Fleet of 1758” was opened to feature the boats. Incredible remnants of history, all seven bateaux are listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

In 1997, an eighth boat was added to the preserve—a full-size replica of an intact bateau was sunk in order to observe the destructive effects of water and time on a shipwreck. Then in 2007 and 2008, students and technology teachers from Maple Avenue Middle School in Saratoga Springs worked with Bateaux Below volunteers to build another replica bateau. This replica was then sunk in four feet of water in the southwest corner of the lake next to Blais Walkway, where visitors to Lake George Village can easily view it.

A few miles away from the Wiawaka fleet, but in much deeper water, a beautifully preserved once-floating gun battery—a *radeau* called the *Land*

Examining the *Land Tortoise*

Russell Bellico

*Tortoise*—can be seen in the lake’s eerie, filtered light. The flat-bottomed, seven-sided *Land Tortoise* is 52 feet long and 18 feet wide, with high, sloping bulwarks. Powered by 13 sets of oars, and equipped with 7 gun ports firing 24-pound cannonballs, the vessel has been described as an “ingenious war machine,” perfectly designed for battle in the calm waters of an inland lake.

Sunk at the same time as the bateaux, it has survived in better condition because the deeper water has lower levels of oxygen, light and temperature. The wooden fasteners, or tree-nails, that hold it together have proved more durable in lake conditions than metal nails, which are vulnerable to rust.

The *Land Tortoise’s* resting place was discovered on June 26, 1990. It was an exciting find for Bateaux Below’s amateur archaeologists who knew the British had built two large warships with a unique, seven-sided design, but believed that neither had survived. The *Land Tortoise* is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, and also has the distinction of being only the sixth shipwreck in the nation listed as a National Historic Landmark.

Traveling a few miles north on the lake is another shipwreck, one that is 200 years younger. The well-preserved wreck of the *Forward*, one of the lake’s first gasoline-powered vessels, rests upright in the silt in 37-42 feet of water. Built of wood in 1906, the *Forward* was a sleek pleasure craft originally owned by the Bixbys of Bolton Landing. The boat was used for stylishly touring about the lake, and once transported a wedding party, and raced in the Hague Regatta. A local newspaper of the time described the boat as embodying “all the comforts of the modern yacht” with a mahogany-dressed deck and inside finish. The green of the lower hull and the white top sides are still visible, as are the two gasoline engines located amidships. The *Forward’s* wreck is listed on the State and National Registers of Historic Places.

No one is quite sure how the once-glamorous *Forward* ended up at the bottom of the lake, but it is believed that it sank in the 1930s, possibly abandoned or having gone down in a fire. At approximately 45 feet long, 8 feet wide and 4 feet high,



The bow of the *Land Tortoise*

Russell Bellico

# Diving down

Divers interested in visiting any of the historic Lake George shipwreck preserve sites should know that each site is marked with a round mooring buoy, which provides access to the site, and a barrel-shaped navigation aid buoy. Be sure to review the Diving Guidelines for Lake George's Shipwreck Preserves at [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7830.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7830.html), and the Submerged Heritage Preserves Generic Mooring Plan at [www.dec.ny.gov/lands/55492.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/55492.html), prior to visiting any site.

**The Sunken Fleet of 1758** — (Wiawaka Bateaux Cluster) found in 25 to 50 feet of water approximately one mile north of Lake George Beach on the east side of the lake. This intermediate dive is available on a first-come, first-served basis from Memorial Day into autumn. Dive boats and divers are required to tow the red-and-white dive flag.

**The *Land Tortoise* Radeau** — located in 105 feet of water in the south basin, nearly two miles north of Lake George Beach. This deep, cold-water dive is an advanced dive open from the second Saturday of June through Labor Day. Divers must sign in and be assigned a time slot at the DEC office at Lake George Beach (518-668-3352). A maximum of eight divers in a single party is permitted on site at any one time. There is a two-hour time slot allowed per dive followed by a one-hour site rest to allow bottom silt to settle. A safety/decompression stop is recommended and the water temperature at this site ranges from 35 to 45 degrees F.

**The *Forward* Underwater Classroom** — found in 25 to 45 feet of water approximately 1,500 feet east of Diamond Island in the South Basin of the lake. This is an intermediate dive available on a first-come, first-served basis from Memorial Day into autumn.

the wreck now serves as the central feature of the *Forward Underwater Classroom* shipwreck preserve. The “classroom” has a trail that leads divers through a series of stations where they measure and record underwater conditions such as temperature and water clarity and learn about zebra mussels, fish, plant life, archaeology, navigation and geology.

The resources in the Submerged Heritage Preserves are part of New York State’s cultural and historic legacy and belong to the people of New York. They are protected by law to preserve this heritage so that future generations can enjoy and learn from them.

The shipwrecks found in Lake George are delicate and should never be touched. In fact, Bateaux Below’s underwater archaeologist Joe Zarzynski points out that the upper part of the *Land Tortoise* is so soft that fingerprints can actually be seen in the wood, left by divers who did not understand the fragility of the 250-year-old waterlogged pine planks. Divers are taught that removing artifacts or damaging resources is forbidden by law and deprives others of the opportunity to view and study them. Fortunately, Zarzynski says, most divers are responsible, and area dive shops help educate divers.

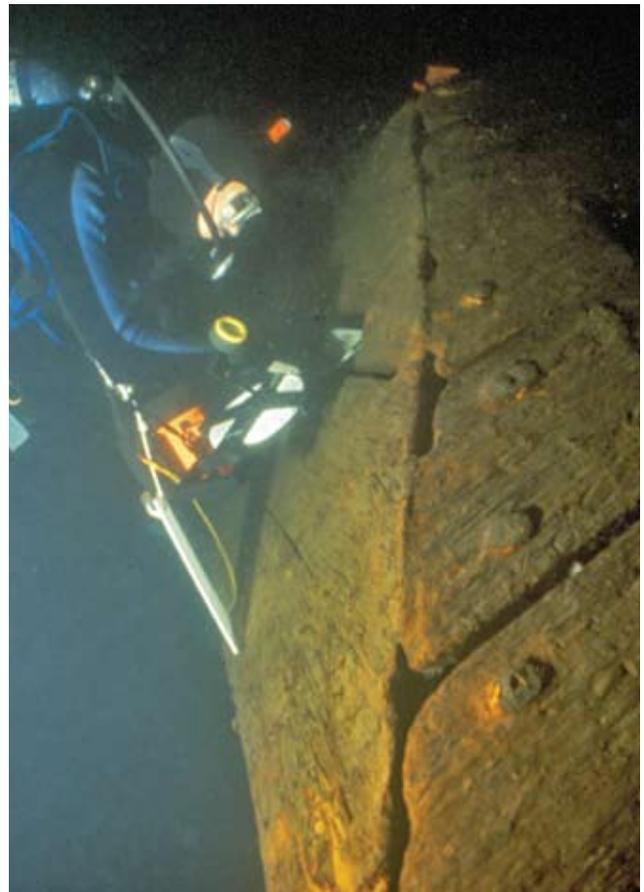
Non-divers can also experience the thrill of exploring Lake George’s underwater treasures. A documentary film by Pepe Productions, *The Lost Radeau: North America’s Oldest Intact Warship*, takes the viewer down more than 100 feet to document the discovery and history of this unique vessel. *The Lost Radeau* airs occasionally on PBS stations, or the DVD can be purchased at [www.thelostradeau.com](http://www.thelostradeau.com). Many public libraries have copies of the DVD. A new documentary, *Wooden Bones: The Sunken Fleet of 1758* (Pepe Productions), informs viewers about Lake George’s bateau wrecks.

Although many who marvel at the wonder and beauty of Lake George’s crystalline waters on a sunny day are unaware, what lies underneath is a prime example of the rich heritage and historic treasures that make New York an historical wonder as much as it is an outdoor lover’s paradise.

**Elaine Bloom** is a contributing editor to *Conservationist*.

## Underwater Stewards

Lake George’s shipwreck preserves are open to visiting divers principally due to the efforts of Bateaux Below, Inc., a not-for-profit corporation that studies historic shipwrecks in Lake George. Bateaux Below volunteers provide monitoring, fund raising, maintenance and public outreach for the Submerged Heritage Preserves. They also prepared the nominations for listing the shipwrecks on the National Register of Historic Places. To find out more about Bateaux Below and the work they do, you can write to them at: Bateaux Below, Inc., P.O. Box 2134, Wilton, New York 12831.



Russell Bellico

(Top) One of several cannon ports that grace the sides of the *Land Tortoise*. (Bottom) A diver inspects the hull of the *Land Tortoise*.

# A Change in Climate

By Mary Kadlecek



Photo courtesy of the Town of North Hempstead

Local communities across New York find innovative ways to **GO GREEN**

## “Green is the future,

and Schenectady wants to be a leader in that future,” says Brian Stratton, mayor of the upstate community once known as “the City that Lights and Hauls the World.”

Energy savings, renewable energy and green businesses are moving the former industrial powerhouse toward renewed technical prominence and prosperity, while reducing emissions of heat-trapping greenhouse gases and saving tax dollars. To the south along the Hudson River, the rural/suburban Town of Red Hook is also saving emissions and tax dollars, as its citizens become increasingly engaged in programs that are good for the climate.

In company with more than 40 other New York municipalities, Schenectady and Red Hook recently adopted the Climate Smart Communities Pledge, a commitment to systematically cut emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases. From experienced “green” communities to those that are just getting started, New York’s Climate Smart Communities reveal the power of local action to solve climate change.

For Schenectady, declaring itself Climate Smart was a step along a path already charted. An aggressive energy efficiency performance contract now in its third year has streamlined the city’s operations and, to date, has prevented emission of more than a million pounds of carbon dioxide (the most common greenhouse gas). Money spent for energy-conserving LED traffic lights, an updated heating system for City Hall and other improvements is being paid back from the \$200,000 saved each year on electricity and natural gas bills.

For many Climate Smart Communities, a strong recycling program is the first step to saving energy and reducing greenhouse gas emissions—recycled materials do not require energy-intensive disposal, and take less energy to re-manufacture than virgin materials. On Long Island, North Hempstead targets schools, libraries and parks with a vigorous recycling program, an initiative of North Hempstead Supervisor Jon Kaiman (wearing red tie), pictured with students and school officials of the Manhasset School District.

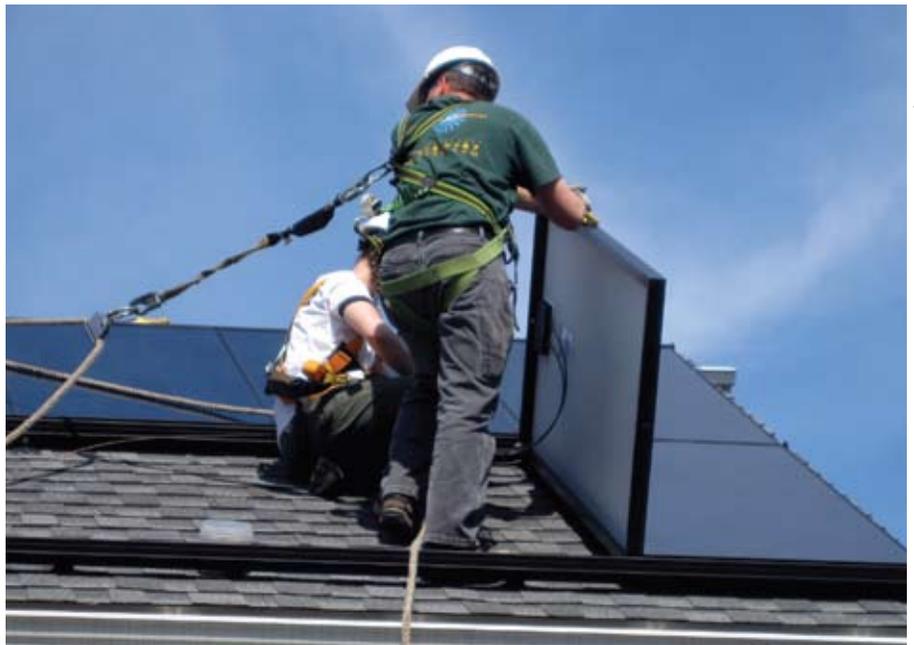


Photo courtesy of the Town of Red Hook

Purchased with grant funding, these solar panels on the roof of the Red Hook Town Hall are on schedule to pay back the initial investment in about nine years, leaving the town with reliable energy at little or no cost and without greenhouse gas emissions.

## From experienced “green” communities to those that are just getting started, New York’s Climate Smart Communities reveal the power of local action to solve climate change.

But that is only one of Schenectady’s ambitious green initiatives. The first-of-its-kind Green Homes program has gained national recognition for combining energy saving and affordability. And plans are in the works to “green” more city facilities and make low-carbon living available to more residents.

Mayor Stratton attributes the success of such a variety of projects in a short time to creative leveraging of city, state, federal and private resources by a large and diverse cast of characters: the Thinking Green Committee of community partners and design professionals; city staff; the regional NYSERDA Energy Smart Coordinator; local environmental groups,

and Schenectady County, which shares efficiency programs with the city.

“People are out there looking for ways to be green,” he says. There is a widespread understanding that a green economy could revitalize the city. The mayor notes that the city’s green initiatives are already attracting private development: Schenectady is home to the headquarters of the General Electric Company’s Global Renewable Energy business and will be the site of the company’s state-of-the-art battery manufacturing plant; the Golub Corporation will open an ultra-green headquarters building in the city, and several energy-related small businesses have recently located there.

Though Red Hook has largely avoided the stresses of de-industrialization, the Dutchess County community is just as determined as Schenectady to combat climate change.

“It’s evident that we all have to pull together to save energy,” says Red Hook Supervisor Sue Crane. Like Schenectady, Red Hook began greening itself about three years ago as an outgrowth of longtime work by concerned citizens. But the source of its climate initiatives was a deeply held “waste-not” philosophy.

“Our Conservation Advisory Council developed a recycling program for Red Hook, and those original efforts have evolved. The idea of not wasting became

and solar photovoltaic electricity (installed with an assist from a state grant) have led to such impressive reductions in energy bills and greenhouse gas emissions that the town is planning to add more panels to its solar array.

“Residents are fascinated,” says Supervisor Crane. Visitors to the town hall stop to read an educational display that explains how the solar panels work, and citizens and town staff alike express enthusiasm.

## Meeting New York State's climate protection goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent by 2050 will require making homes, businesses and public buildings carbon neutral.

very focused, in me and in others,” the supervisor says. So Red Hook sponsors a goods exchange.

“When people drive in to offload recyclables,” says Supervisor Crane, “they drop off things for reuse—dishes, blankets, a chair or two, clothing—or they stroll over to see if there’s anything they can use. It’s a wonderful community gathering place, and people have become very committed.”

In keeping with its resolve that nothing should go to waste, the town turned its attention to energy, starting with its town hall. Weatherization, energy management,

“This has gone further than I ever dreamed when I took office,” she says. “I try to be careful with tax dollars and not overburden the paid staff—we’re stretched so thin. But there is a lot of cooperation on these projects, and that’s to the credit of both our volunteers and our staff. The people who have the new ideas are right there with the staff to get the work done.”

There is no “typical” way for a community to be climate smart, though nearly all municipalities that adopt the Climate Smart Communities Pledge do name a coordinator to investigate options and spearhead planning and projects.



Photo courtesy of the City of Schenectady

Schenectady is building affordably priced low-energy Green Homes to replace abandoned houses in older neighborhoods. Weatherized and super insulated, the four homes that are already occupied use (on average) less than half the energy of standard houses. Despite their specialized features, these homes actually cost less per square foot to build than traditional houses. The city is leveraging federal grant money to build the homes; an additional ten are currently under construction.

A number of Climate Smart Communities are working on emission inventories, reduction goals or climate action plans. For Schenectady, an initial goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by seven percent below 1990 levels was set in signing the 2006 U.S. Conference of

## Become a Climate Smart Community

Many communities would like to save energy and emissions, but need a way to decide what to do and how to pay for the changes. Climate Smart Communities, supported by coordinators from NYSERDA, can help local governments find workable starting points, and then select, coordinate and fund “green” improvements.

To learn more about becoming a Climate Smart Community, contact the Office of Climate Change at (518) 402-8448, or e-mail us at [climatechange@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:climatechange@gw.dec.state.ny.us)

Communities may find the following resources useful:

*Climate Smart Communities guidance*—[www.dec.ny.gov/energy/50845.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/energy/50845.html)

*NYS Energy-efficiency clearinghouse*—[www.nyserda.org/clearinghouse](http://www.nyserda.org/clearinghouse)

*NYSERDA Energy Smart Community Coordinators*—[www.getenergysmart.org/](http://www.getenergysmart.org/)

*CommunityOutreach/EnergySmartCommunities.aspx*

*NYSERDA Focus on Local Government*—[www.nyserda.org/municipalities/default.asp](http://www.nyserda.org/municipalities/default.asp)



Photo courtesy of the Town of Irondequoit

Photo courtesy of the City of Syracuse



Photo courtesy of the City of New Rochelle



Syracuse's not-for-profit 'Cuse Cars program rents out low-emission cars for short-term use, which helps the city move toward carbon neutral transportation. New Rochelle's diesel hybrid electric garbage truck also helps in reaching a carbon-neutral future by costing less for fuel and emitting less greenhouse gas.

Mayors Climate Protection Agreement, and another round of goal-setting is imminent. Red Hook expects to use the outcome of its emissions inventory to set goals and begin a climate plan.

Conservation is a key element in communities' climate thinking. Even before an emissions inventory is available, most municipal governments can name some operating improvements that would save energy and greenhouse gases. Many of New York's Climate Smart Communities start by replacing inefficient boilers, light fixtures, and other energy-wasting equipment in municipal facilities. Some communities are beginning to green their vehicle fleets with cars, trucks and buses that use lower-carbon technologies or fuels. Behind the scenes, in Schenectady and other towns, improved maintenance is saving significant fuel and emissions.

Communities are reasoning that if they generate some of their own power from renewable sources, they will emit less greenhouse gas and enjoy greater security and predictability in energy price and supply. A few have completed renewable energy projects, often using the carbon-free energy to operate municipal facilities. Several other communities are considering renewable power generation as a way of turning closed landfills to productive use, following the example of the Town of Hunter where a horizontal windmill on the old landfill powers equipment that cleans landfill leachate to protect surrounding wetlands.

Meeting New York State's climate protection goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent by 2050 will require making homes, businesses and public buildings carbon neutral. Carbon

neutral buildings get utility and convenience from the smallest possible amount of energy, and tap carbon-free sources for the energy they do use.

While Schenectady works on energy-efficiency for new construction, other Climate Smart Communities have started the huge project of greening existing public and private buildings. The Town of Babylon's Long Island Green Homes program was the first in the nation to provide up-front funding for residents to increase home energy efficiency, with the cost paid back out of home energy savings. In western New York, the Town of Irondequoit partners with a nonprofit organization to help low- and moderate-income homeowners weatherize their homes and save money. Several other communities, including Red Hook, are exploring the possibility of providing up-front financing for home weatherization.

"We are all looking for conservation methods and innovation," says Red Hook Supervisor Crane. "We are excited about the financial and energy savings we've already realized. Our program is a wonderful evolution of an idea that has perked along."

Schenectady Mayor Stratton observes, "Green doesn't cost more if you really plan from the very beginning. When funding and assistance become available, you have to be ready with your ideas. You have to see what the future is, where the money's going, and when that happens you climb on board.

"This is very much part of the city's economic development program," he adds. "We continually try to do more and more with conservation and going green. Once you get into this green world, you don't want to go back to your old way."

**Mary Kadlecsek** works in the NYS Office of Climate Change in Albany.

# Trees for Tomorrow



red osier dogwood

Bob Rehbaum

highbush cranberry

Bob Rehbaum

white spruce

Joseph O'Brien, USDA Forest Service

**Since the early 1900s, DEC's Saratoga Tree Nursery** has offered quality, local seedlings for use in reforestation, wildlife habitat, land restoration, windbreaks, buffer zones, Christmas trees and dune stabilization.

More than 50 native species are grown at Saratoga Nursery. Many are especially suited for wetlands and riparian areas, but they are also versatile and attractive, and can help turn an ordinary yard into a desirable habitat for birds and other wildlife. In addition, many of these same species can also be planted in rain gardens or in low areas to help control runoff and reduce flooding. The native shrub

willows and shrub dogwoods, for instance, can be used for hedges, stabilizing streambanks, or for capturing water that might otherwise seep into a basement. Likewise, red osier dogwood is an outstanding riparian shrub, and is also one of the most tolerant of winter road salt. If space is an issue, the prairie, Streamco and sandbar willows can be kept short and bushy with pruning.

**Saratoga Nursery is currently offering a special riparian package, perfect for planting along rivers and streams, comprised of several species of trees and shrubs. In one reasonably priced package, you get 10 each of:**

- **buttonbush**
- **red osier dogwood**
- **hybrid poplar**
- **highbush cranberry**
- **wild raisin**
- **Streamco willow**
- **silver maple**
- **wetland rose**
- **red oak**
- **white spruce**

To order seedlings, please visit :  
[www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7127.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7127.html)  
or call (518) 587-1120.

# Adirondack Legends Remembered By Betsy Lowe

Ken Rimany



Sometimes you meet people who have a profound effect on you. I am fortunate to have known two Adirondack icons who had such an effect on me.

Clarence Petty and Nellie Staves were Adirondack legends. Their passion for life and the causes they supported endeared them to many. While both passed away in 2009, during their long lives they achieved tremendous success, whether fighting for a cause, or simply enjoying a meal with friends.

I met Clarence in his later years and was instantly drawn in by his passion for the Adirondacks, and for life. A true Adirondacker, he was an ardent conservationist, activist, woodsman and pilot. Over his long life, he hiked, snowshoed, canoed, or flew over just about every acre of the Adirondack Park. He devoted his life to protecting this wilderness, and wanted others to carry on this appreciation and protection of the region. His regular column “Questions for Clarence” in the *Adirondack Explorer*, and well-known ongoing letter campaigns to government officials, written on his antique typewriter, made him a voice to be heard,

and a point of view to be reckoned with.

Clarence worked hard and lived modestly, saving his money to help support special causes. As the Conservation Department liaison to the New York State Legislature, which led to the creation of the Adirondack Park Agency, he helped shape the Adirondack Park we know today.

Clarence supported a variety of not-for-profits concerned about the future of the park. He also supported development of The Wild Center in Tupper Lake which I initiated in the fall of 1998. I regularly met with Clarence at his home to keep him up-to-date on the museum’s progress. At age 99 he made a wonderful homemade lunch for Diana Fortune and me, and on his 100th birthday we shared another delightful lunch at his home in Coreys. He was always very kind, with a twinkle in his eye, a lovely disposition, and a good sense of humor. Though he received many awards and recognitions from a variety of organizations throughout his life, Clarence remained humble. He was grateful for every day he had.

Nellie Staves was a close friend of mine and a sportswoman, conservationist, artist,

community activist, mother, grandmother, great grandmother and guardian angel. Like Clarence, she received numerous recognitions during her life for her conservation and civic work, as well as her artistry.

Nellie would check in regularly at DEC, The Wild Center, and many other organizations, to be supportive and to get the latest on what was going on. She was active with local sportsmen’s groups, and served on a number of government committees where she dedicated countless hours and travel time to support important issues. She lent a diplomatic voice on many of these issues to a wide variety of groups and organizations around the park.

An artist, Nellie had a great talent for carving images of native plants and animals onto fungi that she collected in the woods. She was passionate about her art and enjoyed giving her pieces away to various causes.

On a personal note, she did so much to help encourage me and to support the launch of The Wild Center. She attended my introductory meeting on the idea, helped host the first public meeting, and attended nearly every public meeting and board meeting thereafter to support the project.

A friend to everyone, she was nourished by her connection to nature in the Adirondacks and radiated this in being such a kind and caring person. She was wonderful to me and I miss her “checking-in” calls.

I consider myself lucky to have had two such dedicated and caring friends. Their passion for their work exemplifies the type of life I hope to lead, and while they are greatly missed, their memories will live on.

**Betsy Lowe** is director of DEC’s Region 5.

For further reading on Nellie and Clarence, see the December 2000 and February 2009 issues, respectively, of *Conservationist*.



# CASE CLOSED

## mystery of the missing record antlers solved after 16 years

by Robert O'Connor

### *In the summer of 1994,*

Buffalo resident Nick Gumhalter pled guilty to “possessing wild deer parts while failing to meet the mandatory requirements of the Environmental Conservation Law,” and to “transporting wildlife contrary to the terms of the Fish and Wildlife Law.” While the charges were run-of-the-mill, this was no ordinary case. The largest set of deer antlers in New York State had “disappeared” from a display at the Erie County Fairgrounds in 1978, and as it turned out, Gumhalter may have been involved.

The bizarre case began when an anonymous caller phoned DEC’s then-Lieutenant Robert Lucas on March 21, 1994. The mysterious caller told Lucas (the supervising officer in the area at the time) that he would find an “item of interest” tied to a road sign in a remote area of Cattaraugus County. The caller provided directions to the sign. Lucas assigned Environmental Conservation Officer (ECO) Robert O’Connor to locate and retrieve the item.

What O’Connor found was an extremely large set of shed deer antlers. Neither ECO O’Connor nor Lieutenant Lucas knew the significance of the rack at the time, but the find began an investigation that led to the unraveling of this story.

Hoping for leads in the case, the officers brought the shed antlers to a meeting of other officers, where ECO Jim Rogers, assigned to Niagara County, knew instantly what they were: the set of shed

### *Shortly before the antlers were to be returned to Merwin, they were reported missing from the Erie County Fairgrounds.*

antlers that had disappeared from the Erie County Fairgrounds some 16 years earlier. O’Connor contacted Bob Estes, record keeper for the state’s Big Buck Club, to confirm the identity of the rack and to get more information about the circumstances of its disappearance. Estes not only recalled the rack, but remembered how the disappearance had strained friendships and accounted for some hard feelings.

“Bob [Estes] was extremely helpful in fleshing out the story,” O’Connor said. “He had an intimate knowledge of the history of the antlers as they had been in his care when they were stolen.”

Estes told the officer that Joseph Merwin had found the shed antlers on Merwin’s farm in Allegany County in 1938. Estes explained that, during the 1939 deer hunting season, Roosevelt Luckey killed the buck that likely grew the sheds. Amazingly, the same buck provided

two men with historic racks. The “Luckey” buck still holds the New York State record, more than 70 years after it was shot, and according to Estes scored 198 2/8 points on the Boone and Crockett Club system. Estes speculated that if the shed antlers Merwin found in 1938 had been on a legally taken deer, they would have scored 205 6/8, making them the largest antlers on record in North America at the time.

Merwin kept the shed antlers from the “Lucky” buck in his barn for years. A few years after the Big Buck Club began keeping records in 1972, someone recommended having the enormous rack scored, and Merwin loaned the antlers to the Big Buck Club. Shortly before the antlers were to be returned to Merwin, they were reported missing from the Erie County Fairgrounds where they were on display.

While all involved were glad to have recovered the antlers, the circumstances of the theft remained a mystery. Lieutenant Lucas directed ECO O’Connor to conduct a thorough investigation.

“[The investigation] involved talking to as many people as I could about the rack,” O’Connor said. In an attempt to find people who could shed some light on the case, the ECOs contacted the *Jamestown Post Journal*.

## **Amazingly, the same buck provided two men with historic racks.**

“[The newspaper] ran a front-page story and a photo of the impressive rack, and that generated a lot of calls,” recalled O’Connor. The rack was also shown to as many people as possible. One of those people was retired ECO Don Malmrose, who recalled seeing photos of the unmistakable and distinctive set of antlers. Malmrose put O’Connor in touch with the person who had shown him the photographs. Thanks to this tip, the case took a turn for the better.

“I interviewed the witness who claimed to have seen the antlers in Nick Gumhalter’s possession, and I was able to fill in a lot of the blanks,” O’Connor

said. “The witness gave me a good statement with a lot of facts he could personally attest to.”

According to the witness, the shed antlers had been taken from Gumhalter’s residence and brought to a party where several photos were taken of the rack. ECO O’Connor now had enough eyewitness information to contact his suspect.

The officer called Gumhalter and requested a meeting. Gumhalter agreed to meet, and quickly accepted the terms of a plea deal offered at that meeting. Although Gumhalter never confessed to stealing the sheds from the fairgrounds, he admitted to being employed at the fairgrounds when the antlers disappeared. He also admitted to possessing the sheds shortly after they were reported missing.

James Clayton



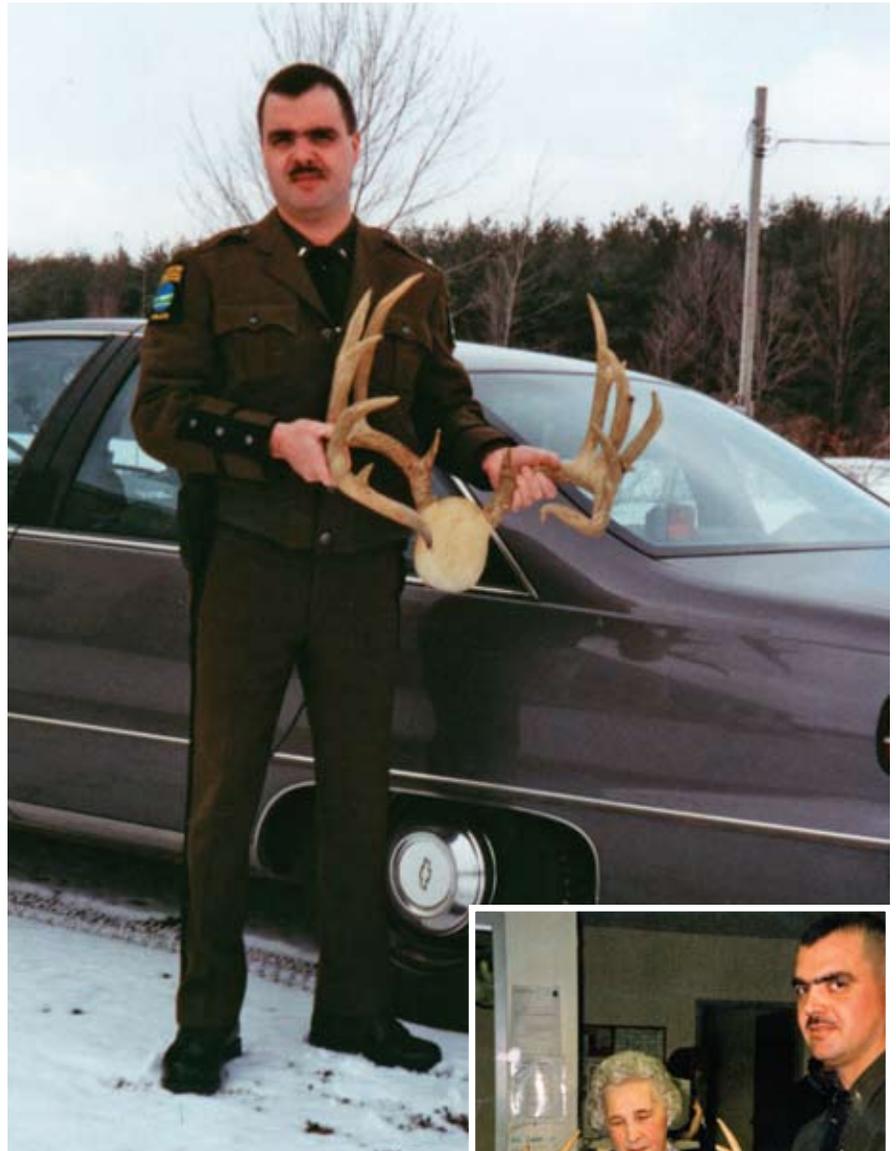
In 1938, Joseph Merwin found the large set of antler sheds (on left) that later disappeared from the Erie County Fair. The following year, Roosevelt Lucky felled the prize buck (on right) that likely grew the sheds.

During that same meeting, Gumhalter told ECO O'Connor that some day he'd tell him the whole story behind the disappearance of the sheds. Sadly, however, Gumhalter passed away before revealing what really happened.

In the spring of 1995, the antlers were returned to Mrs. Phoebe Merwin, the widow of the original finder, Joseph Merwin. Mrs. Merwin later donated the antlers to the Department of Environmental Conservation.

More than 30 years after the "Luckey" buck's shed rack was stolen from the Erie County Fairgrounds, the story of the antlers' strange journey seems almost as unlikely as the rack itself.

**Robert O'Connor** is an environmental investigator in DEC's Buffalo office.



DEC photos

Lieutenant Robert Lucas was the supervising officer when the mysterious sheds were discovered by ECOs in 1994. After the antlers' strange story was investigated, the sheds were returned to the original finder's widow, Mrs. Phoebe Merwin, who later donated them to DEC.



Bill Banaszewski

White-tailed bucks shed and regrow their antlers each year. Antler growth is nourished through a network of blood vessels contained in a soft smooth skin called velvet. The velvet is usually shed by September; the antlers are generally shed in mid-winter. The size of the antlers typically increases with a buck's age up to about five or six years, but nutrition, overall animal health, and genetics also play important roles in antler development.

People sometimes find sheds on the forest floor. The best time to look for sheds is in late winter and early spring. However, antlers are a source of calcium and other nutrients for rodents (including mice, voles, porcupines and squirrels) who feed on them, and this can make finding sheds difficult.

# Dad, can we go ICE fishing?

By Doug Stang

Photos by Kelly Stang



As we drove around the frozen lake, we noticed a lot of people out on the ice. From the back seat, my four-year-old asked, “Dad, what are those people doing out on the lake?”

“Most of them are ice fishing,” I replied.

“Can we go ice fishing?” he followed.

“Sure,” I said.

“When?” he asked.

“Tomorrow,” I replied.

And so it went for the rest of the ride home. “Are we going to take our boat? Can I bring my bear? Can you pull me on the sled? What do fish eat? Can we take Drake (our dog)? Will I catch a big fish? I like perch. Is the whole family going, or just you and me? Does Drake have boots? Will his feet get cold? Can we have lunch on the ice? What are those little houses doing out on the ice? Do I have to wear my hat and mittens?”

As four-year-olds are wont to do, questions upon questions are continually, and often repeatedly asked, so I prepared myself for a fun, question-filled day. Experience has taught me to listen to the cacophony of rapid-fire questions and try to selectively answer those that I can answer, or at least venture a guess at, and those that are most pertinent to the task at hand.

We loaded the equipment and the entire family (sans Drake) into the truck and headed out. Our first stop was a bait shop where we purchased minnows and “mousies.” The bait store owner presented me with the receipt for the minnows and reminded me to keep it with me.

“Do they have more stuff in this store than you do? Why do you have to keep that piece of paper? Are those baby mice? Are you getting worms? Is it time for lunch yet? Why is the man in the store laughing?”

Mousies are not baby mice. They are small insect larvae that you use for bait. I need to keep the piece of paper to show proof that the bait fish I bought were tested for and found to be free of certain diseases. We want to follow the rules and take care of our resources (see sidebar: *Don't Spread Fish Diseases*).



Ice fishing can be a great winter outdoor activity for the whole family.

We arrived at the lake and headed out onto the ice amid many other families who were taking advantage of a relatively warm, sunny January day. Through the years, I have noticed increased interest and participation in ice fishing and other “on ice” activities such as cross-country skiing and snowmobiling.

Heading to a spot to set up, the questions continued. “How big [thick] is the ice? Are you sure we won’t fall through? Where does ice come from? What makes it slippery? What are those things on your feet?”

I thought this was a good time to tell him the first rule of ice fishing—make sure the ice is safe to walk on. I never go out on less than five inches of clear, hard ice. And, as my son pointed out, since ice can be very slippery, particularly if there is no snow on it, many ice anglers wear “creepers” or other devices on their boots to provide traction while walking.

I decided to try the same areas we fished last summer as we are familiar with the water depths and underwater features of this part of the lake. We fish around the edges of weedbeds and areas that go from shallow to deep water fairly quickly. If you are unfamiliar with a particular lake, but want to try it, look to where the concentrations of others are fishing. Talk with others on the ice, and ask for advice at local bait and tackle shops. I’ve found that people who are ice fishing are much more forthcoming with information on fishing techniques and places to try than are open-water anglers.

The questions continued to pour from my son as we reached our “favorite spot” on the lake, set up our tent and unpacked our ice fishing equipment: “What is that big drill? Why are the fishing poles so small? What are those things with the flags on them?”

I explained that the big drill is an ice auger, and is used to cut holes in the ice. Depending on the model, ice augers cut holes from 4 to 10 inches in diameter. In general, six- to eight-inch holes are



Toys help keep young ice anglers happy and engaged. My son had his trucks guard one ice-fishing hole, in case the tip-up was triggered.

sufficient to bring fish, even large fish, up through the ice. Most augers are hand-powered; however, gas-engine powered augers are gaining in popularity as new, lighter-weight and more “environmentally friendly” models are increasingly available.

The small fishing poles are jigging rods. They are lightweight to enable you to feel the subtle bites of panfish (yellow perch, bluegills, crappie, sunfish). The rod’s short length (approximately 2-2½ feet long) lets you stand close to the hole, making

them much more maneuverable if you are fishing in a shanty or tent or “ice house.” I showed my son how to use the jigging rod, raising and lowering the tip with a short stroke or “jigging” action. He wanted to examine each of the lures and baits that I brought—small flashy lures, ice flies, dots, and jigs that are usually baited with a grub, “mousie,” or “spike” (fly larvae).

As he turned his attention to the “things with the flags,” I told him they were called tip-ups. Though tip-ups come in a



Bringing along a picnic lunch keeps everyone happy.

# Safety First

## Ice Safety

Always make sure the ice is safe before heading out. You can use the following table as a guide.

### American Pulpwood Association Ice Thickness Table

Ice Thickness	Permissible Load
2 inches	one person on foot
3 inches	group in single file
7.5 inches	one car (2 tons)
8 inches	light truck (2.5 tons)
10 inches	truck (3.5 tons)
12 inches	heavy truck (7-8 tons)
15 inches	10 tons
20 inches	25 tons

This guide is based on clear, blue, hard ice on non-running waters. Slush ice is about 50% weaker, and clear, blue ice over running water is about 20% weaker. Many ice anglers do not like to fish on less than five inches of ice, and do not like to drive a pick-up truck on less than 15 inches of ice.

## Don't Spread Fish Diseases

To minimize the risk of possibly spreading fish diseases, anglers who collect their own bait fish can only use the bait fish on the water they collected it from. Bait stores must sell bait fish that are certified disease free (tested and found free of diseases of concern). Bait stores located on the shore of a body of water can sell untested bait fish only for use in that same body of water from which they were collected. No overland transport of uncertified bait fish is currently permitted in New York. Anglers who purchase certified bait fish must retain the receipt that indicates the number and type of bait fish purchased. Receipts are good for 10 days, and the fish must be properly disposed of after 10 days.



Patently waiting for a fish to bite.

variety of shapes and sizes, all are basically two sticks of wood or plastic that form an X over the hole, with a third upright stick that is perpendicular to the X. The upright stick has a reel or spool

“TIP-UP” yelled, whether or not a flag was actually tripped, and each time, right on cue, I snapped my head around to check to see if there was a flag in the air, because you just never know. More times

Throughout the day, I became accustomed to hearing “TIP-UP” yelled, whether or not a flag was actually tripped...

of line and a trigger device on the end that is suspended into the hole. There’s a flag attached to a spring on the top end of the stick. When the tip-up is “set,” the flag is down. Once a fish bites, the trigger is released and the flag springs into the air to signal a strike. Of course we had to “practice” setting and releasing the tip-ups a bunch of times so my son could see the flags go up, before I could convince him we should put them in the water. He watched as I baited them with either minnows or worms, and then set the line so the bait was within a foot of the lake bottom, or suspended over the top of the weeds.

I told my son that when you see a flag pop up into the air, it is tradition to yell “TIP-UP” and go over to the hole and pull the fish up through the hole. A courtesy among others who are ice fishing, a.k.a. the “frostbite fraternity,” is to let others know if one of their flags has been tripped in case they did not see it. Throughout the day, I became accustomed to hearing

than not, my head snapping was followed by high-pitched laughter—at least it was done in good fun by the newest “fraternity” member.

The day was filled with playing Frisbee, cooking and eating lunch, visiting with other members of the fraternity, attending to tip-ups, changing wet clothes for dry ones, and jigging and actually catching some yellow perch and pickerel. All-in-all, it was a fine day afield with my family.

As we walked off the ice, loaded the truck, and headed home, the inquisition continued at a fevered pitch: “Are we going to eat these fish for dinner? I’m gonna catch a really big fish next time. Can we go tomorrow? Can we bring Drake? Can I use the auger next time? Do I have to wear my...” That is, until a silence fell over the cab of the truck as my four-year-old son fell sound asleep.

Avid angler **Doug Stang** is assistant director of DEC’s Division of Fish, Wildlife & Marine Resources.



# On Patrol

Carl Heilman II

*Real stories from Conservation Officers  
and Forest Rangers in the field*

Contributed by ECO Lt. Tom Caifa  
and Forest Ranger Lt. John Solan

## Something's Fishy—Kings County

On New Year's Eve, ECOs in Brooklyn initiated a major case against NK Seafood Group, a company with no commercial permits to sell seafood in New York and a long history of violations. After a lengthy investigation, ECOs located a warehouse of seafood about to be sold illegally by the company. More than 9,000 pounds of seafood, including live lobsters, blackfish, Dungeness crabs and clams were seized and inventoried. Lt. John Fitzpatrick arranged for a large portion of the seafood to be donated to the Bowery Mission in lower Manhattan. Later that month, NK Seafood Group was once again caught illegally importing a large number of marine species, which the US Fish and Wildlife Service impounded at a warehouse at JFK Airport. ECOs confiscated and donated the 5,000 pounds of seafood to the Open Door Church in Brooklyn. Charges against NK Seafood Group are pending.

## Taking out the Trash—Onondaga County

In December, a landowner contacted ECO Rick Head about an unusual illegal dumping complaint in Otisco. The landowner was hunting when he saw a pick-up truck pull to the side of the road and the driver unload a pile of garbage. The landowner ran up to confront the driver, but the man drove away. When the landowner looked at the pile of garbage, he was surprised to find a gun case containing a very nice 30-06 rifle. The dumper must have realized his mistake because he came back to retrieve the firearm a short time later, but the landowner refused to give it to him and instead turned it over to ECO Head. The officer checked the firearm and discovered it was loaded. The dumper was charged with unlawful disposal of solid waste and possession of a loaded firearm in a motor vehicle.

## Don't Wander—Herkimer County

In October, Mr. Wesley Rennie of Pompey and his friend, Rick Morton, were doing their annual hike to Rondaxe Fire Tower. On the return trip, they decided to try and find the original trail to Rondaxe Fire Tower that started from Route 28. Unfortunately, Mr. Rennie got too close to the edge and

slipped, sliding more than 100 feet down a steep portion of the mountain. On the way down, he crashed into several trees, injuring his shoulder, arm and lower back. Herkimer County 911 was called and rescuers reached him at about 2 p.m. The rescuers stabilized Rennie, cut a trail to Route 28, and then carried him to a waiting ambulance. Mr. Rennie was transported to Old Forge airport, and then airlifted to Syracuse.

## Load of Quack—Suffolk County

During a routine foot patrol along a marshy area in East Hampton, ECO Liza Bobseine discovered a large amount of corn scattered along the shoreline and in the water near a hunter's duck blind. Suspicious that someone was illegally using bait to lure ducks, she returned the next day (the opening day of duck season) and watched two duck hunters. Soon, one of the hunters shot at some ducks as they flew overland past a nearby house, striking the house with several pellets. ECO Bobseine arrested the individuals for discharging a firearm within 500 feet of a residence, and for hunting waterfowl with the aid of bait.

## Ask the ECO

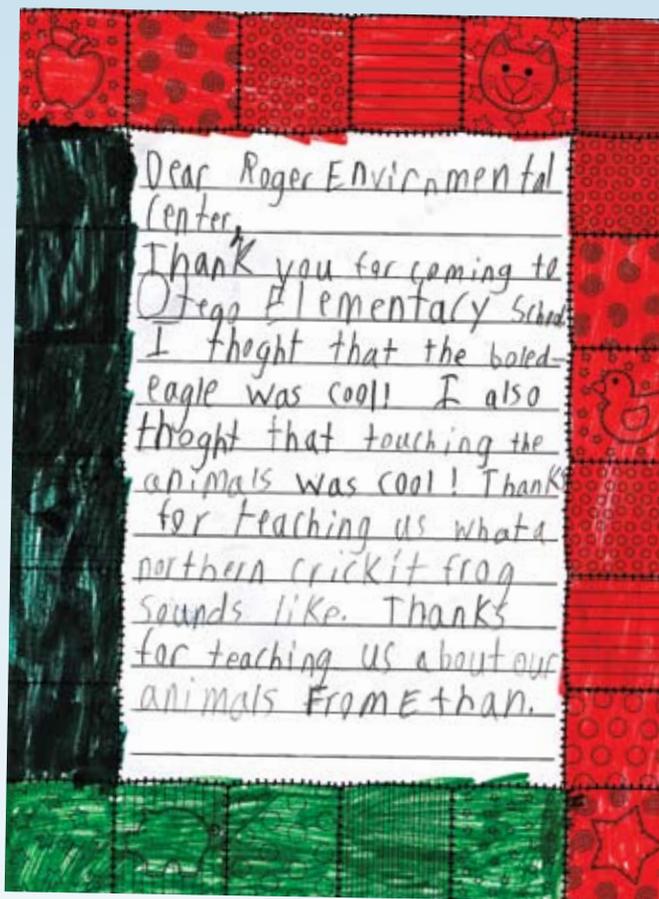
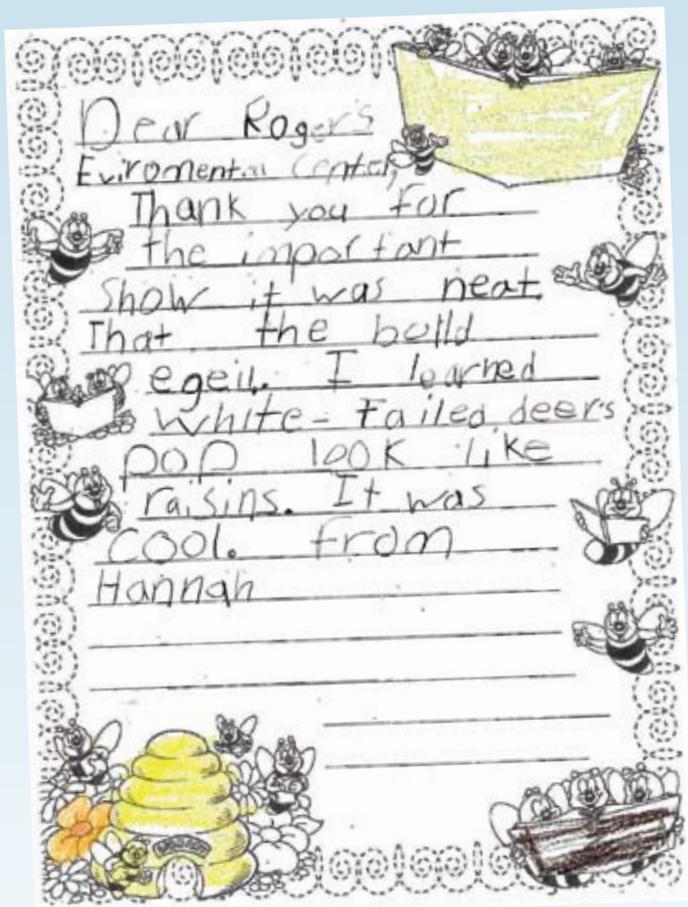
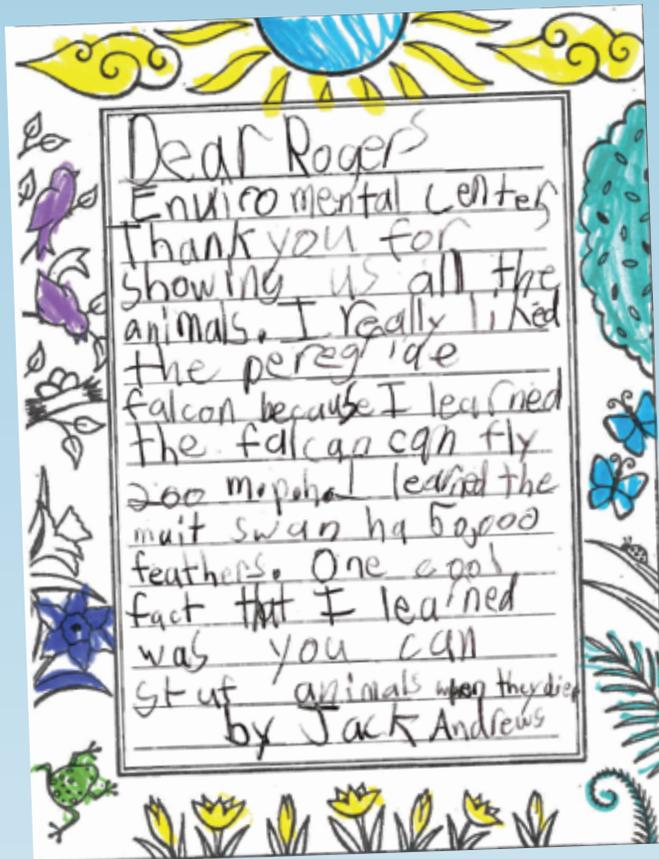
**Q:** I know it's after the season, but the "Ask the ECO" section of your December 2009 issue got me thinking. You said it was OK for someone to track a wounded deer after dark with a light, as long as they don't carry a firearm or longbow. What if you have a New York State permit to carry a concealed weapon?

**A:** If it is after dark, you may track a wounded deer with the aid of a light, but you may not possess a firearm of any kind while doing so—regardless of a permit. We allow people to track wounded deer after dark because it is the ethical thing to do. However, we cannot allow the possession of a firearm while doing so because it would undermine our capability to enforce the law.

# Fan Mail

Each year, DEC receives letters from children who have visited one of our environmental education centers, or participated in a DEC-sponsored event. Whether their visits were part of a school class, youth group or family outing, the enthusiasm for the experiences they've had are reflected in their words. Sometimes it's the unexpected things that have made a lasting impression.

The letters reprinted here came from students who attended a program led by Rogers Environmental Education Center in Sherburne, in Central New York. The letters are typical of the ones we receive, and remind us that each participant's experience is unique, as they discover something new about the outdoors, and perhaps also about themselves.



If your family, youth group or school class would like to participate in any of the numerous DEC environmental education programs held at various locations across the state, check out our website at [www.dec.ny.gov/education/74.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/74.html). The programs are free, but the experience is priceless.



Mike Clancy

### What a Fish!

While ice fishing on Mystic Lake in Cattaraugus County in January 2009, Thomas Reed of Kill Buck experienced the thrill of any angler's life; he landed a new state record fish. While Reed knew the walleye he pulled through the ice was huge, he was thrilled to learn that his 16-pound, 9-ounce fish surpassed the 1994 state record (also caught in Cattaraugus County) by 2 ounces. Walleye are the largest member of the

perch family, and some of New York's most highly sought after and valued sportfish. The walleye Reed caught is estimated to be more than 20 years old.

### New York's Peregrines— model of success

Hoping to learn the secret to New York's peregrine falcon nesting success, various national and international officials visited New York during 2009 to observe the banding of young falcons.

Once eliminated as a breeding bird in the state, there are now roughly 60 breeding pairs of the state-listed endangered peregrine. In fact, the state now holds the largest number of nesting peregrine falcons east of the Mississippi River, and New York City may be home to the largest urban population in the world.

DEC monitors falcon pairs across the state. The data collected allows us to better understand, protect and manage the species. Interested individuals can watch several of these falcon nests and hatchlings via DEC webcams that run from March to July. For more information, and to link to live falcon webcams, please visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/56121.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/56121.html).

### Good News for Deer

DEC reports that continued testing has found no new cases of the deadly Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in New York's white-tailed deer population. This bodes well for the state's deer, and is a good sign that regulations instituted by DEC to combat the possible spread of CWD—restricting the importation of live elk and deer, restricting the transportation of certain animal parts, and restricting the feeding of deer—is working. A very rare, but fatal neurological disease that affects members of the deer family, CWD was confirmed in two white-tailed deer in Oneida County in 2005. Since CWD is transmitted through animal-to-animal contact, primarily fecal, urine and saliva contact, there is the potential for the disease to spread throughout the state's deer population, especially in areas of high deer concentrations, such as winter deer yards. The most recent testing indicates that the disease hasn't spread from the original area in Oneida County. To learn more, visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7191.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7191.html).



Barbara Saunders

## White-nose Syndrome Update

Al Hicks



Scientists recently identified the fungus associated with the disease White-nose Syndrome (WNS) which has been afflicting hibernating bats in New York and across the northeast. The cold-loving fungus, *Geomyces destructans*, grows best between 0-10 degrees Celsius, the same temperature found in bat hibernacula. WNS was first detected in bats in a New York cave in the winter of 2005-2006. Since then, roughly 1 million bats have died within the affected region and the disease has spread to caves and mines as far away as central Virginia. All six hibernating bat species in NY in nearly all hibernacula are now infected. The most severely affected species are the little brown bat, the northern long-eared bat, and the



James Clayton

Bats with WNS leave roosts in winter, causing their premature death.

eastern pipistrelle. The least affected species is the big brown bat. While the cause of the disease is not yet confirmed, evidence continues to point to the fungus itself as the causative agent. DEC is working with a long list of universities, conservation organizations, and state and federal agencies to find a solution to this problem. For more information, visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/45088.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/45088.html).

## Summer Camp Scholarship

DEC joined with the National Heritage Trust (NHT) to develop a summer camp scholarship in memory of Emily Timbrook, a former Camp Rushford attendee and volunteer. Emily's parents set up the scholarship in her memory after she tragically died in a car accident. The Timbrooks hope that this scholarship will encourage other young people to get outdoors and appreciate nature the same way Emily did. Scholarships will use funds collected via NHT to send returning campers to DEC's summer camps for free. If you would like to donate to the NHT fund for camper scholarships, send a check made out to NHT—Camps Scholarship, c/o Director of Management and Budget Services, NYSDEC, 625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-5010 and be sure to visit [www.nysparks.state.ny.us](http://www.nysparks.state.ny.us) for a description of NHT. For more information about DEC summer camps, visit [www.dec.ny.gov/education/29.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/29.html).



Emily Timbrook

## Ruffed Grouse Survival Study

For the past two years, DEC staff and a student at SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry have conducted a fall/winter survival study of ruffed grouse at two locations in New York. Biologists banded more than 200 ruffed grouse for the study, and put radio-transmitters on 169 birds. Ruffed grouse experienced a mortality rate of at least 50 percent in both 2007 and 2008. Less than 11% of the total birds captured were harvested by hunters over the course of the two-year study. The mortality study is part of an effort DEC recently initiated to learn more about grouse populations. In addition to the telemetry study, DEC is employing the Cooperative Ruffed Grouse Hunting Log and Ruffed Grouse Drumming Survey to learn more about trends in grouse populations and distribution. For more information, and links to surveys in which you can participate, visit: [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/48393.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/48393.html).



DEC photo



*Barred owls are opportunistic predators that will eat small mammals, rabbits, birds, reptiles, amphibians, fish, and invertebrates. At this time of year, it was probably feeding on mammals and birds. Your photo of the pine marten (American marten) is great. Not many people get to see this secretive mammal (for more information, see Meet the Marten in the December 2007 Conservationist). Thanks for sharing.*

—Scott Stoner, DEC Research Scientist

### Blue Snow?

While on a walk last winter, I noticed a patch of blue snow where I had seen a bunny urinate the day before. Can rabbit urine turn blue?

Ed Miller  
Albany County



Jef Taylor

*We checked, and reportedly bunny urine can indeed turn blue if the rabbit has eaten a buckthorn plant. It appears that the ingested buckthorn chemical passes with the urine—a yellow or brownish color—and then turns blue in the presence of sunlight. A non-native plant, buckthorn is not a desired browse plant of native North American herbivores, and makes up only a small percentage of a cottontail's diet.*

—Eileen Stegemann, Assistant Editor



### Wild Encounters

I thought your readers would enjoy these photos. The owl took up temporary residence on one of my bird feeders. Night after night he showed up just after dusk and remained through the night. Once he spent the entire day there as well. I think he was dining on mice, voles and red squirrels that live in the snow beneath the feeder. Can you tell me what kind of owl this is, and is this typical behavior?

I snapped the photo of the pine marten on the trail to Algonquin Mt. where hikers often leave their packs while climbing Wright Peak. I think this little guy makes himself a good living from the largess, offered by or pilfered from, these hikers.

Jack Denero

West Monroe, Oswego County

*Your visitor is a barred owl, and although these owls are found across New York, seeing one on your feeder is certainly unusual.*

### One-footed Blue Jay

We found this blue jay with its foot frozen to our gutter. Using warm water, we freed his mangled leg and he flew away. Two weeks later, he returned to our feeder, without the hurt leg. He has adapted by balancing on one foot and using his wing to help support his body. He frequently feeds on the ground. What an amazing adaptation.

Sue Gillis  
Ithaca, Tompkins County

*Accidents frequently happen in nature. When an animal loses a limb, it is that much harder for the animal to survive, but they can, and sometimes do, adapt remarkably well. I once had a one-legged common crow frequent our yard for a period of a couple years. I nicknamed it "Hoppy," as it could not walk at all, and marveled at its ability to survive.*

—Dave Nelson, Editor



## Kooky-colored Cardinal



A few years ago, this odd-colored bird appeared in our backyard. I thought it was an immature cardinal, however more than a year later the bird still has its ghostly gray plumage, with very pale orange on its tail and wings. I've never seen a cardinal like this. Is it albino?

Noel J. Gish  
Smithtown, Suffolk County

*The cardinal appears to be “leucistic,” sometimes referred to as partially albino. Like albinism, leucism is a genetic mutation. Albinism is the total absence of melanin (a pigment found in skin, feathers, hair, etc.); leucism is when the melanin is not properly deposited in the feathers. Birds like these can be tricky to identify, and sometimes do not do well. Yours, however, has been around for a couple years at least, and seems to be doing just fine!*

—Scott Stoner, DEC Research Scientist



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## Ask the Biologist

**Q:** I see lots of squirrel leaf nests in the trees. What kind of squirrel makes these and how do they keep their nests together? Do they have something in their spit that sticks the leaves together? And do the squirrels live in these nests all winter? Aren't they cold?

Sophie Hardison  
First Grade, Sackets Harbor Central School  
Sackets Harbor, NY

**A:** Gray squirrels build the leaf nests you see in trees. The nests are used as an additional shelter for resting or to escape predators. Young are raised elsewhere—usually in hollowed out trees. Many of the leaf nests are built during mid-late summer, and again during the fall. The squirrel gathers leaves and twigs, which it then wedges between the tree branches, resulting in a densely intertwined very tight structure. While the nest appears quite large from the outside (up to two feet in diameter), the interior cavity may only be four to five inches wide. Each squirrel builds about two nests within its home range of about an acre. The nests are used year-round, whenever the squirrels are actively moving around.



This past fall I watched a squirrel build one of these nests. It made multiple, consecutive runs up and down the tree to collect leaves and tuck them into the crotch of a white pine. It collected oak and maple leaves, seeming to stuff as many as it could in its mouth, and then charged up the tree. It was frantic as it did this, making about 10 runs before stopping to just feed. My guess was that at that rate it would probably take about three days to build a nest.

—Gordon Batcheller, DEC Wildlife Biologist

# Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

## Rushford Reflections by Bill Sharick

I stood looking over the pond and wondered...where had all that time gone? High school, then college, and finally a career with the Department of Environmental Conservation. One thing was imminently clear: my experiences at Camp Rushford had made a tremendous impact on all those years.

My grandfather was an avid hunter and fisherman. Some of my most vivid memories are of the large catches of the Lake Erie blue pike he would bring home from all-night fishing trips. Sometimes he even took me along.

In those days, hunters had to register at a check station very early in the morning. Conservation Department wildlife technicians registered the hunters and handed out hunting permits. It was the first time I came across fellows who worked in the field of wildlife management. That's the kind of job I want, I thought to myself.

When I was 14, my dad told me there was an outdoor camp for kids run by the Conservation Department. At that time, camp was just for boys. It was one week long, cost \$35, and there would be classes in fisheries, wildlife, forestry, hunting, trapping and boating. It sounded like just the thing for me.

I remember on a Sunday afternoon in July, my mom, dad and I drove south in our green 1960 Chevrolet from our house near Buffalo to Camp Rushford in Allegany County. Shortly after I arrived, other guys showed up and we were assigned to our bunk houses. There were fellows from all over western New York.

The main meeting room was very rustic with all sorts of tanned skins and animal mounts. In it, I felt transported back in

time to one of the wilderness camps of the Adirondacks.

Bunk rooms were partitioned off with two double bunks per section and there was a common bathroom with multiple sinks and stalls. The showers used hot water supplied by a wood-fired boiler. The counselors were responsible for keeping the fire burning. As I recall, the water was either freezing cold or scalding hot.

Outside, beyond the pond was a caged area where the counselors kept a red fox. Every day, we'd go down and watch the animal being fed. I remember talking to a counselor about college during one of those feeding sessions. He told me he went to Cornell University and was studying wildlife science—which sounded like a good match for me.

Camp days were filled with talks and hands-on lessons in woodlot care, fish and game management, streamside erosion control work, fly-fishing, hunting and trapping. Conservation officers, forestry, and fish and wildlife technicians also spoke in our classes.

We took two official state courses, Boating Safety and Hunter Training. As part of the Hunter Training course, we were allowed to shoot .22 rifles and shotguns at the range located beyond the bunk house. Written tests were given at the end of each course and I passed both. I had a perfect score in Hunter Training; as a prize I received a one-year subscription to the *Conservationist*. I've received every issue since. I—and others—also received a small yellow card certifying completion of the Hunter Training course. I still have mine.

At week's end we all received certificates proclaiming our completion of the



A typical DEC camp in the 1960s.

training courses at the conservation camp. Mine is framed and still occupies an important place on my office wall: next to my Cornell University diploma and my Certified Wildlife Biologist papers from The Wildlife Society.

About 15 years ago, I attended a meeting at Camp Rushford. It was the first time I visited since I was a camper. When I arrived, I was shocked to see the whole place had shrunk. The buildings were much smaller than I remembered; the lake was just a little pond, the expansive ball field was the right size for T-Ball, and the big shooting range was more like a suburban lawn completely surrounded by woody vegetation.

After wandering around a bit and thinking about that week in the summer of 1964, I realized that what I saw now didn't matter. The things I learned and people I met there helped set the stage for my career as a wildlifer.

In that respect, Camp Rushford will always be a big place in my mind.

Wildlife Biologist **Bill Sharick** recently retired after a 36-year career with DEC.

*New York State Conservationist*, February 2010

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Registration forms and information are at [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov) (search for "environmental education camps").



Susan Shafer

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