

Peeping Tom

I was sitting at my computer when I heard gobbling. I turned around to see a turkey looking in my window, so I took a couple of photos. The birds like to come down to eat under the bird-feeder and under my old Christmas tree where I throw seed for the ground feeders.

Michael R. Weishan
Cattaraugus



What great photos. We have heard of turkeys gathering quite closely to feeders and in close proximity to houses, but to see one right outside one's window is truly remarkable!
—Conservationist staff



Due Credit

I have always enjoyed the *Conservationist*. I have just one complaint. My late husband LeRoy Irving was a dedicated employee of the Conservation Department. He administered the Conservation Boys (and then, Girls and Boys) Camps, but in all the magazine articles about these camps, I have yet to see his name mentioned. He also did some writing for the *Conservationist* and at one time did the map work for it. I think he should be given some credit, but then again, I am very proud of his record.

E. Jane Irving
Rensselaer County

Thank you for shedding light on your late husband's fine career in conservation in New York. I took a look at our files and your husband did indeed make a number of contributions to the magazine in the 1950s and 1960s, and compiled the student's page during that time. One article Mr. Irving wrote about the Ranger School at Wanakena particularly caught my attention. In it, he discusses student life at the school, including arriving by train, enduring 40-degree-below zero weather in the winter, quiet time at 7:30 p.m., and studying plane geometry. Mr. Irving also spent some of his tenure with DEC's conservation camps. It seems he was a consummate nature educator!

Considering the fact that he ran the conservation camps for a number of years, now is a good time to remind folks that registration opened recently for summer 2011 DEC environmental education camps (see Brieflys on page 28).

It's always a pleasure hearing about men like Mr. Irving, and it makes me wonder what changes have occurred since their time. Though many here today never had the opportunity to have met or worked with LeRoy or his colleagues, their names and contributions are not forgotten.

—Dave Nelson, Editor

Early Bluebird

I was surprised to see this bluebird perched on my roof this afternoon. I wouldn't have expected to see one of these backyard favorites until March at the earliest, but I hope it decides to stay. Is it common for them to make an appearance at this time of year, in the midst of a tough winter?

Tim Mack
Saratoga County

Surprisingly enough, bluebirds do overwinter in the Capital Region; we often see small groups of them (up to perhaps 10 birds) in the winter at the DEC Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar. Bluebirds, which are in the thrush family, and American robins (also thrushes) can be found in our region throughout the year.

—Scott Stoner, DEC Research Scientist



✉ LETTERS

Albino Birds?

(*Conservationist* often receives letters from readers with photos of all-white or partially white animals. Here are two interesting ones we've received. Answers to both are found below the second photo.)

Can you help me identify this bird? It is a regular at my feeder. Could it be an albino chickadee?

Tom Lewis
New York County



My husband and I were on our way to Savona when we saw this white red-tailed hawk. We pulled over and when the hawk landed I got these photos. I have never seen a hawk like this; it was awesome to see such a pretty bird.

Brenda M.B. Todd
Steuben County



How interesting it must have been to see these two birds! I agree, Mr. Lewis: it appears you have seen a chickadee. For guidance on these instances of color variation, I turned to the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. Both birds are leucistic, sometimes referred to as partially albino. Like albinism, leucism is a genetic mutation.

New York State Conservationist, February 2011

Albinism is the total absence of melanin (a pigment found in skin, hair, feathers, 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, in part because of their inability to blend in with their surroundings. Based on the photos, it appears both birds are doing fine.

—Scott Stoner, DEC Research Scientist

Special Delivery

Yesterday, I discovered a rufous morph of an eastern screech-owl sitting quietly in the open bottom compartment of my neighbor's mailbox. In view of the bitterly cold temperature and amount of snow, it seemed that the owl was patiently waiting to be picked up by the mailman to be delivered to a warmer climate!

Brad Bowden
Alfred, Allegany County

With the blustery cold winters we're used to here in New York, we don't blame it!

—*Conservationist* staff



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