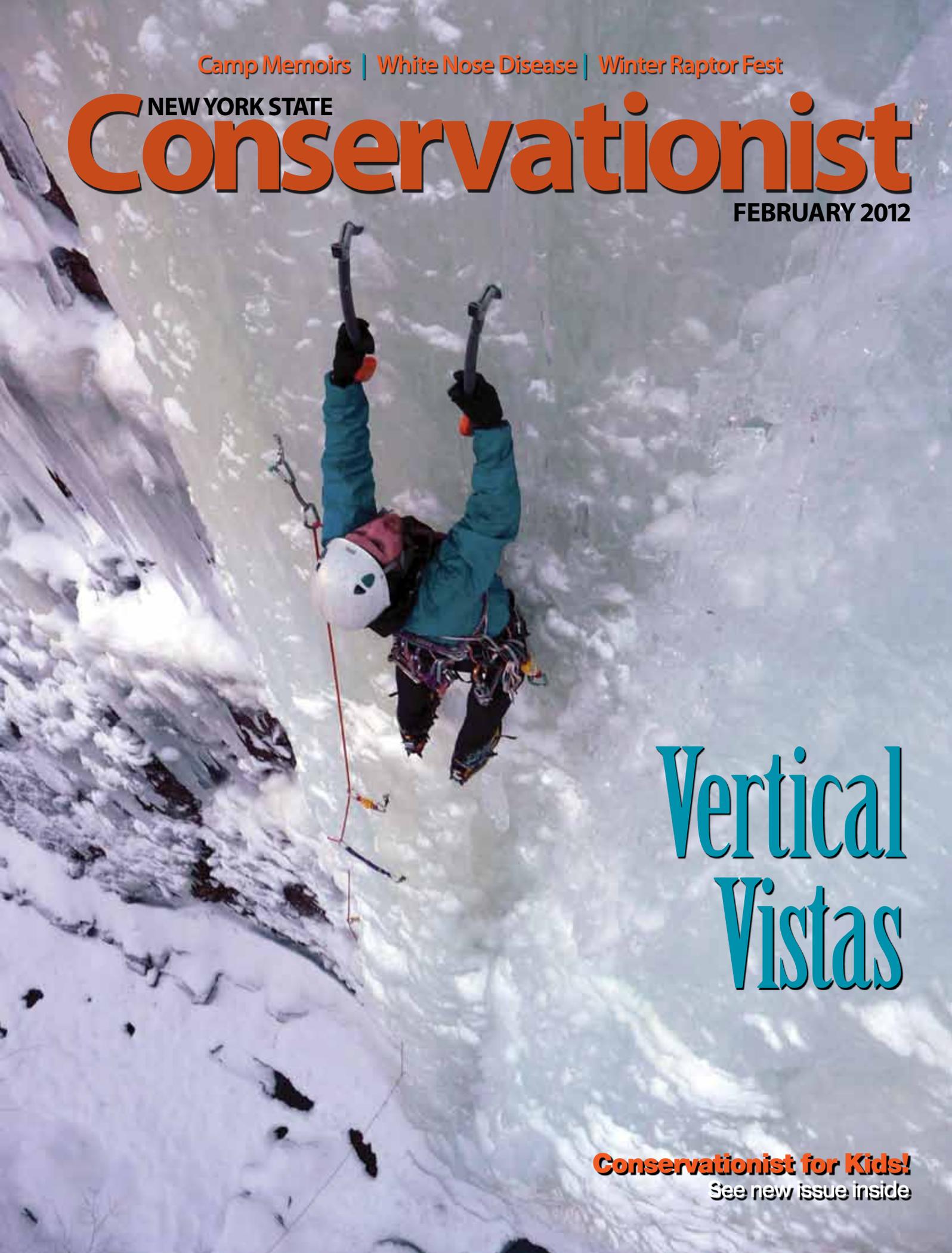


Camp Memoirs | White Nose Disease | Winter Raptor Fest

NEW YORK STATE

Conservationist

FEBRUARY 2012



Vertical Vistas

Conservationist for Kids!
See new issue inside



Dear Reader,

As Commissioner I often speak about the importance of outdoor recreation to the state's economy and my commitment to developing partnerships with private entities and local governments to conserve our natural environment. I am pleased to announce that DEC has recently completed two significant land acquisition projects in Ulster County: nearly 600 acres adjoining the rustic retreat of the seminal naturalist John Burroughs, and 1,200 acres on the eastern side of Belleayre Mountain. The first property will become part of a network of public and private conservation lands in the Catskills, and the second will be added to the Catskill Forest Preserve.

Along with Henry David Thoreau and John Muir, John Burroughs was an early leader of the American environmental movement and is considered by many to be the greatest nature essayist to have ever lived. Burroughs moved to the Hudson River Valley in 1873 and wrote books including *Birds and Poets* (1877) and *Ways of Nature* (1905). I invite you to visit his Catskill retreat, Slabsides, which was designated a National Historic Landmark in 1968.

These land purchases were accomplished through partnerships between federal, state, and local government agencies working with community non-profit groups to protect ecologically significant areas that also provide a variety of recreational opportunities. These acquisitions will conserve the natural habitats, creeks, woods and scenery for all New Yorkers to enjoy for generations to come. They will also further protect the New York City watershed and the drinking water it provides to nine million residents downstream.

The preservation of these properties, which will be managed for public recreation, forest conservation, fish and wildlife habitat and water quality, will enrich lives through connections to nature for years to come. These acquisitions represent important milestones in protecting lands in the public interest while promoting economic growth. The state will continue to pay local taxes for both properties and local businesses in nearby communities will benefit from recreational tourism.

I look forward to building on these successful examples of partnerships in land preservation in the months and years ahead. Thank you for your support of conservation and stewardship in New York.

Regards,

Commissioner Joe Martens

NEW YORK STATE Conservationist

Volume 66, Number 4 | February 2012
Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of New York State

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EDITORIAL OFFICES
The *Conservationist* (ISSN0010-650X), © 2012 by NYSDEC, is an official publication of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation published bimonthly at 625 Broadway, 2nd Floor, Albany, NY 12233-4502. Telephone: (518) 402-8047

Manuscripts, photographs and artwork will be accepted if accompanied by SASE. Please write to the above address with an author's query or to request a Contributor's Guide. The publisher assumes no responsibility for loss or damage of unsolicited materials.

TO SUBSCRIBE:
\$18 per year, \$24 for two years, \$30 for three years. Outside the U.S., add \$27 per year with a check drawn on a U.S. bank. All orders must be prepaid.

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for new subscriptions or changes of address. Periodical postage paid at Albany, NY, and additional mailing offices.

Send check or money order payable to:

Conservationist
NYSDEC
625 Broadway
Albany, NY 12233-4502

or call: **1-800-678-6399**
Visit the Department's website at:
www.dec.ny.gov

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation does not discriminate on the basis of race, national origin, disability, age, or gender.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:

Conservationist
NYSDEC
625 Broadway
Albany, NY 12233-4502

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Conservationist
with Kids!



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Evan Picard

WINTER HIGH

—ice climbing in New York

By Robert Mecus



Ice climbing on Poke-o-Moonshine Mountain

We pull up to Chapel Pond in the heart of the Adirondack High Peaks, and it's cold—really cold! The wind buffets the car gently; enough to make us not want to open the door. My long-time climbing partner Bob Elsinger and I are spending the day climbing three of the Adirondacks' classic ice climbs, and this is the last in our trifecta. Earlier we climbed Multiplication Gully in Wilmington Notch, and Roaring Brook Falls, between Chapel Pond and St. Huberts. The climbs were spectacular, and we've been enjoying the hauntingly beautiful Adirondack winter day.

Donning climbing rope, ice axes, crampons, helmet, and an assortment of nylon slings, carabiners and ice screws, we leave the car. Looking across the lake from the parking lot, the gully can clearly be seen as a wide channel of ice four hundred feet high. The wind rips across the surface of the frozen lake, creating unique designs of carved and swirled snow. Our crampons squeak on the snow with a comforting sound—squeaky snow means cold and dry conditions, perfect for doing physical activity in the winter.

Jung Taek Yoon



Tools of the trade include ice screws and carabiners.

At the base of the gully, we flake out (uncoil into a pile) the rope and I tie into one end. Looking over the equipment, I reflect on how much some of the technology and the sport itself have evolved over the years. Our ice axes, for example, are short and have radically drooped picks—different from the standard straight pick previously used. The new design was introduced here after legendary climber Yvon Chouinard visited the Adirondacks in 1969. Chouinard and friends brought new equipment and techniques that enabled climbers to ascend what was formerly seen as impossible sheets of ice. This changed the face of American ice climbing. Suddenly climbs like this last route we planned for today (appropriately called Chouinard's Gully) were possible.

Once we are ready, Bob belays me (a safety technique whereby your climbing partner lets out rope while you ascend, keeping ready to hold the rope tight if you fall), and I start up the first pitch. Swinging my tools into the ice and standing on the front points of my crampons, I gain height and place an ice screw into the ice. These tubular aluminum screws provide good protection in the solid ice, and I clip my rope to it. Well designed tubular ice screws have made the sport relatively safe, provided one has the knowledge and experience to judge the quality of the ice.

I climb until the rope comes tight to Bob, and then I build an anchor to belay him up to me. Standing on a small rock ledge, pulling in the rope with the warm late afternoon light shining on me, I look across the valley to Giant Mountain. It's beautiful and despite the cold, it's actually quite pleasant. I'm sheltered from the wind, and the body heat I generated from climbing is trapped in my puffy belay jacket, keeping me comfortable.



LEAVE NO TRACE: Consideration for the natural environment is important, and that is where ice climbing really shines. A deep snow pack and climbing on a frozen medium that will disappear in a few months means there will be almost no trace of your passage if you take a little care. Walking off the top of a route is always preferred if possible. If you need to rappel, learn how to do it safely and with minimal impact. Inquire with the local DEC office about the use of fixed (permanent) anchors on the property before you go. Do not cut away vegetation to “improve” a climb. Consider the vegetation as part of the challenge of the climb, and work your way through the problem.

Climbers joke amongst themselves that to be an ice climber you must enjoy some misery and suffering.

Bob meets and surpasses me, taking the gear from me as he continues to go up. Now, I am belaying him from below as he brings the rope up with him. In this way, a two-person climbing team can each share the thrill of “leading” a pitch. The leader is responsible for choosing the route up the ice, and placing the protection that will keep them and their partner safe. It’s a thrilling feeling, looking below and seeing the rope sweeping down in graceful arcs, connected to your partner a hundred feet below. At the same time, you are very aware of the risks associated with the sport. If you fall at any time, but especially while leading, the danger is real.

Bob reaches the top, builds an anchor, and puts me on belay. As I climb up, more and more of the frosty Adirondack valley comes into view. My body again heats up from the exertion, but I have layered accordingly, which allows me to remove my belay jacket before I start climbing and put it in a small stuff sack on my harness. Climbing ice involves long periods of stationary activity, followed by periods of intense physical activity, so you need to layer properly.

Our climbs today, like just about all ice climbs in New York State, are located on DEC-managed lands. Areas in the Adirondacks, Catskills, Salmon River Unique Area, and a few other smaller



Mike Stanslaw

Underwood Canyon, Adirondacks



Greg Derda

A mixed climb in the Catskills.

areas as well, provide some of the best ice climbing around. In fact, climbers from all over the east coast come to test themselves against the ice here. Most ice climbers were skilled rock climbers before entering the realm of winter climbing. As you can imagine, everything is a little harder to do when it is five degrees Fahrenheit. Tying knots, wading through deep snow, keeping food, water, and digits warm; these are all things that add to the already exhilarating challenge of being high up on a cliff.

The Adirondacks offer the largest collection of ice climbing routes in the state. Here, you can experience everything from short and easy roadside climbs, to overnight excursions that are high on a remote wilderness cliff where you are completely reliant on your skill and experience to keep you safe. The Catskills Mountains, a mere ninety-minute drive from New York City, are also festooned with white lines in the winter. While these ice climbs tend to be shorter than, and not as remote as, some of the Adirondack climbs, what they lack in height they make up for in sheer verticality. In addition, the Catskills have a lot of mixed climbing opportunity—a difficult combination of ice and rock climbing that tests a climber’s skills in multiple disciplines.

The Salmon River Falls Unique Area in Oswego County is a relatively new spot that ice climbers have discovered. Here, the Salmon River plunges over a shale band and has formed a wide overhanging cirque of rock. In winter, the wet and mossy areas of seeping rock crystallize into a fantastic pantheon of ice daggers and pillars, providing incredible opportunities for the ice climber who is ready to take on its challenges.

For me, ice climbing is a great way to experience the amazing beauty of New York’s winter wonderland. Getting off the beaten trail, truly immersing myself in this format that nature offers, and seeing



Mike Stanshaw

Climbing Roaring Brook Falls (south of St. Huberts), one of the best moderate ice climbs in the Adirondacks.

the environment from a vertical perspective is deeply rewarding. As Bob and I prepare to walk off the top of the climb (we walk—or hike—down, rather than rappel because it is safer, and often more efficient), we take one more look at the spectacular vista before us.

Twenty minutes later we are back in the car, changing into clothes for the drive home. I have to admit that I’m looking forward to sitting by the fireplace, wiggling my toes and fingers against the

radiant warmth. It’s been an amazing day—we climbed over 1,200 feet of ice; not bad for a short February day.

Avid ice-climber **Robert Mecus** is a forest ranger in DEC’s Region 3.



SAFETY FIRST!

Safety is paramount when going on an ice-climbing adventure. Being responsible for your actions and self-reliant is more important than getting to the top. Ice climbers must first and foremost be able to judge the safety of the ice prior to climbing. Unlike rock, the ice changes texture and quality constantly. What was safe to climb last weekend may be unstable this weekend, and it takes an experienced eye to judge the soundness of an ice screw placement.

During the past ten years or so, ice climbing has undergone somewhat of a second revolution. A new wave of climbing tools has now enabled relative beginners to climb what was recently considered extremely difficult ice. Basic safety equipment includes a helmet, climbing boots,

crampons, two ice axes, rope, climbing harness, an assortment of carabiners, ice screws and nylon slings. Depending on the weather and length of the climb, you should also carry water, head lamp, sunglasses, sun screen and high energy food.

Staying warm and avoiding hypothermia is vital to keeping safe. Climbers must be intimately familiar with their layering systems and be able to adapt to changing conditions quickly, while tied into an anchor on a small ledge. Recent improvements in textiles allow climbers to stay warm and dry even in the dampest conditions. A little knowledge changes what would be a cold, shivering experience into one in which you can enjoy the beauty of the winter landscape in a unique way.

The internet provides climbers with a lot of information, allowing them to gain knowledge far faster than their predecessors. But there are many things you simply can't learn online or from a book. It's especially important that beginning ice climbers "cut their teeth," either by hiring a guide to teach them the basics, or by performing an apprenticeship of sorts with an experienced climber. Remember, it takes an experienced eye to know when the ice is safe to climb!

There are many well-trained and experienced climbing guides in New York who can teach you the fundamental techniques of ice climbing and how to climb safely. For a list of these guide services, visit DEC's website and search for the licensed guide program.



Prior to the introduction of white-nose disease, hibernating clusters of the federally endangered Indiana bat (like the one pictured here) were becoming more common in New York.



Bats on the Brink

White nose disease takes a toll on New York's bats

By Jenna Kerwin and Carl Herzog

It is a calm, July night and you're sitting on your porch, watching twilight set. The sky is full of stars and every now and then, something small and dark flashes across your line of vision. There's one! It dips and darts in another direction.

Now there's another, and another! The night is simply riddled with the small, shadowy aerial acrobats.

To some, bats are those creepy, noisy inhabitants of Grandma's attic. To others, they're a Halloween mascot, invoking images of Dracula. But despite what you might think, they are pretty amazing creatures. And, they're pretty neat to watch flying around at night. In fact, night is actually their feeding time. Bats can consume 50-75 percent of their own body weight in flying insects on a summer night! Pretty cool, huh?

But over the past few years, you might have noticed the summer skies are a little

emptier. New York's bats are in trouble, and have been since 2006, when biologists with the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) first documented a curious white fungus on the noses and mouths of bats in Hailes Cave in Albany County. The unusual ailment (then-dubbed "white nose syndrome") was present on dead and dying bats, and the death toll of several species rose quickly.

New research indicates the fungus is actually the cause of death and not just a

symptom of something greater, as previously thought. Therefore, the ailment is more like a disease, instead. Since its original discovery, it has spread to at least seventeen states, from Maine to Tennessee, and into four Canadian provinces. The white fungus behind it is a member of the group Geomyces: fungi that live in soil, water and air, and which are able to reproduce in cold temperatures like those found in bat hibernacula.

Biologists first noticed something was wrong when bats prematurely left their caves during winter hibernation. Generally, hibernating bats have enough stored fat reserves to carry them through the winter when their body temperatures and metabolisms are low. However, when awake, bats' body temperatures are similar to ours and so they burn through their fat reserves at a high rate. Research suggests the white nose disease causes hibernating bats to wake more frequently and perhaps for longer periods of time when there is no readily available source of food—insects aren't plentiful until the following spring. The bats then either starve to death or fly out of the site, presumably in a desperate attempt to find food. This leads to predation or succumbing to the winter elements.



James Clayton

The tell-tale sign that a bat has white nose disease is the easily recognizable white fungus on the animal's nose and mouth.

It seems bats are the primary vector for spreading the disease, as it has appeared in previously unknown caves or in many areas where no person has been since before 2006. Since bats often hibernate close together, bat-to-bat transmission is easy. However, humans may also contribute to spreading the fungus. In fact, it is believed humans first transported the fungus from a cave in Europe or Asia. The same fungal disease has been identified there, but it does not affect native bats. It's assumed those bats have learned to adapt. It's also been suggested that a live, infected bat was unintentionally transported across the Atlantic, but it's very unlikely it made the trip itself, so human transport seems the likeliest possibility.

Six species of bats that hibernate in New York have been affected by the white nose disease: northern, little browns, big browns, tri-colored, Indiana, and eastern small-footed bats. Northern bats seem to be the hardest hit in New York, with losses of about 98 percent from pre-disease levels! Little browns were the most common species in the state; they were one of two species commonly found roosting in houses and barns. (The other is the big brown.) Little browns have declined by 90 percent, and so comprise the greatest number of bats that have died.



White nose has decimated many of New York's bat populations—some by 90 percent!



Research shows bats with the disease tend to wake from hibernation sooner, and thus leave their caves in a desperate attempt to find food. Most succumb to starvation or the elements. Here, retired DEC bat biologist Al Hicks studies one such bat who left its cave too early.



Due to white nose disease, biologists often find only a few bats in areas previously inhabited by large congregations.

Big browns are the least affected of New York's bats, as they spend most of the winter in buildings. This makes them hard to count, but seems to offer a sort of protection. This species is still abundant in summer and is now the most common species in the state. So far there isn't a reason to think that the population has drastically declined, if at all.

The tri-colored bat was uncommon even before white nose hit, and has since declined by 90 percent. The federally endangered Indiana bat has declined by 70 percent. The eastern small-footed bat was so rare before white nose that it was a candidate for federal endangered species protection. It has been impacted to some extent by the disease, but because of its rarity, it's hard to know to what degree.



The easiest ways to help stop the spread of this deadly disease are to follow decontamination procedures and simply to not venture into cave sites closed to the public.

It's difficult to judge what the future brings in terms of white nose disease. It does not appear to be stopping, but there are many factors that may work in our bats' favor. For instance, some bat species naturally forage during the winter, which allows them to replenish any extinguished fat reserves if they were to be affected by white nose. Also, tree bats migrate south for the winter. The silver hair bat, a type of tree bat, may stay over in caves, but the chances of them picking up the disease are less likely.

Though wide-scale solutions have been offered, such as disinfecting caves and treating each bat individually, perhaps the best thing we can do to help is to take precautionary measures. Disinfecting an entire site, for instance, puts other species (sometimes endangered) at risk; treating individual bats isn't a very practical or reliable way to help. What we can do is follow strict decontamination procedures set in place for those visiting caves so the disease isn't accidentally spread to other sites. Not ven-

turing into cave sites closed to prevent the spread of disease is also an important rule to follow.

Many people also wonder if bat boxes can help. Though it's hard to say (as not all species of bats use boxes), properly constructed and placed boxes could perhaps help some bats that manage to survive the winter get off to a better start in the spring breeding season. Bat boxes provide an alternative location to trees or in buildings for bats to have young. (Search for the "How to Build a Bat Box" brochure on DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov, and check out the February 2008 *Conservationist* for more information, as well.)

Also, though it does happen, it's unusual for a wildlife disease to cause species extinction. Recently, some evidence even suggests the decline of little brown bats in affected hibernation sites may have stopped! It's a tiny, but positive sign. In the meantime, numerous New England states, including New York, are looking to add many bat

species to state endangered species lists. The federal government is looking into the possibility, as well.

Our best hope is that bats will develop immunity to the disease. Even now, some evidence suggests that some bats may be relatively unaffected, either because of an inherent protective benefit from their own immune system or a tendency to engage in more solitary behaviors, or a combination of both. Whatever the case, scientists hope that those bats will pass down the traits to their offspring; then the decline may halt and populations might be able to recover.

So for now we must hope that bats will be able to pull through on their own. Until then, researchers and biologists will continue to study the disease, and look for answers. Perhaps the rest of us will keep looking in the summer sky, waiting for the nighttime acrobats.

Jenna Kerwin is the staff writer for *Conservationist*. **Carl Herzog** is a biologist with DEC's Wildlife Diversity Unit.



RAPTOR FEST

—winter festival celebrates birds of prey

By Laurie LaFond

Winter in Fort Edward: crystal clear, star-filled nights; cold, sunny days spent bundling up and bracing against the bitter wind; snowy landscapes, and...a raptor festival. A what, you ask?

Just when you thought you'd heard of everything, along comes something else to expand your horizons. If asked what hearty northern New Yorkers do to enjoy winter, you'd expect answers like skiing, snowshoeing, snowmobiling, and maybe somebody would even toss out the possibility of a polar bear swim. Hey, as long as these things are accompanied by a cup of hot cocoa, why not? But in Fort Edward, NY, a rural part of western Washington County, nothing says mid-winter fun like Winter Raptor Fest.

This year marks the second annual Winter Raptor Fest: a gathering to celebrate the existence of birds of prey. The festival returns to the heart of the Washington County Grasslands Important Bird Area (IBA) on March 10 & 11.

short-eared owl



Gordon Ellmers

This exciting event, which features live owls, hawks and falcons, is part of a mission to raise public awareness of, and protection for, state-endangered short-eared owls and other at-risk birds that depend on the Washington County Grasslands IBA for their survival.

At the festival (held at the Gallup Ridge Farm in Fort Edward), trained hawks and owls demonstrate their aerial agility as they navigate obstacles formed by human volunteers during an amazing free-flight raptor show. In addition, live bird of prey programs presented by Adirondack Wildlife Refuge & Rehabilitation Center, The Wildlife Institute of Eastern NY, New York State Wildlife Rehabilitation Council and North Country Wild Care offer fun and educational opportunities to see and learn about many of the owls, hawks and falcons native to the Washington County Grasslands IBA.

Visitors can sign up for a guided snowshoe walk to look for wintering owls, harriers and other at-risk birds in their natural habitat. Or they can take a horse-drawn sleigh ride through the winter landscape for a unique oppor-

tunity to experience the area for themselves. Exhibitors, vendors, youth snowshoe races and other activities for kids round out this fun and exciting weekend where raptors rule! No fee is charged to attend the event, but donations are suggested.

The “Why” Behind the Fly

More than a decade ago, Audubon New York designated a core area of grasslands in Washington County as an Important Bird Area. This designation is a National Audubon Society program to identify areas that support endangered bird species or significant populations of breeding and wintering birds. The Washington County Grasslands IBA does both.

In fact, this IBA is critical to the survival of endangered short-eared owls in New York State. And while it is important to short-eared owls, it also provides important habitat for almost a dozen other threatened and at-risk grassland-dependent birds, including northern harriers, upland sandpipers, American kestrels, eastern meadowlarks and grasshopper sparrows.



Avian Ambassador

This shy little owl, one of the few state-endangered short-eared owls in captivity, was one of the stars at last year’s Winter Raptor Fest. His career as an avian ambassador began after he survived being hit by a car and sustained injuries too severe to allow him to be released back into the wild. Car strikes are all-too-common causes of injuries and deaths for short-eared and other owls. He came with Kelly Martin, President of New York State Wildlife Rehab Council, to help Friends of the IBA educate people about the Washington County Grasslands IBA’s critical importance to the survival of short-eared owls in New York State.



Connie Bush

Trained hawks and owls demonstrate their aerial ability with the help of human volunteers.

Short-eared owls and state-threatened northern harriers need large, grassy open areas for several reasons. They both hunt primarily “on the wing” (while flying). They are specially adapted for flying low over the ground so they can surprise mice and voles that are their usual prey, and which grasslands provide in abundance. Finally, they nest and roost on the ground, like many of the other at-risk birds previously mentioned, which makes them vulnerable to habitat fragmentation. Think about a mouse’s chance of evading your cat if they were to be locked in a closet together, as opposed to being together in a huge hayfield: the larger space provides greater protection from predators.

The largely agricultural base of the communities that comprise the IBA (primarily Fort Edward, but also parts of Argyle and Kingsbury) has preserved this area as one of the largest grasslands in eastern New York. Many agricultural practices (including hay production and pasture) maintain habitat for wildlife in early successional stages like grassland. In so doing, these practices provide ecological benefits to grassland-dependent wildlife. But a declining agricultural base has meant that early successional habitat is disappearing quickly in New York, and is turning into shrubland and young forest stands. High costs and slim profit margins are driving many local farms out of business. Many area residents want to preserve the rural character of their communities, but they are already dealing with tough economic conditions and difficult budget choices.

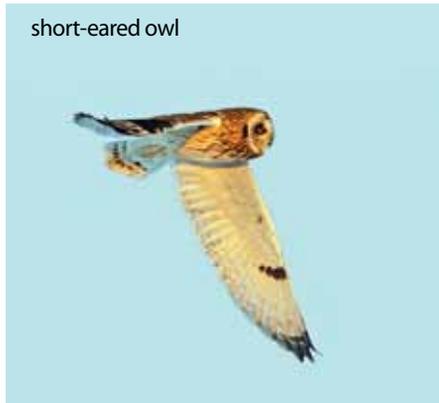
DEC and other conservation partners, including the non-profit organization Friends of the Washington County Grasslands IBA, would like to see this area conserved as wildlife habitat. DEC has proposed the creation of a new grassland-focused Wildlife Management Area or Unique Area that would protect approximately 2,000 acres of land through fee acquisition. An additional 2,000 acres of land could be preserved

eastern meadowlark



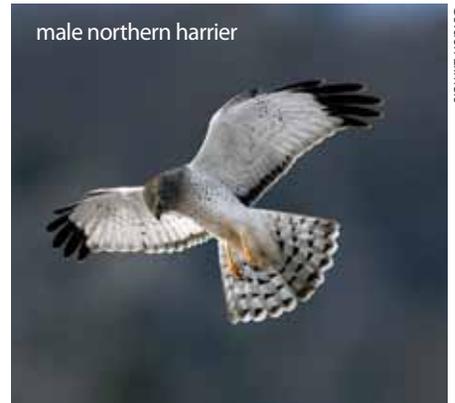
Gordon Ellmers

short-eared owl



Jeff Nadler

male northern harrier



Gordon Ellmers



Connie Bush

The festival has something for everyone—even a horse-drawn sleigh ride to experience the birds’ own environment.

through an agricultural conservation easement. To date, approximately 260 acres in the southern portion of the Washington County Grasslands have been purchased and protected by The Nature Conservancy—the first steps in making this goal a reality. Wildlife surveys conducted by DEC, Audubon New York and the Southern Adirondack Audubon Society have helped identify which specific areas are most important for rare grassland birds and wintering raptors. This information will guide future land conservation efforts.

But the battle to conserve this area is not yet won. Development pressure in this area threatens to replace wildlife habitat with housing and retail space. For conservation to succeed, it must benefit local communities. More than 10,000 people have attended Winter Raptor Fest, which is co-sponsored by Washington County Tourism Association. Other Friends of the IBA live bird of prey events, co-sponsored with the City of Glens Falls and the New York State Museum in Albany, have promoted interest in this area. Local businesses are already feeling the benefits, reporting increases in sales and foot traffic. Room reservations for Winter Raptor Fest 2012 and inquiries for dining recommendations are already coming in.

There are other partners in this effort to conserve the area as wildlife habitat. A joint collaboration between USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, DEC and Audubon New York will help farmers and interested landowners learn about conservation easements and encourage practices that will help short-eared owls and other at-risk grassland birds.

Bringing together local farmers, willing landowners, and those who love watching birds, scientists hope that significant habitats like these can be conserved for future generations to enjoy as much as we do today.

Laurie LaFond is founder, president and acting director of Friends of the Washington County Grasslands IBA.

female northern harrier



grasshopper sparrow



FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Winter Raptor Fest is co-sponsored by Friends of the Washington County Grasslands IBA, and the Washington County Tourism Association.

GlensFallsRegion.com is a business sponsor.

To learn more about the birds at risk, their habitat, and upcoming events and activities, visit www.winterraptorfest.com. For more information about the festival, contact the tourism association at 518-499-2435, or send an e-mail to info@winterraptorfest.com.



On Patrol

Real stories from Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers in the field

Carl Heilman II

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

During the course of their work, DEC environmental conservation officers and forest rangers perform a variety of duties. Some are extreme tasks, carried out in harsh environments or in dangerous circumstances. Last year, Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee ravaged the east coast, affecting the lives of many New Yorkers. Environmental conservation officers and forest rangers rose to the occasion to help those in need. The following are just a few of the many stories that resulted from last August and September.

Keene resident Marcy Neville and her family were among multiple victims overtaken by the AuSable River during flash flooding. State Police contacted DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch stating that two adults and three dogs were trapped in the home with waters rising quickly. Forest Rangers Scott VanLaer and James Giglinto attempted to reach the Neville home with a cataraft (a raft consisting of two hulls connected by a frame) but were hampered by strong river currents. Rangers then attempted the rescue using an airboat. Mark St. Claire, Glen Bronson, James Giglinto and Robert Prackajlo had just reached the Neville home when the airboat had a major mechanical failure, forcing them to evacuate the family by the cataraft and another boat. Once safely on higher ground, the Nevilles were taken to a neighbor's home.

A Town of Windham resident was stranded in his trailer, surrounded by rushing, muddy water. The trailer began to take on water when ECOs launched a 16-foot aluminum boat to perform a rescue. The officers managed to maneuver the boat 50 yards across the dangerous current to reach the man, load him into the boat and carry him back to dry land.

Rapidly rising flood waters trapped people in the bungalows at the Aladdin Hotel and bungalow colony in Sullivan County, causing the Fallsburg police to request the assistance of ECOs in evacuating the property. Officers Ricky Wood and Captain Richard Martin waded to stranded people and carried approximately ten children to dry ground. Shortly after, the Woodbourne Fire Department arrived with boats, and ECOs helped rescue the remaining children and adults from the last flooded bungalows.

Joan Oldroyd



With catastrophic flooding along the Susquehanna River, forest rangers had to use special airboats to rescue people stranded by swiftly rising waters in Nanticoke and Conklin. A day later, rangers used the airboats once again to carry: 62 people to safety from their flooded homes in Johnson City; 15 people and two dogs from a flooded neighborhood in Chenango; and 35 people and two dogs from Apalachin in Tioga County. At the request of local officials, airboat crews also checked on the welfare of residents who remained in the flooded areas, specifically focusing on people with special medical needs.

String of Memories

—a week at a DEC education camp can change lives

Susan L. Shafer

Supplied by author



by Dannielle Perry

In the spring of 1995, my father asked me if I would be interested in spending a week at an environmental education camp that coming summer. The Chautauqua County Fish and Game Club would be sponsoring a child to attend a camp operated by the New York State

Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). Little did I know that my simple “yes” would become a lifelong relationship with DEC’s summer camps. To some, summer camp is a place to meet friends, play outside and explore new things. To me, camp is home.

I remember my first day like it was yesterday. On the ride there, the butterflies in my stomach multiplied. I was 12 years old, and nervous about the unknown adventures that my first stay at an overnight camp might bring. As we pulled up, I had my initial view of Camp Rushford: a pond and two large, long cabins. There were other families dropping off campers just like me. My parents commented on how beautiful the place was, but all I could think about was whether or not I would survive my week there.

The camp staff greeted our car and made me feel welcome and at home right away. While I unpacked my belongings in my assigned cabin, I met my bunkmates. It was their first week at Camp Rushford too, and it didn’t take long for us to realize that we were all equally nervous. My mother reassured me that I’d have a wonderful time, and that she and my father would be back in a week, eager to hear about my adventures.

With our parents gone, we settled down to our first meal, followed by group games that introduced us to each other, and then a campfire. It was overwhelming and exciting at the same time. As I crawled into bed that first night, thoroughly exhausted, I thought about all the fun things the camp counselors told us we’d be doing that week: forest, field and water lessons, games, trips to the bog, canoeing, making campfires, swimming and learning to work together as a group. The nervous feeling was gone, and I was excited to wake and begin the adventures ahead.

The week flew by. On Friday (the last full day of camp), each camper was handed eight different beads to take home—a reminder of everything we had learned and discovered during the week, both of the outdoors, and of ourselves. While I packed my things that final night, I decided that I had to come back the next summer.

Camp Rushford became my summer home. I spent winter months wondering which staff members would return, and how many campers I would see again. Over time, changes took place: new cabins were built, my first bunkhouse became a classroom, the director's cabin became a work space for staff, and familiar staff moved on to new jobs. Despite the changes (or perhaps because of them), the excitement of camp was always there. Over the ensuing years, I transitioned from camper to returnee camper to volunteer and eventually joined the camp staff. For me, there was no place on Earth quite like Camp Rushford.

Being a member of the camp staff, it was now my responsibility to help campers make memories. I led activities, encouraged laughter, and challenged kids to try new things. I was constantly reflecting on the years when I was a camper, and used what I learned from my camp counselors to try to make the camp experience as rewarding for the new recruits as it had been for me. My counselors had been my role models and mentors, and I wanted to be just like them. Preparing to lead campers on a night hike (one of my favorite activities), I thought back to my first night hike, remembering where my counselor took us, and how he affected each and every camper in our group.



Camp is still the topic of my conversations throughout the winter months, and I can't wait for summer.



In 2007, my summer camp journey led me from Camp Rushford to Pack Forest (another DEC summer camp) when I was hired there to be the assistant director. I would be taking my love for camp one step further by helping new counselors grow, teaching them to affect campers' lives as I had been affected. I met this new challenge with enthusiasm, as my years at Camp Rushford had trained me to do.

This time, I was arriving at camp on my own, leaving my parents at home. Driving through the Adirondacks for the first time on my way to Pack Forest, I got that nervous feeling again. I was starting the camp process over again, just like a first-time camper. Would the camp staff like me? Would I like this new camp? Could it be anything like Rushford, my "home away from home?" As I pulled into the driveway, the butterflies from my 12-year-old self began to flutter in my stomach. I resisted turning back to Rushford and the familiar. I thought of my experiences there and remembered that "if you want something badly enough, put your whole heart into it, and believe." Though the new job at a new camp would be a challenge, I knew I could do it.

Like my first day at Rushford, I was greeted by friendly staff at Pack Forest and welcomed right away. As I unpacked my bags for the summer, the first thing I pulled from my bag was the beaded necklace I made my first year as a



James Clayton

camper. That simple, colorful strand of beads reminded me why I was at camp, and that my role was now to help guide staff and campers to build their own lifetime of memories. Each Sunday night campfire held at the opening of a new week symbolized a new beginning for the next generation of campers.

Twelve years after my first summer at Camp Rushford, that first summer at Pack Forest brought about more life-changing insights. I had always wanted to work with children in a teaching setting, but had never thought of environmental education as teaching. In 2010 I received my Masters of Science in Environmental Education, and with it, now I share my love of the outdoors with the students in

my classroom. Every day I draw upon the skills I learned at camp: how to motivate young learners, how to listen, how to share, and how to laugh.

Camp is still the topic of my conversations throughout the winter months, and I can't wait for summer. I look forward to seeing returning staff, meeting new staff, and eagerly awaiting the arrival of campers. Perhaps among the campers there will be someone just like me, with butterflies in their stomach and curiosity in their heart. Perhaps, like me, he or she will treasure that string of beads from their first week at camp, representing the string of memories sure to last a lifetime.

Danielle Perry teaches science at the Syracuse Academy of Science Charter School.



DEC operates four summer camps across New York State for youth (ages 11 to 17) who are interested in nature and the environment. Campers enjoy a balance of environmental education, sportsman education and outdoor fun, via lessons, hands-on activities and games. Hiking, canoeing and swimming are just some of the fun ways attendees can learn new outdoor skills. Campers leave with a love for the natural world that will last a lifetime.

If you or someone you know would like to find out more about attending or working at one of DEC's summer camps, visit our website at www.dec.ny.gov/education/29.html.



Outdoor School

—Conservation Officers teach SUNY Cobleskill students

By Captain Mike St. Jeanos and Lieutenant Tom Harrington
Photos by Lieutenant Tom Harrington

It's the early afternoon of Saturday, October 1, 2011, at SUNY Cobleskill, and Environmental Conservation Officers (ECOs) Nate Doig and Mike Terrell are hiking up a steep and muddy hill in cold, rainy weather to reach an injured hunter. They already had a busy morning—checking for illegal deer at a roadside check station and arresting one subject—and the afternoon is shaping up to be just as busy. They barely had a minute to take a break from the inclement weather when they received a report of a hunter being shot nearby. But, that's how the job goes: from 0 to 100 miles per hour in an instant.

With any potentially serious crime, time is of the essence. The ECOs (police officers working for DEC's Division of Law Enforcement) needed to help the victim, and also needed to secure the crime scene: preserve

evidence, identify the responsible party and identify any witnesses. The afternoon and possibly a good part of the evening would now be committed to addressing this issue and the investigation would require the assistance of additional personnel. This is not unusual for events officially known as "Hunting Related Shooting Incidents" (HRSI).

As the ECOs climb the steep hill to reach the crime scene, a peculiar sight takes shape—there are thirty-five SUNY Cobleskill students, along with their instructor, trailing behind them. That's because this isn't a real incident, but a mock exercise to allow these students the unique opportunity to observe firsthand what an HRSI investigation looks like. The injured hunter, the probable shooter, and his hunting partner are all ECOs in disguise.

The exercise evolved from a program wherein college students interested in becoming ECOs could ride along with an ECO for a day or two. Students were able to personally observe and experience the job, which helped them decide about potential future employment while also satisfying a course requirement for graduation. In order to accommodate the large number of requests, DEC restructured the program to create simulated events like the one described here. That way, a greater number of students could observe ECO work, in as real-life a setting as possible, but in a more efficient manner.

To get the program started, Lt. Tom Harrington, Technical Sergeant Keith Isles, ECO Mike Terrell and I met with SUNY Cobleskill instructor Mark Cornwell at a local diner. Harrington and Terrell, along with several other ECOs, are alumni of SUNY Cobleskill, a testament to the college's program. During the next couple of hours, we settled on a plan: laying out scenarios culled from real-life cases, generating scripts for our role players, and enlisting the help of several other ECOs and investigators. Although the initial work was time consuming—including follow-up visits to the "crime scene" for preplanning and staging the event—our goal was to generate a protocol which can be repeated year after year, and possibly even expanded for use at other colleges.

Today's event is going well, and the students remark on how much they are learning and enjoying partaking in "a day in the life of an ECO." It started out in the classroom with a short overview of an ECO's job duties and a rundown of the day's planned events. Then the students, along with their instructor Mark Cornwell, headed out to a rural crossroads a short distance away on the college property. There, they were greeted by a DEC police vehicle with two officers, ECOs Mike



ECO's use a K-9 unit to locate empty shell casings and other clues that help them unravel the mock crime.



Students gather to get a closer look.



Students observe the mock scenario play out.



An ECO uses forensics to check if a deer has been shot with a firearm.



Arp and Mike Terrell, interviewing the driver of a vehicle they have stopped. The stop leads to the arrest of the driver (played by ECO Mark Vencak) for having a loaded firearm in a motor vehicle, as well as an illegal deer which is found hidden in the back of the truck. The driver states that he shot the deer with his bow, but a forensic check of the wound with a lead test kit proves that it was shot with a firearm. This led to an additional charge for taking a deer with a firearm during a “bow only” season.

As the scenario played out, students asked questions and the officers explained their actions. Everyone was out in the cold and rain, on their feet for hours, experiencing the stress and difficulties of the road check and arrest, just as if they were actually on the job. To help everyone warm up, a hearty meal of hamburgers, hotdogs and hot soup (donated by the NYS Conservation Officers Association, and prepared by ECO Marty Skotarczak) was served. It was a welcome reprieve.

After lunch, the students were transported to the college’s former ski lodge where officers were recreating the previously mentioned HRSI. The students watch as the drama unfolds: three hunters argue in the woods and ECOs show up to begin their investigation. The victim (played by ECO Tim Card) has been “shot” and has a bandaged and “blood-soaked” arm. Standing with him are an out-of-town hunter from NYC and his grandfather (played by ECO Jason DeAngelis and Investigator Norm Channing, respectively). Everyone takes their roles seriously, and the observers nearly forget this is a carefully scripted mock scenario.



As the mock crime comes to a close with ECOs interviewing involved parties, students gain valuable knowledge by observing a real-life event which many officers face each day.



One of DEC’s detector dogs hot on the trail.

The ECOs separate the hunters and interview them individually, and then call for a K-9 unit and BECI investigators. BECI, short for Bureau of Environmental Crimes Investigation, is DEC's plainclothes criminal investigative unit. Lt. Charlie Honikel and Investigator Jesse Paluch head to the scene. As with most HRSIs, the shooters' accounts of the incident don't add up, and it's up to the officers to uncover the truth. The K-9 warden and his dog locate an empty shell casing, a shotgun wad and a hidden shotgun. These "detector dogs" are great assistance in many cases as they can locate evidence such as spent shell casings, firearms and venison, as well as track missing persons and fugitives.

With the new evidence in hand, the officers are able to pinpoint the exact location where everyone involved was standing, and lay out a string line which shows the path of the shotgun pellets from the shooter to the victim. In the end, the investigation proves that the shooter, originally reported to be the grandfather, is in fact his grandson, a convicted felon not able to legally possess a firearm, and who has used illegal-sized shot to shoot at a turkey decoy which he had negli-

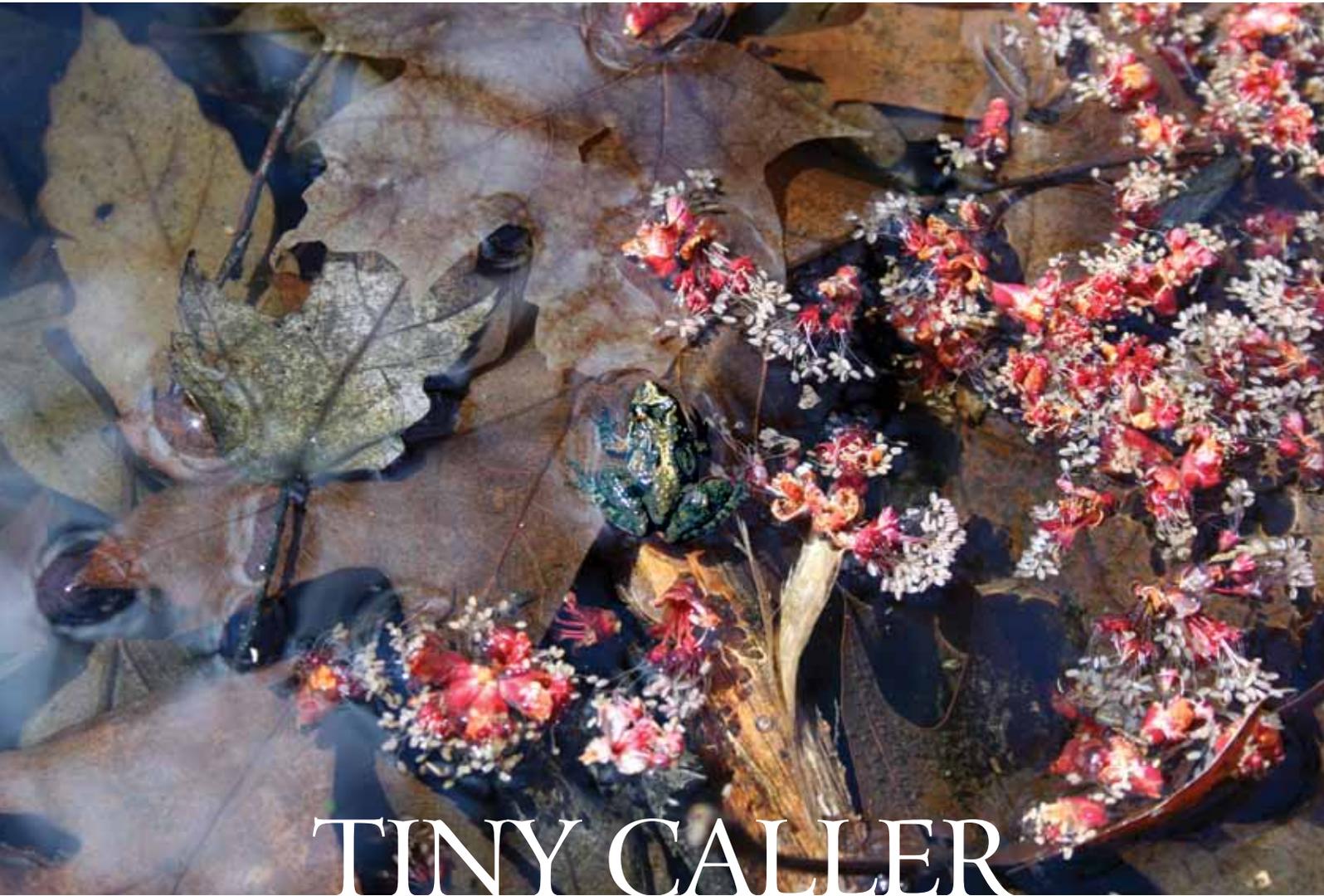
gently mistaken for a live bird. In fact, the grandfather had been covering for him, hoping they would all go free. The grandson is subsequently arrested. Interestingly, this scenario was actually taken from a real-life incident we had previously encountered in the field.

The day concludes with a short debriefing and discussion of the day's events. Everyone involved—students, class instructor, ECOs, investigators—agree it was a great experience. The ECOs and investigators thoroughly enjoyed working with possible future co-workers, and the exercise helped them to look critically at their investigative process, which can lead to future improvements in procedures. But most importantly, about three dozen students were able to experience the job of an ECO, and the relationship between DEC and SUNY Cobleskill was strengthened. All in all, it was a "win-win" experience; one we anticipate repeating in the future.

Captain Mike St. Jeanos is in charge of DEC's Division of Law Enforcement for nine counties in eastern New York. **Lt. Tom Harrington** supervises Otsego and Schoharie Counties.

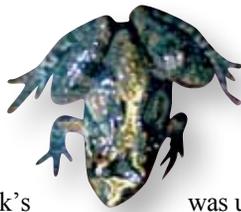


Programs like this allow students to experience an ECO's job, and strengthen the relationships between DEC and college students.



TINY CALLER

—the northern cricket frog



By Jay Westerveld

Growing up in a family of sportsmen in New York's verdant Hudson River Valley, I quickly developed an intimate knowledge of the vast variety of organisms inhabiting our diverse patchwork quilt of forests, fens, hills and marshes. Indeed, the lower Hudson River Valley is a crossroads of biodiversity, hosting overlapping fringe populations of a multitude of species, while fostering unique interplay between these diverse organisms, like some ecological Grand Central Station.

My older brother and I spent hours afield hiking, fishing, hunting and trapping in this ecological quilt located only an hour's drive from Manhattan. The species that most caught our attention was the northern cricket frog: a tiny, colorful frog that

was unlike any other frog we came across. We imagined it was some accidental, exotic vagrant from the Amazon that was transplanted thousands of miles north by some odd wind.

We would see northern cricket frogs frequently: at lakes, marshes and swamps in summer, and in deep woods and dry ridge lines in spring and fall. Depending on the season, we'd find them in just about any habitat. Even during bowhunting season, we'd glimpse them darting across our path in their signature low-trajectory, four-foot-long leap. They captivated us with their different color morphs, tiny size and surprising twice-yearly migration; and thus began my lifelong study of this species' ecology in New York State.

Rarely exceeding one inch in length, northern cricket frogs are New York's smallest vertebrates and only endangered frog. Their coloration varies from dark brown to light gray, and they can have markings of stripes or spots in green or red, and occasionally bright blue. During the warmer months, they inhabit weedy areas of lakes, creeks and ponds. In the fall, winter and spring, however, they live upland of water bodies—sometimes as far as 2,000 feet away, as one researcher, Dr. Jonathan Micancin, discovered in North Carolina.

In New York, cricket frogs often call at wetlands near rocky outcrops. But over the years, their chorus has grown quieter as their numbers have declined. While habitat destruction may contribute to this decline (see page 27), in my observations it doesn't appear to be the primary cause. For example, northern cricket frogs used to abound in Harriman State Park—I recorded robust populations there throughout

They captivated us with their different color morphs, tiny size and surprising twice-yearly migration; and thus began my lifelong study of this species' ecology in New York State.

the 1970s and '80s—and despite the fact that the ponds, marshes and creeks from which they once called appear virtually unchanged, cricket frogs are no longer heard anywhere within this large, undisturbed state park. In addition, other outwardly pristine habitat in the state has also fallen silent of their clicking call. Today, the species survives, and in a few cases, thrives, at only a handful of locations within New York. The largest and most robustly populated of these sites is the Glenmere Reservoir/Black Meadow Creek Reservoir lands in Orange County.

In 1983, DEC biologist Joel Hermes and I reviewed some of my cricket frog records, as observers were noting a decline in cricket frog numbers. We found that many sites had far fewer cricket frogs, both audibly and visually,

than they held previously. By 2000, I confirmed cricket frogs only at five remaining sites in Orange County.

At that time I lived at the Glenmere Mansion, an enormous, Mediterranean-style structure overlooking the Glenmere Reservoir, and home to New York's largest population of cricket frogs. I discovered small masses of live cricket frogs overwintering in the vast, subterranean cellars of the mansion. These frogs arranged themselves in small clumps of six or more, all with eyes and nostrils exposed, at cutouts in the thick masonry that formed passageways.

I began to search for similar natural habitat in the reservoir's wild uplands and found cricket frogs assembling at comparable, sheltered crevices in the adjoining forests, often more

Matthew D. Schlesinger



Brad M. Glorioso



Brad M. Glorioso



than 1,500 feet from the nearest lake or creek known to have cricket frogs. On the coldest days, accompanied by other zoologists, I'd find the frogs collecting at the entrances to rock crevices among shale cliffs, and also near holes in rotted tree stumps. Within hours

of falling temps, they'd no longer be present at the openings, suggesting there were tunnels that likely lead the tiny amphibians to well below the frost line. When temps would warm again, we'd find them back at the entrances to these tiny cracks and holes.

Locating these deep overwintering sites is important for the frogs' survival, as unlike many other frog species found in the state, cricket frogs produce very little "antifreeze" to prevent their bodies from freezing. Their nearest cousins, the gray treefrog and the spring peeper, both manufacture glycerol similar to the antifreeze that we use in our cars' radiators.

The fact that cricket frogs migrate such a long distance is incredible. In fact, in 2006, we conducted a study of the cricket frog's overwintering habits and discovered that New York's tiniest amphibian migrates farther than most other amphibians in the state. We photographed the unique, individual markings of each frog we found entering rock crevices and root holes in the fall, and compared them to photos of the frogs we found emerging from these same, often tiny cracks and crevices the following spring. It was a perfect match and indicated that cricket frogs were surviving winter freeze in hibernacula over 1,800 feet from their summer habitat.

The traveling frogs collect at ephemeral woodland pools (seasonal pools which occur in the spring, fall or winter), when the leaves are off the trees. Here, the sun warms the dark, shallow waters, increasing the frogs' metabolism and protecting them from freezing temperatures while en route to and from their summer breeding habitat.

The pools also provide food for the little vagabonds; in fact, we've observed cricket frogs following migrations of tiny insects called water-lily planthoppers (*Megamelus davisii*) from these pools to the lakes and creeks. Cricket frogs will fatten up on these planthoppers prior to embarking on their long fall migration. A single cricket frog might spend several hours on one lily pad, devouring planthoppers as they move by the thousands over a lily pad.





These tiny planthoppers may shed light on the cricket frog's decline in New York. At locations where these frogs have disappeared, there were no water-lily planthoppers to be found, while at Glenmere, where the frogs are abundant, these insects virtually carpet the vast wetlands.

In my opinion, aerial pesticides sprayed to control gypsy moth populations in the 1970s may

have decimated water-lily planthopper populations, and hence be indirectly responsible for the decline in cricket frog numbers. Interestingly, Harriman State Park, where cricket frogs have disappeared, received continuous treatment just prior to the crash in cricket frog numbers, while Glenmere, where cricket frogs remain abundant, was spared any spraying because it is a public water supply. Also, since water-lily planthoppers lack full wing sets, they can't fly, so once extirpated, it could take them decades to repopulate an area.

Hopefully, as populations of the water-lily planthoppers rebound, cricket frogs will return to the wetlands they formerly inhabited, and places like Harriman State Park will once again resound with the rhythmic clicking call of the northern cricket frog.

But for now, New Yorkers can visit the Glenmere Reservoir to hear the unique summer chorus of this tiny, colorful frog.

Jay Westerveld has spent more than 30 years studying the northern cricket frog in New York. He resides in Orange County and is founder of the New York Natural History Council.



Editor's Note: While habitat destruction may not be the cause of range-wide declines observed in cricket frogs, loss of aquatic or upland habitat can have serious impacts on local cricket frog populations. DEC works hard to protect the essential habitat of this and all endangered species to ensure that they remain an important component of New York's wildlife diversity.



Day-old Pheasants

The application period for DEC's Day-old Pheasant Chick Program is open from now until March 15th. The program provides pheasant hunting opportunities through a partnership between DEC, hunters, 4-H youth, and landowners. Chicks are available at no cost to participants who are able to monitor the birds' health, provide daily care, a brooding facility, a covered outdoor rearing pen, and an adequate release site. Approved applicants receive chicks in April, May or June. Cooperators bear the cost of raising the chicks to adulthood, and release them before December 1st on DEC-approved sites on lands open to public hunting, before the season opens. In 2011, DEC distributed more than 46,000 day-old pheasant chicks to qualified 4-H and

sportsmen applicants. Anyone interested in raising and releasing pheasants to expand next year's hunting opportunities should contact DEC's Reynolds Game Farm at 607-273-2768.

RiverNet Newsletter

DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program has a new newsletter! Available online, the quarterly *RiverNet* delivers information on ensuring clean water; protecting and restoring fish, wildlife and their habitat; providing river access and recreation on the water and throughout the watershed; and more. In its first issue, readers can learn about the effects of Hurricane Irene in New York; check out new grants, training, and volunteer projects open to the public; and discover unusual Hudson River animal sightings! Go to www.dec.ny.gov/lands/76018.html to learn more, including how to subscribe.



James Clayton

Falconer and Wildlife Rehabber Tests

The annual written examinations for New Yorkers interested in becoming either a licensed volunteer wildlife rehabilitator or an apprentice to practice the sport of falconry will be held on April 20th at DEC regional offices throughout the state. Applications to take either exam are due no later than April 6th. Wildlife rehabilitators care for injured, sick and orphaned wild animals, with the ultimate goal of preparing the animals for their return to the wild. Falconry has a rich history and tradition throughout the world; in New York, the tradition is continued by more than 200 licensed falconers. Both endeavors are demanding and require significant commitments of time and effort. Visit DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov to learn more about wildlife rehabilitation, falconry, and a list of DEC's regional offices where the tests will be administered.

Environmental Excellence

In December, DEC held the 8th annual Environmental Excellence Awards ceremony recognizing five organizations for innovative and sustainable action. Award-winning projects focused on achieving energy efficiency, involving students and communities in composting, and revitalizing an urban center.

James Clayton



Environmental Excellence Awards

The 2011 winners were: SUNY Albany’s “You’ve Got the Power to Conserve” program (Albany County), the Dryden Central School District’s “Go Green” program (Tompkins County), Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency’s food waste composting program (Onondaga County), University of Rochester’s “Go Green! Conserve and Save” program (Monroe County) and Uniland Development Company’s adaptive reuse project (Erie County). Visit www.dec.ny.gov/public/945.html for more information about the program, to see summaries of previous award-winning projects, and to find out how to apply for the 2012 awards.

Reductions in Menhaden Harvest

For the first time, there will be reductions in the harvest of Atlantic menhaden after a vote by the Menhaden Management Board of the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission (ASMFC). Menhaden are the primary forage fish of most predatory fish, and have steadily declined; recently

they hit a record low. The public submitted more than 90,000 comments on the proposed reductions; most were in favor of reducing the menhaden harvest. Check out the Coastal Conservation Association’s press release (<http://news.joincca.org/a-new-day-for-menhaden-management>) to read more about the decision, and to find out what comes next.

New Fishing Map

Freshwater anglers will be happy to learn there’s a new free fishing map/brochure available from DEC. The large, fold-out *I FISH NY Guide to Freshwater Fishing in New York State* contains valuable fishing information—including fish species present, the type of access available, whether ice fishing is allowed, what (if any) permits are required, and the location of fishing piers, marinas or local campsites—for more than 320 lakes and ponds and 112 rivers and streams. The map also contains color photos and descriptions of New York’s most popular sportfish, important contact information, and a



list of recommended fishing waters. The fishing map was completed using Federal Aid in Sportfish Restoration monies and can be obtained free of charge from any DEC regional office, or by sending an e-mail to fwfish@gw.dec.state.ny.us (include “NY Fishing Map” in the subject line).

No Discharge in Lake Ontario

DEC and the Environmental Protection Agency recently declared New York’s portion of Lake Ontario as a “no discharge zone,” meaning boaters are banned from discharging treated on-board sewage into the water. Instead, boaters must dispose of their sewage at specifically designated pump-out stations. Even waste treated by on-board septic systems contains chemical additives which can be harmful to water quality, and pose a risk to marine life and people’s health. Visit DEC’s “No Discharge Zones” webpage at www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/73875.html for more information.



Susan Shafer

S. F. Denton





Editor's Note: Jim Bonesteel, President of Rensselaer Plateau Alliance, Inc., sent us a note regarding the article "Home Sweet Home on the Rensselaer Plateau" in our October 2011 issue. He wanted to point out that the map on page 29 needs clarification. Barberville Falls Preserve is owned by The Nature Conservancy, but the Preserve only encompasses half of the actual waterfall; the other half is in private ownership. Mr. Bonesteel would like visitors to please respect this private property and limit visits to lands of the Preserve.

Praise for Jerry

I was pleased to see the late Jerry H. Czech's spotted turtle painting in the August 2011 issue being used to promote the Habitat and Access Stamp. In the early 1960s Jerry taught natural history courses at the Heldeberg Workshop summer program in western Albany County. I was privileged to have been his student. A pencil sketch of a sparrow hawk he gave me in 1963 hangs in my home and reminds me of happy summer days spent in marsh, field and stream, observing, collecting, examining and trying to better understand the natural world.

Dan Odell
Cohoes (Albany County)



We're happy you had to the opportunity to know Jerry; he was a great artist, a great teacher and an even better friend.

—Conservationist staff

Memories from Miller

I have been a *Conservationist* reader for half a century. The photograph of Storm King Mountain by Greg Miller in the December 2011 issue brought back many memories. I was a student at the Storm King School from 1960 to 1963. I was born and raised in upstate New York, and my parents give me a *Conservationist* subscription each year for Christmas. The letters from readers are in many ways my favorite feature of the publication, though the sensitive paintings and beautiful photographs always bring back the landscapes of my childhood and youth.

Mott Greene
Seattle, WA

One of our favorite features, as well!

—Conservationist staff

Like Hopper?

I was riding the Newburgh Ferry when I took this photograph of the sun rising over the Hudson.

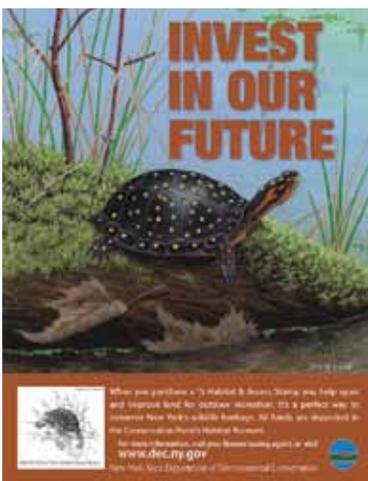
Jennett Bissinger
Orange County

What a beautiful photograph! We can't help but notice the photo's resemblance to Edward Hopper's painting "Nighthawks." Anybody else think so?

—Conservationist staff

Gun Safety

I read "First Buck at 49" (see October 2011 issue) and would like to congratulate Thomas on his diligence and patience over six years. I, too, started hunting later in life, also because I did not have any family members that hunted. However, I am disappointed that one of the "Ten Commandments of Firearm Safety" is broken in the article; many people think it's okay to use their scope as a substitute for binoculars. A co-worker told me that



✉ LETTERS

he “accidentally” shot a deer when he was checking its antler size through his scope. The rule says you must only point a firearm at something you intend to shoot.

Subscriber
Newfane (Niagara County)

Point taken. While hunting afield, it is best to identify targets with binoculars.

—Dave Nelson, Editor

Floating Science

We came across these frozen discs in Tenmile Creek. What are they?

Mary Binder and Helene Goldberger
Albany County

These look like ice circles and occur when the force of the flowing water is enough to break off chunks of ice and cause them to rotate against other areas of ice, causing the chunks to grind down into a circle.

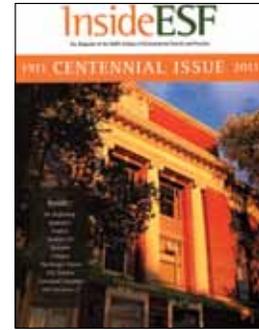
—Susan Van Patten,
DEC Division of Water



ESF Centennial

The article in your October 2011 issue on the 100th anniversary of the Department (see “Conservation Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow”) was very meaningful to me. One hundred years ago, the state also started the College of Forestry at Syracuse University, now SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry. As members of the class of 1971, many of my classmates and I recently returned to campus to celebrate our 40th anniversary. We also celebrated the centennial of the college. We found the undergraduate and graduate programs more vibrant and nationally competitive than ever, and the dedication of a new student residence hall, aptly named Centennial Hall, is making on-campus housing a reality. May the dedicated young professionals have the opportunity to work and serve the public in their chosen fields of study.

Craig R. Johnson
Tonawanda (Erie County)



Thanks so much for the kind words. I, too, am an ESF alumna (class of 1980) who has been fortunate enough to work in my chosen field. I was a forest biology major and began working for DEC in 1981 in the fisheries office in Watertown. Over the years I've done a number of different jobs, but I've always loved my work and found it rewarding. Now I love working with the magazine. Sounds like there are great things happening at ESF; maybe I'll plan a visit!

—Eileen Stegemann, Assistant Editor

Snowy Scene

Ed Trosclair sent us the photo below of a female northern flicker visiting his suet feeder on a snowy, February day.



Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

Whimsy by Janice Horton

In the Adirondacks, whimsy is everywhere. Shortened from “whim-wham”, it’s an odd notion, something fanciful or unexpected. Like the two round-mouthed dummy paddlers poised to go over the edge of the roof at the Canada Lake Store in the Town of Caroga Lake. You expect to see moose silhouettes, bears holding mailboxes and loon-shaped house numbers in the Adirondacks. Signs in the wilderness *ought* to be made from rough slabs of hemlock or boards with saw-toothed edges. Retired oars and buzz-saw blades make the medium the message.

Whimsy is the language that tells you where you are. Las Vegas writes in neon; our symbols are antlers and stylized pine trees. No matter where you go, whimsies overused become icons. If there’s a twelve-foot-tall steer out front, it’s a safe bet there’s a BBQ corral inside, pardner. Some whimsy makes you turn the car around for a second look, like the picket fence fashioned from skis spotted along Route 10 in southern Hamilton County.



Whimsy is what happens when an object begs to be seen in a different perspective. Like those round bales of hay shrink-wrapped in white plastic that dot the fields. Does it take much imagination to see a marshmallow farm? I’m waiting to see one or two bales impaled on a Paul Bunyan-esque skewer over a faux campfire.

Whimsy is what you do with an object that’s outlived its reason for being. What good is an old plow blade until you weld on some buggy eyeballs and turn it into an oversized cricket? Probably too many things have been re-purposed as flowerpots: big tractor tires, water heaters cut in half and toilet bowls. Those little shanties with a moon cut out over the door have been known to get a new identity as a potting shed in an upscale garden—privies with panache. There is a line, somewhere between clever and kitsch, that gets crossed when the stuff is mass-produced. You can buy a



readymade scarecrow whose stuffing won’t fall out but it’s not the same as a pair of real overalls and a shirt that’s been worn. And forget about anything that must be inflated. Please.

In the Adirondacks, whimsy knows just how much it can get away with. A twenty-foot-tall, plaid-shirted, axe-wielding (albeit smiling) woodsman is a worthy representative of a lumberyard, more fitting than a late model Chevy sawn in half to demonstrate low, low prices. Whimsy shows up at just the right interval. Like a chunk of green pepper in the chili, a bigger than life heron adds a little rush of flavor to keep the bowl interesting. Miles of unspoiled wilderness, with another shining lake around the bend are the essence of the place. But endless stands of birch and pine aren’t diminished by a joke now and then any more than when the minister comes out with a gentle one-liner to unfreeze the nervous bride and groom. They remember, then, not to take themselves too seriously. In the same way, a chubby, chainsaw-carved bear holding a fishing rod reminds us that the wilderness is awesome, but not unapproachable.

Whimsy needn’t be supersized. Small touches like cupboard pulls made of knots, an antler to hang your hat on, birch bark frames and anything made from twigs testify that this is the Adirondacks. The great “camps” of the Vanderbilts and J.P. Morgans gave Adirondack style status. Perhaps whimsy takes the embarrassment out of the riches.

The Adirondacks aren’t the only place you’ll find antler chandeliers and tree-trunk bedposts, but I’m sure the upstate New York mountains wouldn’t be the same place without them. In front of a children’s playground, a pair of brawny carved owls stand at the gate. You were expecting clowns or bunnies?

A native of western New York, **Janice Horton** writes from northeast Pennsylvania.



Trees for Tributaries; Shrubs for Streams —Restoring protective buffers



James Clayton

Trees and shrubs provide a critical role in flood protection. Without the trees and shrubs planted near streams (known as riparian buffers), the devastating damage caused by 2011's record storms and flooding in New York could have been worse. Trees and shrubs slow the speed and force of water during floods, and their roots help hold the soil in place. The healthier and larger the buffer and planted floodplain, the better it can withstand flooding.

On a daily basis, riparian buffers help reduce runoff from roads and farmland, keep mud out of trout waters and streams, and keep water clean for downstream users. Trees and shrubs can also be used for urban stormwater plantings to hold and filter rainwater and reduce its flow into storm drains.

DEC's State Tree Nursery at Saratoga specializes in native, New York-sourced plants. These small, lightweight seedlings are easy to plant and can restore and protect our stream banks and floodplains. They also provide food, shelter and safe travel corridors for wildlife, and help keep streams cool for fish. You can play a role in protecting water quality by planting seedlings in a riparian zone.

Check out www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7127.html to find out more or to order New York's hardy seedlings.



Candace Balmer

Suggested streamside and floodplain plants: Tree and shrub willows, poplars, buttonbush, silky and red osier dogwood, arrowwood, swamp rose, silver and red maple, wild grape.



Also, be sure to check out NYS DEC Saratoga Tree Nursery's new Facebook page.



John Bulmer

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