

Hunting | Maple Sugaring | Short-eared Owls

NEW YORK STATE

Conservationist

FEBRUARY 2013

Waterfalls
of New York



Dear Reader,

Winter is spectacular in New York State! As snow covers the landscape in a beautiful blanket of white, New York's world-class winter recreation opportunities abound. We have trails for every cross-country style and skill level—from beginner to back-country explorer—at parks, forest preserves, ski resorts, and nearly 50 cross-country ski centers across the state. Downhill skiers can hit the challenging slopes at Belleayre, Gore and Whiteface Mountain ski resorts. Snowmobilers can access more than 2,000 miles of groomed trails connecting communities throughout upstate.

Last year, Governor Cuomo launched the Path Through History Tourism Initiative to capture and celebrate New York's rich historical and cultural heritage. The legacy of the Adirondack Park is a powerful part of the New York story, and DEC is once again joining with local partners to host open house events at Santanoni, a historic Adirondack great camp located in the Town of Newcomb in Essex County.

During Presidents' Day weekend (February 16, 17 & 18) and St. Patrick's Day weekend (March 16 & 17) at Camp Santanoni, you can cross-country ski or snowshoe to the breathtaking camp property and explore the surrounding lands as part of guided tours. The 9.4-mile round trip to the remote lakeside Main Lodge is a fantastic (and healthy) way to enjoy the outdoors. The Artist's Studio on the shores of Newcomb Lake will be open as a warming hut and hot chocolate will be available. Like last year, DEC will hold interpretive events at the camp.

But you needn't visit the Adirondacks to enjoy a winter outing. DEC and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation offer wonderful options for great winter hikes. Visit www.dec.ny.gov and www.nysparks.ny.gov to learn more. For the latest information on conditions at state-operated ski resorts, visit www.orda.org.

And that's the beauty of our state lands: outdoor enthusiasts can experience nature close to home in any season. From the Catskills to the Adirondacks to the Pine Barrens and the Pine Bush to Allegany State Park, we have the greatest wealth of parklands of any state. No matter your interests, I encourage you to take time to discover New York's wonderful nature.

Regards,
Commissioner Joe Martens

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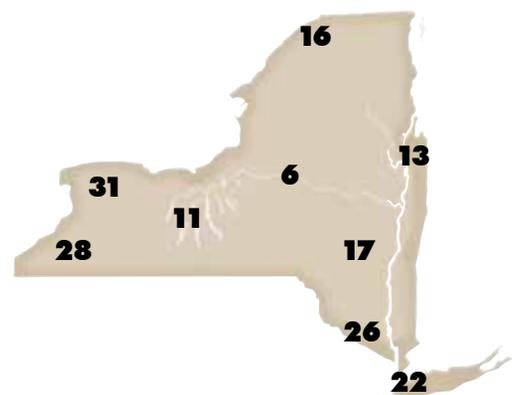


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The Great State of Hunting

By Gordon R. Batcheller



James Clayton

As a professional wildlife biologist at DEC, I help manage New York's wildlife conservation programs. As a lifetime wildlife enthusiast, I am also an avid hunter. For me, hunting is a way of life that encompasses all seasons. Beginning in October, I look for turkey flocks and use my calls and camouflage in an often-feeble attempt to call a bird in close enough for a shot. Last fall I took my 100th wild turkey, but this doesn't make me an accomplished hunter. My expertise, if any, comes from the thousands of mistakes I have made where I can only conclude, "Turkey: 1; Gordon: 0."

By mid-November, I turn my attention to deer, which remains my focus until mid-December. The venison and wild turkey in my freezer are the only meat in our household, and I deeply value this modest level of self-sufficiency. My richest memories, however, are the deer or turkeys that proved to be elusive, and left me scratching my head and pondering the wonders of nature.

Lately, I have grown to savor days afield with new hunters, both young and old, all of whom have been eager students. When my son took his first deer on a chilly Thanksgiving morning, and when two friends took their first wild turkeys, I knew that I had given something back and done my part in enriching their lives.

New York offers some of the finest hunting experiences in the country for a variety of game, beginning in September for squirrels; running into late winter for rabbits, hares, and furbearers; and starting anew with our spring turkey hunt. This is why New York is a destination of choice for hunters from every county in the state and several neighboring states.

According to the 2011 National Survey of Fishing, Hunting, and Wildlife-Associated Recreation, an estimated 823,000 hunters spent 18.4 million days afield in New York in 2011. This ranks New York 3rd in total number of hunters nationwide. The 84,000 non-residents who travel to New York to hunt make the Empire State the 9th-most popular hunting destination in the nation.

New York offers some of the finest hunting experiences in the country for a variety of game.

And the strong state of hunting is generating economic benefits for small businesses and local communities across New York. Outdoor sportsmen and women spend an estimated \$1.5 billion each year on food, lodging, clothing, equipment and supplies, ranking New York 4th in the nation for total expenditures by hunters. Though these numbers are impressive, DEC is stepping up efforts to recruit new hunters. This is one reason why our youth hunting events are so important, and it is also why DEC supports programs like "Becoming an Outdoors-Woman," in which women of all ages can learn basic outdoor skills like beginning shotgun and archery.

An important part of our job at DEC is to listen to hunters and understand what we can do to make a good experience even better. Are our seasons set at the right time? Do we provide enough information to help people find a place to hunt? Just last year, for example, we changed our deer hunting regulations to provide even more opportunity, and bear seasons have also been expanded. Research is underway right now to ensure that our turkey seasons are set correctly.

Every year, new hunters explore this lifestyle with curiosity and excitement. Some seek a challenging new outdoor activity. Others wish to grow closer to the land and harvest game as a sustainable source of food. Many are drawn to carry on family traditions. In my case, a close friend taught me some of the tricks needed to successfully hunt turkeys, and the challenge of doing so remains one of the great rewards of going afield each fall and spring. More than anything, I have learned that successful hunters spend lots of time preparing, and lots of time in the field observing wildlife. For me, the connection with nature defines a true hunter, and that is a lifetime quest.

Our job at DEC is to make the hunting experience positive so that hunters want to come back. A big part of this is to ensure that all hunters understand the rules and responsibilities of hunting, and that they are properly trained and licensed before going afield to ensure a safe and enjoyable hunting experience. Another big part is providing information to help hunters understand the excellent hunting opportunities in New York, including how to access millions of acres of public land.

Every year, new hunters ask how to get started. Experienced hunters want to know how to make the most of what we have to offer. Let's take a look at DEC's programs to promote hunting.

First Steps

All new hunters must first successfully complete our hunter education course. Usually held over a period of two evenings and one weekend day (though we are offering more and more options for online study as well), these courses cover the basics of firearms safety and hunting ethics. Students are introduced to key laws and regulations. Taught by a skilled group of trained volunteers, our hunter education classes are your portal to a lifetime of enjoyable outdoor activity. To find a course in your area, visit the DEC website at: www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9191.html.



Find a Mentor

There is no better way to learn about hunting than from a skilled teacher. If you are under 16 years of age, New York laws require that you may only hunt with an experienced hunter-mentor. If you are older, seek out a friend or family member willing to take you on your first hunting trip. Talk to experienced hunters and ask them for suggestions. Your hunter education instructor may be able to suggest a network of potential mentors.

Many hunters are very willing to share their time with a new hunter, and few experiences are more rewarding than passing on the hunting tradition. DEC sponsors special opportunities for youth hunters, holding youth hunts for pheasants, waterfowl, turkey and deer. Last fall, for example, the first-ever youth hunt for deer was held over Columbus Day weekend. An estimated 7,500 young hunters went afield that weekend with an experienced mentor, and took about 760 deer. You can see some of those successful hunters on page 17 of this magazine, and even more at DEC's online photo gallery: www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/85926.html.

Sp@rtsman Education

DEC photo



DEC's Sportsman Education program is your entrée to hunting. The program began in 1949. Each year, a cadre of 2,500 trained volunteer instructors teach more than 30,000 students in four disciplines: firearms safety, bowhunting, trapping, and waterfowl identification. Approximately 1,300 Sportsman Education courses (www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9191.html) are offered each year, generally in the evenings and on weekends. There is no charge for any course. Demand is greatest for courses held immediately prior to the hunting season, so consider signing up for an earlier offering.

Online and home-study courses are becoming more prevalent, but must be completed with a hands-on field day. For more information, check out www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9187.html.

We are always looking for interested individuals to join our instructor team. Applicants must be at least 18 years of age, be of good character and have no serious legal convictions. Applicants must have at least three year's experience in the discipline that they choose to teach and several references are required. To learn more about becoming an instructor, visit www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/9189.html.



Many young hunters hone their skills with small game like squirrels.



By extending seasons, expanding use of deer management permits, and increasing access on public lands, we are working to improve deer hunting in New York.

Start Small

While many first-time hunters are attracted either to deer or turkey hunting, New York's small game hunting seasons offer excellent opportunities for both beginning and seasoned hunters. For example, the squirrel season begins on September 1st in all upstate counties. Squirrels are abundant at that time of year; they are widespread in most of New York, the weather is pleasant, and you'll have the woods largely to yourself. Hunting squirrels is an excellent way to develop your hunting and shooting skills. Squirrels remain one of the most abundant and popular game animals in the United States.

Places to Hunt

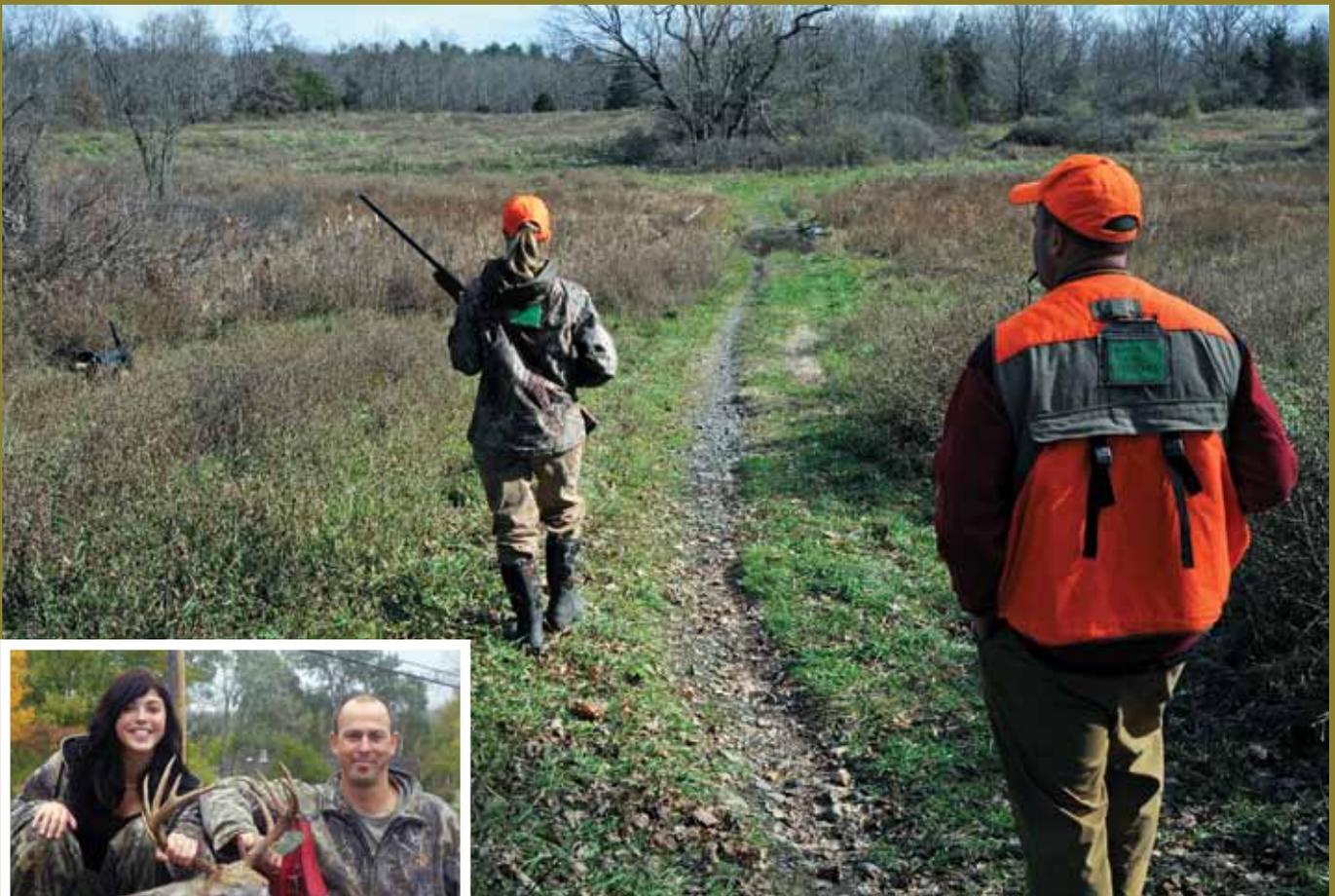
DEC manages hundreds of thousands of acres of public land where you can hunt. The habitat types and hunting opportunities are as diverse as the state itself, and best of all, access to all these lands is free of charge. Recent acquisitions have increased the areas open to

hunting. Since January of 2011, DEC has acquired 44,080 acres in fee and through easement, nearly all of it available for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreational activities. That total includes additions to several Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs), including Bashakill, California Hill, Black Creek Marsh, Northern Montezuma, Cranberry Mountain, Rome, Oriskany Flats, Hi Tor and Ausable Marsh.

In addition to WMAs, DEC has also expanded hunting opportunities on a number of other publicly owned lands by: expanding Chenango, Boutwell, Beebe Hill, Eldridge Swamp, Zoar Valley, and Hinckley State Forests; working with the NYC Department of Environmental Protection to open up thousands of acres of New York City-owned lands in the NYC watershed in the Catskills; and adding lands to the Adirondack Forest Preserve. You can find a lot of information about public lands open to hunting by visiting our website at www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/82098.html.

Many private landowners also allow hunting on their properties, with permission. Always remember to treat private property as you would want your own land treated: with respect. It is best to approach landowners well before your hunting trip, and be sure you do not interrupt them at an inconvenient time. If you receive permission to hunt on their land, be sure to follow all of their rules. Landowners expect nothing less. After your hunt, let them know how you did and be sure to bring them some fresh game, prepared and ready for the table. Touch base with them every year and keep the relationship positive and open. You will find many landowners are willing to allow you to hunt on their land if you are courteous and considerate.

Gordon R. Batcheller is DEC's chief wildlife biologist, and is an avid deer and turkey hunter.



Courtesy the Albright family

Supporting New York Hunters

by Kathy Moser,
Asst. Commissioner of Natural Resources

Hunting is one of the most popular forms of outdoor recreation in the Empire State and an important part of our economy. New York hunters can pursue a wide variety of wildlife, including big game, small game, game birds, waterfowl, and furbearers. The Department of Environmental Conservation is committed to providing opportunities for hunters to enjoy their time-honored tradition. Under Governor Cuomo's leadership, the state has taken several steps to better serve the hunting community in 2012:

- Launched a new study to better manage wild turkeys and to maintain outstanding turkey hunting (see "Volunteers Wanted" on page 28). New York routinely ranks as one of the top ten turkey hunting destinations in the United States.
- Extended use of deer management permits during early muzzleloading season and early bowhunting season in the northern zone, thereby providing additional opportunity to take deer.
- Extended the opening of the bowhunting season by 12 days into early October, which bowhunters have been requesting for a number of years.
- Added more than 26,000 acres of new public lands across the state to expand areas open to sportsmen for hunting, fishing, trapping and other outdoor recreation.
- Rebuilt Howland Island Bridge in Northern Montezuma WMA to provide access for hunting, fishing and other outdoor recreation.
- Released 30,000 pheasants for hunting and continued investments to improve the Reynolds Game Farm where pheasants are raised for stocking.



SWEET SUCCESS

—*Central NY students make their own maple syrup*

By Chip Haley

Photos provided by author unless otherwise noted



James Clayton

Like the slow-dripping sap they collect from local maple trees and then transform into delicious syrup, the maple program at Vernon-Verona-Sherrill High School (VVS) in Oneida County has slowly developed over the years into a sweet success.

What began at the school's facility in 1992 as a pilot program through the district's Future Farmers of America (FFA) chapter, has grown into a huge success

with more than 1,000 gallons of maple syrup produced last year. But the program doesn't stop there. Students have also made maple sugar, maple fluff, maple coffee, maple cream spread and cotton candy. A few years back, the school added a mobile maple trailer to take the program on the road to other schools—some as far away as New York City and Washington, D.C. The high school also hosts a maple con-

ference (the largest in the U.S. dedicated strictly to maple products) that last year attracted 925 participants from 13 states, and from Canada and Sweden.

Agriculture teacher Keith Schiebel has nurtured the program since its inception. Beginning around the end of February, approximately 25 of his students tap trees, insert spouts, install tubing or hang buckets and lids, collect sap, haul the sap with a

tractor and tanker, filter the sap at the sap house, operate an evaporator, and bottle and label the syrup and other products.

The high school owns 28 acres of woods (including 6 acres of maple trees), and the program manages two other sugarbushes as well. In addition, a fourth area is managed by a former student who sells the sap from his trees to the school's program. Combined, the four sugarbushes contain about 3,500 taps with tubing that carry sap to a collection tank, and a total of 600 buckets which must be emptied into a collection tank and then placed back on the tree tap.

Each year, Schiebel assigns students to various jobs, depending upon their maturity, ability, interest and availability. Older students teach the younger ones the fine art of maple tree tapping and maple syrup processing. They work during their agriculture class, as well as after school and on weekends. Some of the students spend as much as 20 hours or more a week during the season, either in the sugarbush or at the sugar house.

A few former students have gone on to manage their own sugarbush lots, while others are now involved in different types of farming. "Even if they are not involved in agriculture, many former students come back and tell me how grateful they are for the skills they learned," Schiebel says proudly. "They talk about how their involvement in Future Farmers of America and the maple program has helped them, whether with public speaking, job interviews or working with people."



Students who participate in the maple program perform a number of tasks, including (clockwise from top) tapping trees, installing tubing, filtering sap at the sap house, and bottling the syrup.

James Clayton



Collecting sap from maple trees.

Schiebel's students join him on the Mobile Maple Trailer, making presentations at other schools, at community festivals and fairs. Among the stops for the trailer are the New York State Fair, the LaFayette Apple Fest, the Oneida County Farm Fest, Remsen Barn Festival, Otsego County Fair, and the Schoharie Maple Festival.

"When that trailer is out on the road... my students are the educators," Schiebel observed. "They get the chance to interact with elementary students and adults—some very engaged in agriculture themselves, others with very little ties to agriculture. The mobile maple vehicle has given us a lot of exposure, and has visited all over New York, and all five boroughs in New York City," he added.

A state maple queen and her princesses help promote maple products at various events each year. VVS has been fortunate and has crowned six maple queens or princesses since 2004. "It's rewarding for those kids to couple classroom experiences with a title that allows them to travel and promote the agriculture industry," Schiebel said.

All the maple products made by the students are inspected and licensed under the state Department of Agriculture and Markets. Profits from the sales of the products are "generally invested back into the program," the teacher explained. Those profits have helped to buy a reverse osmosis machine from a company in Vermont, which "really cut our hours of boiling, and fuel consumption." And the FFA recently ordered "a new electronic bottler... that will speed up our bottling next year." Schiebel said a website is also being developed, through the school's portal, so maple syrup lovers can order their favorite product online.

The VVS maple sugaring program recently received a \$57,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to allow them to harvest willow grown at the school, and purchase an evaporator that



will burn willow rather than fuel oil. This will require significant changes in the sap house to accommodate a new fuel source. Agriculture students will design, fund, and construct the building extensions to accommodate the new equipment.

As the program grows and evolves, Schiebel said he and his students will keep looking for ways to improve the product, increase production efficiency,

and discover new products and markets.

In the meantime, they will continue gathering sap each spring, and convert it into sweet success.

Chip Haley is the retired news editor of the *Rome Daily Sentinel*, and loves maple syrup on her pancakes.

Waterfalls OF NEW YORK

Text adapted from *Waterfalls of New York State*
by Scott A. Ensminger, David J. Schryver and Edward M. Smathers

There is something in the sound and sight of falling water that both refreshes and inspires us. The water's lively, relentless movement draws us closer, and the seemingly infinite flow is almost hypnotic. Perhaps that's why waterfalls have such a powerful effect on many of us.

Waterfalls of New York State celebrates 100 of the state's more than 2,000 waterfalls that range in size from modest, delicate

cascades to huge, thundering cataracts. The most famous of these falls is Niagara Falls. Located on the border of Ontario, Canada and New York State, Niagara is ranked as one of the world's top 10 waterfalls, and roughly 20 million people flock to see it annually. But waterfall lovers can choose from a myriad of other falls to visit, such as those featured here, many of which have more secluded settings.



The Falls at Clarendon—Orleans County (Greater Niagara Region)

The Falls at Clarendon
Clarendon, Orleans County
Trail to falls: grass; easy

Located 200 feet west of the parking lot for the local town park, the Falls at Clarendon has a total height of 26 feet. The waterway that forms the falls is an unnamed tributary of Sandy Creek’s East Branch. After going over an initial drop of seven feet, the stream then fans out to a width of about 20 feet. An extremely steep cascade with some free-falling sections makes up the rest of this picturesque falls.

Falls at Thacher State Park
Voorheesville, Albany County
Trail: gravel and dirt with metal stairs; difficult

Located on the Helderberg Escarpment (one of the richest fossil-bearing formations in the U.S.), John Boyd Thacher State Park overlooks the Hudson-Mohawk valleys and the Adirondack and Green mountains. The park features several waterfalls ranging in height from 15 feet to more than 100 feet;



Falls at Thacher State Park—Albany County (Capital Region)

Mine Lot Falls (also called “Big Falls” or “Indian Ladder Falls”) is one of the most dramatic. Visitors can see this falls from the Indian Ladder Trail, which is accessible via a 60-foot staircase and follows the base of the escarpment.

Falls at Stony Brook State Park
Dansville, Steuben County
Trail: stone; easy

There are three major waterfalls formed by beautiful Stony Brook as it cascades

through the twisting gorge of shale and sandstone in Stony Brook State Park: 36-foot-high Lower Falls, 25-foot-high Middle Falls, and 42-foot-high Upper Falls. All three falls are visible along the path that leads from the lower parking lot to where Stony Brook emerges from the gorge into an enticing cliffside pool.



Stony Brook State Park—Steuben County (Finger Lakes Region)

**Falls at Fillmore Glen State Park
Moravia, Cayuga County**

Trail: crushed stone and dirt; easy

Fillmore Glen is a long, narrow gorge with waterfalls, shady woodlands and a variety of rock formations. The park was named for the 13th president of the United States, Millard Fillmore, who was born just east of the park. Thirty-seven foot Lower Falls is accessible via a short side trail on the northern bank of Dry Creek (Fillmore Creek). There are various other waterfalls, including 85-foot high Dalibarda Falls and 14-foot high Upper Pinnacle Falls.

Fitzgerald Falls

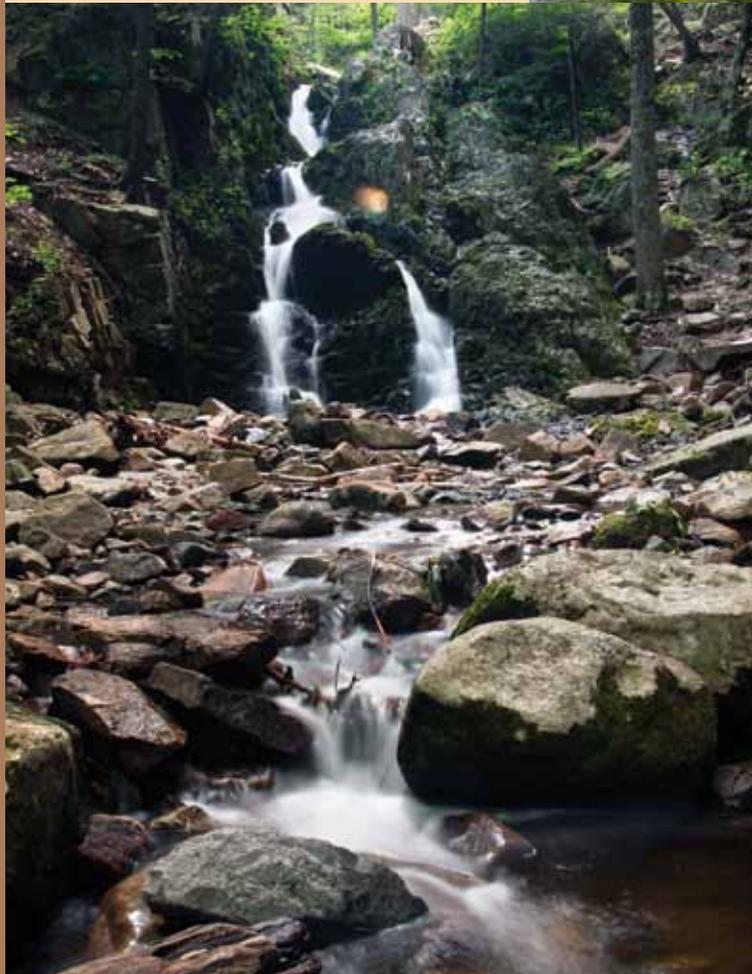
**Warwick (near Greenwood Lake),
Orange County**

Trail: dirt and single track; easy

Fitzgerald Falls is a medium-sized waterfall located on the New York segment of the Appalachian Trail.



Falls at Fillmore Glen State Park—
Cayuga County (Finger Lakes Region)



Fitzgerald Falls—Orange County (Hudson Valley Region)

The trail to the base of the falls is well-traveled and easy to follow. There are unimpeded views of the falls from about 180 degrees around its base. The Appalachian Trail system continues up and past the top where you are afforded an excellent view of this beautiful spot.

Dionondahowa Falls
Greenwich, Washington County

Trail: dirt; easy

Located just outside Greenwich, Dionondahowa Falls is an incredible sight. Once nicknamed Devil’s Caldron, the plunge pool at the waterfall’s base has since been dubbed Hell’s Hole by local residents. The land that encompasses the Dionondahowa Falls viewing area and Dionondahowa Park is owned by Dahowa Hydro, but is open to the public from dawn until dusk.

Falls at Watkins Glen State Park
Dix, Schuyler County

Trail: stones and steps; moderate

Cutting through sedimentary layers of shale and limestone, the waters of Glen Creek have sculpted a famously scenic gorge that features high cliffs, fantastic carved potholes, sparkling



Dionondahowa Falls—Washington County
(Capital Region)

pools and marvelous waterfalls. There are 19 waterfalls in the glen, ranging from vertical drops to twisting cascades confined to narrow chutes. The best way to view the glen’s waterfalls is to hike uphill from the main entrance, along the Gorge Trail, to the upper entrance.

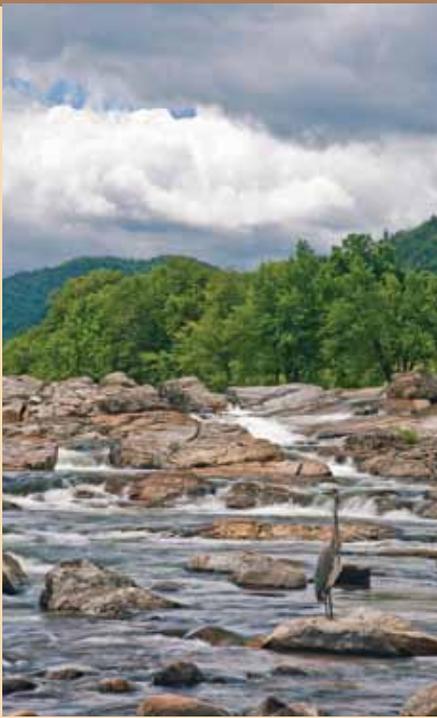
Watkins Glen State Park—Schuyler County (Finger Lakes Region)



Visit the New York State parks website at www.nysparks.com and DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov to obtain details on waterfalls that are located on publicly managed land. Remember that many of New York's waterfalls are on privately owned land, and access to them may be restricted by the landowner. Respect all posted and no-trespassing signs, and contact the landowner for permission to enter the property.

Please note that waterfalls and their settings are dynamic and changeable, and road and trail conditions can alter overnight as a result of severe weather. Be sure to do your due diligence by checking the latest information about weather and road conditions.





above: Jay Falls—Essex County
(North Country Region)

left: Artist Falls—Greene County
(Hudson Valley Region)

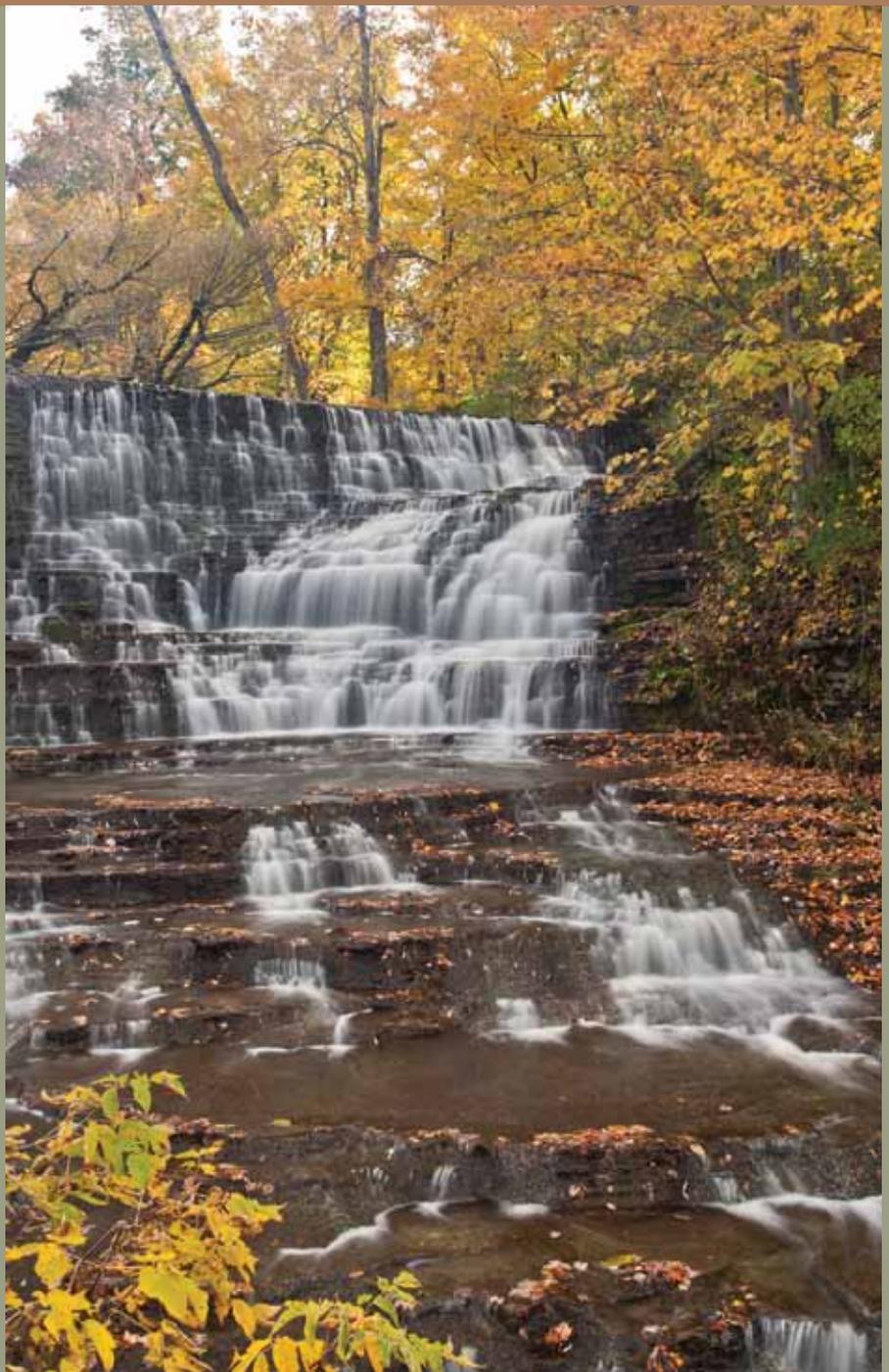
Jay Falls
Jay, Essex County

Trail: pavement; easy

While not large, Jay Falls occurs at a section of the riverbed that is effectively a natural rock waterslide. During high water in spring, the water bubbles and churns in a curtain cascade that covers the entire width of the river. At other times of the year, vast slabs of the underlying rock are exposed and the waterfall is reduced to a pair of ribbon cascades emerging from two of the lower openings in the rock. The site is also home to the Jay Covered Bridge with a park alongside that is open to bicyclists, but closed to vehicles.

Artist Falls
Cairo, Greene County
Trail: dirt path; easy

Artist Falls flows beneath a hand-crafted covered bridge specially built for local hikers and the clientele of nearby Winter Clove Inn. At a mere 15 feet high, the falls rivals the beauty of many of New York's tallest waterfalls. Set in a wooded area, the scenery changes



Burrville Falls—Jefferson County (North Country Region)

dramatically with each season. The trail is well-maintained, and the short hike can be managed by the whole family. Although located on a private retreat, the falls is open to the public.

Burrville Falls
Watertown, Jefferson County
Trail: concrete walk, wooden steps; easy

A popular falls in Jefferson County, Burrville Falls has many visitors, thanks to its location by the Burrville

Cider Mill (one of the oldest buildings in the country). Every autumn, people come to taste the landmark mill's legendary cider and cider doughnuts, and to view the falls. Located on private property, the falls are open to visitors when the cider mill is in operation, but can also be seen from a distance off CR 156 in the off-season. Once known as Burr's Mill Falls, the waterfall is technically unnamed today, though it is locally known as Cider Mill Falls.

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

DEC photo



Fur Coats Seized—New York County

At the Hell's Kitchen Flea Market, you can find almost anything: rare records, vintage furniture, even endangered species, or at least their fur. ECO Dustin Dainack was patrolling the flea market when he discovered a vendor selling a fur coat that looked suspiciously like cheetah, an endangered species. The seller claimed the fur wasn't from a cheetah but rather from another (nonexistent) species. The ECO seized the coat and another fur coat from a nearby vendor. The second seller admitted his coat was from an ocelot, another endangered species. ECO Dainack took both coats to Patrick Thomas, PhD, vice president and general curator of the Bronx Zoo, for examination. Thomas concluded that the first coat was a cheetah and the other coat was a Geoffroy's cat, an uncommon species. Charges are pending.

Fishy Waders—Suffolk County

At Montauk Point late one afternoon, ECO Liza Bobseine walked along the footpaths leading to the rocky shores. She watched a fisherman, who appeared reasonably fit, having difficulty making his way up an incline. He seemed particularly hampered by his bulky-looking chest waders. Closer inspection revealed the man had tucked a striped bass into each leg of his waders. ECO Bobseine issued a summons to the man for possessing more than his limit of striped bass.

Illegal Wildlife on Craigslist—Queens County

While searching Craigslist for wildlife for sale, ECO Shea Mathis noticed an ad for red belly piranha, which are illegal to possess in the state without a DEC permit. Posing as a potential buyer, ECO Mathis contacted the seller, who said he had an alligator for sale as

well—also illegal to possess without a DEC permit. Mathis met with the seller, and after visually confirming the seller had the animals, called-in uniformed ECO Chris Lattimer who was waiting nearby. Together they seized five piranhas and a foot-long alligator, and issued a summons to the perpetrator.

Parties Busted—St. Lawrence County

Ranger Jay Terry received a tip about a large, underage alcohol and drug party planned for Brasher State Forest. After verifying the information, he requested assistance from the State Police. On the night of the party, several DEC rangers and two troopers arrived at the site. Despite the rain which caused the turnout to be smaller than expected, rangers and troopers still issued 30 tickets, and delivered two minors to their parents and had one vehicle towed. Charges included: felony DWI; unlawful possession of marijuana; open containers in a motor vehicle; littering; felony drug/cocaine possession; underage alcohol possession; unattended fire; illegal operation of a motor vehicle; and providing a false name.

ASK THE ECO

Q: Can I sign my buck tag over to another person if they do not have a tag?

A: No. The only carcass tag that may be signed over to another hunter is a deer management permit (DMP) tag for an antlerless deer. Instructions for how to transfer a DMP carcass tag to another person can be found in your hunting guide.

2012 Youth Deer Hunt a Success!



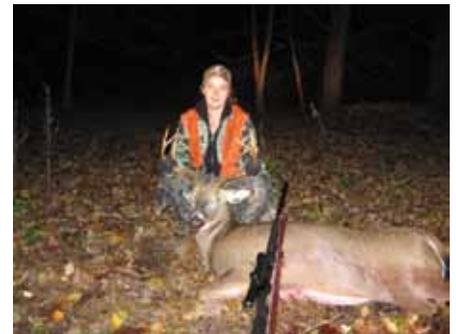
This past Columbus Day weekend (October 6-8, 2012) marked the state's first youth firearms deer hunt. During the special weekend hunt, 14- or 15-year-old junior hunters with a big game license were eligible to take one deer of either sex with a firearm when accompanied by a licensed, experienced adult. In total, junior hunters reported taking nearly 760 deer.

The youth hunt was a great opportunity for junior hunters to learn about New York's hunting traditions; feedback from young hunters who participated was enthusiastic and overwhelmingly positive. No hunting-related shooting incidents were reported during the hunt, either. (Editor Dave Nelson reminds all hunters that wearing hunter orange saves lives!)

Here are photos of just a few of the junior hunters who participated in the youth hunt. Visit DEC's Big Game Hunting Photo Gallery at www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/85926.html to see more of this year's successful hunters. Congratulations to all who participated.



On October 8, Alexis Dekanek took this 8-point buck on her family's farm in Herkimer County. This was her first deer hunt.



Olivia Yeaple took this 8-point buck with a shotgun.



Hannah Hayes of Honeoye Falls took her first buck on October 6.



On October 6, Michael Cook from Parishville took this 8-point buck.



Fourteen-year-old Rhiannon Goetze shot this impressive buck, her first deer, in Monroe County.



Charles "Chas" Decker from Bloomville harvested this 7-point buck, which was his first deer.



GHOST IN THE GRASSLAND

— Tracking the short-eared owl

By Theresa Swenson and Glenn Hewitt

On a brisk December evening, volunteers, birders, and biologists gather near dusk, in hopes of glimpsing one of New York's rarest owls. The surrounding landscape of hayfields and pasture promises both a truly exceptional birding opportunity and a chance to contribute to the conservation of a unique and declining species, the short-eared owl.

A medium-sized owl, the short-eared is named for the small ear tufts atop its head, although these are often not visible. These owls have a distinct round, beige to white facial disk with brown and white mottling over much of the body. In flight, their most distinguishing characteristics are the bold, dark "wrist" patches, dark wingtips, and an erratic flight pattern which is often described as "moth-like." Their bark-like vocalizations, which are often heard in winter when large numbers of birds congregate, are almost unmistakable once you have heard them.

The short-eared owl is among the world's most widely distributed owls, occupying all continents except Australia and Antarctica. In New York, they often prey on small mammals, particularly the meadow vole, but will also take small birds and insects. This highly opportunistic species will sometimes congregate in great numbers in areas experiencing population explosions of small mammals. If food resources are plentiful

on wintering grounds, these areas may also be used for breeding. However, when environmental conditions such as deep snow and ice limit access to prey, owls must move on to search for better foraging grounds. Their nomadic and sometimes irruptive nature, along with their rapidly declining habitat, make targeted monitoring and research imperative to evaluating this species' status in New York State.

A bird of open country, the short-eared owl is more common in winter in New York than in summer. This is because our state is at the southern edge of its breeding range; the owl usually spends the summer breeding season further north. In his 1914 *Birds of New York*, Elon Howard Eaton called the short-eared owl "one of our commonest owls." Just six decades later, in *Birds of New York State* (1974), John Bull considered the species "a local breeder, greatly decreased in recent years." While rare breeding still occurs in the St. Lawrence and Champlain Valleys, parts of western New York, and on coastal Long Island, the species continues to decline as a breeder in New York. Distribution of this species declined by 33% between the first (1980-1985) and second (2000-2005) *Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State*. Most of these declines occurred in the marshes and coastal grasslands of Long Island's southern shore.



Grasslands are open areas dominated by herbaceous vegetation and characterized by very few trees and shrubs. Grasslands are maintained naturally by fire, flooding, and wildlife grazing, but in New York, they are predominantly maintained by agricultural practices such as hay production and livestock grazing. The long-term decline in agriculture and subsequent abandonment of farmlands in New York has led to habitat succession, from grasslands to shrublands to woodland, making it unsuitable for grassland-dependent birds.

The precipitous decline of the short-eared owl in New York and other parts of its North American range coincides with that of other grassland-dependent species such as the horned lark, upland sandpiper, and Henslow's sparrow. As land use practices have changed, grasslands have become one of the most imperiled habitats throughout New York, the Northeast, and much of North America. The reforestation of the Northeast since the peak of agricultural clearing in the early 1900s is an important factor, but threats such as development, fragmentation of habitat, and changes in agricultural practices, including conversion to row crop and early mowing, have also contributed to grassland declines.

This winter, and for the fourth consecutive year, biologists and birders will conduct coordinated surveys to document wintering hawks and owls. Surveys focus on the New York State-endangered short-eared owl and state-threatened northern harrier, but also include the rough-legged hawk, American kestrel, and snowy owl. From December through March, participants track these species in a rural area in western Washington County commonly referred to as the Washington County Grasslands. Their efforts are part of DEC's statewide Winter Raptor Monitoring Project, which aims to monitor winter raptor concentration areas and better understand species supported by grassland habitats.



Gordon Elmers

DEC currently manages more than 11,000 acres of grassland habitat on state Wildlife Management Areas...

While the collective acreage of these grasslands constitutes only a fraction of New York State's landscape, their conservation is the key to the continued existence of our short-eared owls. In addition to the volunteer-based surveys to determine whether short-eared owls

are using an area, DEC's Winter Raptor Monitoring Project also includes trapping and tracking individual owls equipped with transmitters, characterizing the habitat they frequent, and using this information to guide future conservation efforts and management activities.



Peter Nye

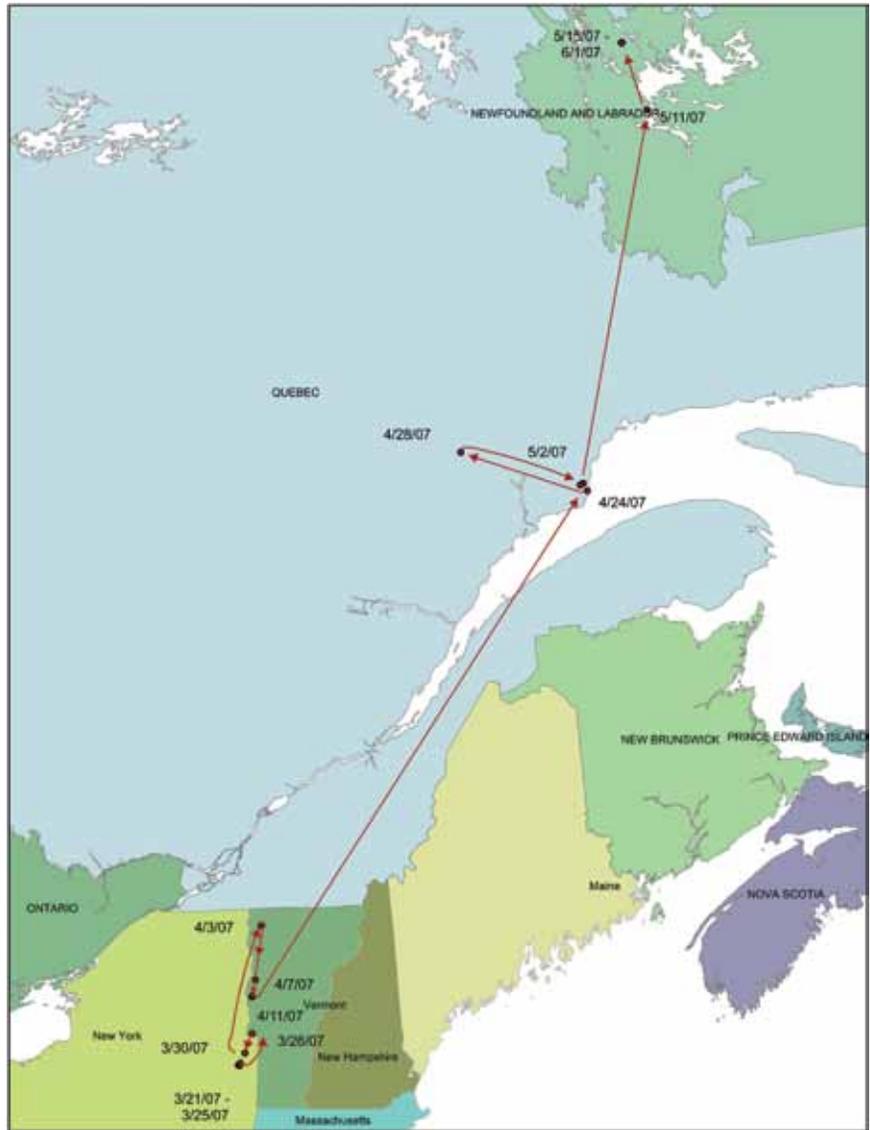
Biologists trap and examine short-eared owls as part of DEC's statewide Winter Raptor Monitoring Project. Here, a biologist examines an owl's wings.

Over the past several years, DEC staff have captured, banded, and placed transmitters on more than 70 short-eared owls. Using a variety of nets, DEC staff safely capture short-eared owls and northern harriers, determine their age and sex if possible, and gather other biological information. The short-eared owl is surprisingly docile in the hand, making processing relatively easy. Staff place a unique federal identification band on each owl's leg to facilitate reporting if it is seen again or recovered. A lightweight radio or satellite backpack-style transmitter is also placed on each owl so it can be tracked throughout the grassland complex.

Biologists use these battery-powered radio transmitters to track a bird's local movements. The batteries last for 12 to 18 months, and each transmitter has a specific radio frequency. With receivers and antennas in hand, DEC staff scan the known frequencies of radio-tagged birds and track them as they forage throughout the night. This provides valuable information on what areas the birds regularly use, and allows staff to evaluate individual bird's home ranges. Biologists can then use these data to determine what areas and habitat types are of critical importance to roosting and foraging owls. The following winter, DEC staff again scan these frequencies to see if owls have either returned to their capture area or have relocated to other parts of the state.

DEC staff also use satellite transmitters on some owls. Because of their greater range, these transmitters go a step further by providing insight into both migratory routes and locations of summer breeding grounds. Satellite transmitters can provide data for up to three years.

Biologists also assess the habitat in areas frequented by congregating owls. Biologists take specific measurements to learn about the owls' habitat needs and preferred cover types. A thorough understanding of the habitat used by owls will



Peter Nye

Peter Nye



Above: This map shows the flight pattern of an owl captured in NY, fitted with a satellite transmitter, then released.

Below: Short-eared owl fitted with transmitter.

enable biologists to prepare management plans that ensure high quality habitat for this species while also benefitting other grassland-dependent species. DEC currently manages more than 11,000 acres of grassland habitat on state Wildlife Management Areas, some of which are regularly used by short-eared owls.

As well as managing state lands, DEC also encourages private landowners to protect and manage grassland habitat on private property. The Landowner Incentive Program (LIP) gives qualifying landowners incentives to manage their property to benefit grassland birds for a minimum of five years. Since most grassland habitat in New York is privately owned, the program is an essential part of grassland conservation.

Our winter raptor work has already produced noteworthy results. In the Washington County Grasslands, telemetry data from owls led to the purchase, with help from The Nature Conservancy, of more than 250 acres of habitat as conservation grassland. This land now protects a key roosting and foraging area for both short-eared owls and northern harriers, as well as habitat for other at-risk grassland species. Satellite telemetry data have helped biologists identify migratory routes and breeding grounds of short-eared owls that winter in New York, and provided insight on different migration routes used by birds at various wintering locations.

Little is known about short-eared owls' and northern harriers' winter site fidelity (the tendency to return to the same site year after year), but this project has already contributed to the knowledge base for both species. In western New York, two owls captured one winter returned to the same location the next winter. In the Washington County Grasslands, a northern harrier was also captured in successive seasons. Documentation of this behavior highlights the importance of pro-

Scott Stoner



WINTER WILDLIFE WATCHING

Short-eared owls are crepuscular (active in low light levels), and dusk is the best time to view them. Migrating and wintering birds typically arrive in New York from mid-November to early December and depart on their spring migration from late March to late April. Short-eared owls respond readily to changes in environmental conditions and prey availability, so it's important to remember that site occupancy can vary year to year and throughout the season. While enjoying any wildlife viewing experience, it is important to keep a respectful distance and not to disturb wildlife. If viewing from a car, observers should pull safely off the road and respect landowner rights and privacy.



For more information about wildlife viewing opportunities, visit www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/55423.html.

For more information on the Landowner Incentive Program, visit www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/32891.html.

tecting certain wintering grounds despite these species' nomadic tendencies.

The Winter Raptor Monitoring Project has helped us better understand the needs of grassland species and to better protect the habitat that they require. While the short-eared owl is rare throughout much of New York State, if you know when and where to look, you may have an opportunity to see this magnificent bird courging over our grasslands.

Theresa Swenson and **Glenn Hewitt** are wildlife technicians in DEC's Albany office.

Author's note: This work was supported in part by State Wildlife Grants and a Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Grant awarded to DEC by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.



ClimAID

— Recommendations for adapting to a changing climate

By Jonathan Comstock

This past March, I put some snowshoes in the trunk of my car and drove to Tupper Lake to give a talk at the Wild Center. My presentation was a public prelude to a meeting of the Adirondack Climate and Energy Action Planning group (ADKCAP), and interest in it was heightened by the abnormally early snowmelt that had rendered my snowshoes useless baggage. Snowshoes would normally be required for any trail excursion in Tupper Lake in March.

In 2009, I joined a team of scientists commissioned by the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) to draft a report—called the ClimAID report—explaining our society’s vulnerability to climate change, and detailing how we might adapt to it. My role was to help with the Ecosystems and Agriculture sections, overseen by Cornell University’s David Wolfe.

Following the publishing of the report in 2011, I and many members involved in that effort have traveled across New York and the region to educate the public. People everywhere want to know what to expect from climate change and what they can do about it. I’ve met with grade-school classes, college groups, church groups, and the Science Cabaret, an informal group of people who meet reg-

ularly in Ithaca to discuss current and sometimes controversial topics in science.

Climate is fundamental to the human experience. We tend to view climate as a permanent feature, like a mountain, lake or valley, even though natural change occurs, albeit slowly. Significant shifts in climate, like going from the last ice age to our current climate, generally occur over tens of thousands of years. What concerns most scientists today is the rate of change—temperature increases projected for the next 100 years may be as dramatic as those that separate us from the last ice

age, thousands of years ago. At that pace (up to 100 times faster than the transition from the last ice age), by the year 2100 the resulting warmer temperatures could cause New York’s landscape to change from its current maple-beech-birch forests to a pine-oak woodland that is characteristic of today’s mid-south. This could mean major stand die-offs of trees due to their inability to adapt quickly enough, as well as from disease, insect outbreak, and extreme heat or drought. On the other hand, if this change were to occur much more slowly, gradual competition,



Gerard Miller

Extreme weather events cause property damage like the coastal erosion shown here on Staten Island.

recruitment and replacement could occur, one tree and one generation at a time.

One concern in such scenarios is that foreign invasive species might co-opt the transitions. By their very nature, invasive species are specialists in rapid colonization from afar, and in fast growth. Their presence might lead to entire new communities with little room for our native species, rather than the intuitive progression of southern forests shifting their range northward across the continent in a manner akin to ice-age advances and retreats.

Scientists are working to fend off these invaders. At the front line of this battle in New York State is the Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management network. PRISM consists of eight regional groups of scientists and volunteers charged with coordinating invasive species partner efforts, recruiting and training citizen volunteers, identifying and delivering education and outreach, establishing early detection monitoring networks and implementing direct eradication and control efforts.

ClimAIDreport

Commissioned by NYSERDA, the ClimAID report was released in 2011. It provides a comprehensive assessment of climate change vulnerabilities and adaptation strategies for human health, agriculture, native ecosystems, and infrastructure from transportation and communication to water management and energy production. It details likely change and evaluates possible solutions. Many earlier studies analyzed the root causes of climate change and how to reverse them. Scientists refer to those efforts as mitigation. In dealing with this worsening crisis, we need to engage in both mitigation and adaptation; that is, to hold change within manageable limits, and then deal with it effectively. The ClimAID report provides a toolbox of information, ideas and approaches for New Yorkers to deal with the climate changes we face. For more information, visit www.nyserdera.ny.gov/climaid.

Kelly Elliott, NOAA Office of Ocean Exploration



Rising sea surface temperatures and melting ice caps threaten to alter the habitat of many wildlife species.

PRISM is active across the state and could use additional support. Consider getting involved; it's a great way to actively support the wild lands we love.

As the climate changes, other vegetation, as well as the associated wildlife species, will change. Today's land managers cannot prevent a shift in species

composition, but perhaps they can help guide it. For example, we can welcome North American flora and fauna that are adapted to warmer conditions, while trying to keep out aggressive invaders from other parts of the world. We must accept that some change is inevitable, but cherish and preserve our biological heritage at the same time.

Across our state, municipal planners are trying to determine how climate change will affect their operations and infrastructure. I participated in several meetings to revise the Tompkins County Hazard Assessment, a local plan to prepare for and deal with all kinds of emergencies, from flooding to earthquake to industrial accidents. One issue discussed was the topic of more pronounced heat waves in the future, as outlined in the ClimAID report. Extreme heat accounts for more human deaths each year than does extreme cold. Heat also affects infrastructure like asphalt roads, which are more easily damaged at high temperatures. Because we can expect heat waves

Because we can expect heat waves to be more intense, planners will have to take this into consideration when outlining their future needs and responses.



The ClimAID report details a number of climate issues facing us, including more pronounced drought and heat waves in the future.

to be more intense, planners will have to take this into consideration when outlining their future needs and responses.

The agricultural community is another segment of our society wrestling with the effects of climate change. Farmers are always watching the weather and trying to make the right choices for their crops. I have found that recognition of climate change is mainstream in some groups, like the Northeast Organic Farmers Association or the Northeast Sustainable Agriculture Working Group, but many farmers are still skeptical that human activity can affect the climate. However, skepticism is overridden by realism when success depends on making the right choices: optimal planting dates are getting earlier; wet conditions during spring planting are an increasing challenge; new pest and weed problems will likely come with milder winters; and new plant varieties may prove more productive during longer, hotter growing seasons. Within the past few years, New York farmers lost crops to flooded fields from intense rainfall events one year, and then had reduced yields the next year because of midsummer droughts. Last autumn, fruit growers in many parts of New York lost most of their 2012 crop to frost damage, because an unprecedented March warm spell brought fruit trees into bloom a month earlier than usual. Frosts then killed the blossoms, so the apple crop was ruined.

These challenges have management solutions, but the solutions sometimes involve expensive adaptive strategies like new equipment. Making wise decisions in tight economic times depends in part on recognizing that past experience alone is an imperfect guide to a changing future. Luckily, the ClimAID report gives guidance on what to expect.

Overall, the impact of climate change on our natural ecosystems is likely to be more profound than that on agriculture, because natural ecosystems will largely need to adapt themselves. The projected



In 2012, a lot of New York's apple crop was lost to frost damage following an unprecedented warm spell that brought apple trees into bloom a month early.

change in climate this century would require an average range shift for all species of several hundred miles (mostly moving northward or significantly higher in elevation) across the landscape.

Can species do it on their own? For some, the answer is yes. Birds and other mobile creatures are already showing shifts in their breeding range and overwintering habitats. Not all creatures have wings, however, and for those who do successfully move with the climate, will the species they depend on for habitat and food be there, too?

In many cases the best thing we can do for these assemblages of immobile wild species is ensure that they aren't trapped in "wilderness islands" with no way to reach the next available habitat. We must manage our wild lands to retain bands of connection across the entire landscape, not just in island-like preserves. Many organizations from state and federal agencies, to non-governmental organizations like The Nature Conservancy, to local land-trusts, are working hard to achieve this, but they all need your help because they

are struggling against suburban sprawl and development. We need coherent regional plans to meld economic development with ecosystem health.

The prospect of holding climate change in check seems remote today, not because of a lack of technical ability, but because most people have not made arresting climate change a personal top priority. I'm certain that in time, driven by accumulating effects, we will demand effective action, both of ourselves and of our leaders. But how much will our climate change before that happens?

Whether wild or managed, New York's landscape faces a future of upheaval and transition. How much is saved, and what is lost will depend, in part, on each of us. Now is the time for both individual and collective action, as our choices define how society will adapt to the global changes set in motion by our energy consumption and land-use practices.

Jonathan Comstock is a research support specialist in Cornell's College of Agriculture and Life Sciences.



NASA

SUPERSTORM SANDY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

In today's society, climate change is a hot-button issue. When Superstorm Sandy smashed into the East Coast this past October, it had many back at the discussion table asking important questions, like: Was Sandy's destructive impact increased by climate change?

Hurricane development depends on many complex factors. Did climate change alter certain factors associated with Sandy (like sea surface temperatures, and the high pressure over Greenland that made the storm turn inland instead of out to sea), to cause it to become a "superstorm"? This sort of postulation is what climate scientists call "attribution"—how a specific weather event can be attributed to a particular cause in a global climate system that is very capable of producing extreme events from time to time on its own. It is one of the hardest things to do, and, in the case of Sandy, is a source of some debate. Many climate scientists view Sandy's origins as fairly typical; others think that things like the loss of arctic sea ice played an important role in the storm's development and path.

About 15% of the elevated sea surface temperatures feeding Sandy can be attributed to global warming as opposed to other regional patterns. There has also been nearly a foot of sea-level rise over the past century as the oceans have warmed. These

factors, as well as others (like peak storm surge coinciding with high tide), increased Sandy's coastal flooding and damage.

We can predict that climate change will become more important throughout the coming century as major flooding events could become relatively commonplace. This would be due, in part, to steadily rising sea temperatures, ice melt and, in this context, to an accelerating rate of sea-level rise.

The ClimAID report discusses two different projections of sea-level rise. The more conservative estimate suggests an additional two feet in sea-level rise due to the warming ocean water expanding and melting of the Greenland and Antarctic ice sheets. However, more attention is being given to the alternative idea that, even though total melting of these ice sheets will take centuries, they may melt more quickly than anticipated and could contribute to a sea-level rise of more than four feet this century.

Climate scientists continue to try to resolve the difference between these two projections. However, the rapid loss of arctic sea ice and current estimates of melt rates cause many to take higher rates more seriously. If the more dire predictors occur, and if carbon emissions continue on a high trajectory, coastal flooding events that now occur about once in a hundred years would happen as frequently as once in every 15 to 20 years.

Mongaup Valley Wildlife Management Area

Located in southeastern New York, about 75 miles northwest of New York City

A premier watchable wildlife site



Susan L. Shafer

Thomas D. Lindsay

Our national symbol, the bald eagle, is the star of this more than 10,000-acre wilderness nestled in the shadow of the Catskill Mountains, little more than an hour north of New York City. Mongaup has been designated a Bird Conservation Area by New York State because of its variety of habitats important to a diversity of bird species. The majority of the area is forested upland with a mixture of conifers and deciduous trees preferred by forest

birds. Rare floodplain forest, perched bog, and pitch-pine and oak-hickory woodland habitats are also found at Mongaup, attracting wetland birds and species that prefer sedge meadows.

In addition to eagles, several species of migrating raptors, owls, songbirds and waterfowl have been observed in this landscape of forested rolling hills, deeply dissected by streams and rivers.

Waterbodies and wetlands add to the diversity of Mongaup's landscape and wildlife. Steep, rocky slopes surround three reservoirs interconnected by the Mongaup River, which flows into the Delaware River at the area's southernmost border. Water habitats contain as many as 42 different species of fish, as well as sustaining a variety of mammals, reptiles and amphibians.



Thomas D. Lindsay



Thomas D. Lindsay

Wildlife to Watch

Mongaup hosts one of the largest bald eagle wintering sites in the state, and also supports several active eagle nests in the spring. Though bald eagles have been removed from the endangered species list, they are still considered a threatened species in New York, making Mongaup a particularly important breeding area for these iconic birds.

Other raptors you may see here include goshawks, turkey vultures, and red-tailed, red-shouldered and sparrow hawks. Most of these raptors are migratory, and best seen in the warmer months. As the sun sets, listen and look for great horned, barn, barred and screech-owls as they emerge to hunt for small mammals in forests and meadows.

Mongaup's large tracts of tall, deciduous, broad-leafed trees attract many warbler species. In particular, cerulean warblers, a "species of special concern" because

development has reduced its habitat elsewhere, can be seen here.

In spring, listen for ruffed grouse drumming in the understory, as they rapidly beat their wings to attract mates. Male American woodcock perform elaborate mating rituals near wetlands, flying high above and spiraling back down to impress females.

Mongaup is large and varied enough to support several kinds of mammals, including white-tailed deer, black bears, porcupines, gray and red foxes, raccoons, otters, beavers, mink and coyotes.



Wayne W. Jones

Visitors should be wary around rocky slopes as Mongaup harbors eastern timber rattlesnakes, a threatened species and one of New York's three species of venomous reptiles. Eastern hognose snakes, wood turtles, eastern box turtles, and marbled and Jefferson salamanders—all species of special concern—can be found here as well.



Site Features

Site Notes: Several parking areas and boat launches are provided. In winter, access is restricted to protect the wintering bald eagles from human disturbance. However, two specially constructed viewing blinds (located on County Rte. 43 and on Plank Road) enable visitors to watch the eagles. Hunting, trapping and fishing are allowed in season by permit.

Trails: Numerous trails are available for hiking, biking (where appropriate), snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. Please be aware that the area is rocky and rugged, with few amenities along the trails, but many of the views are spectacular and worth the effort.

Accessibility: Located on County Route 43 approximately 12 miles from Monticello.

Directions: The WMA is located in the towns of Bethel, Lumberland, Forestburgh, and Highland in Sullivan County, and in the town of Deer Park in Orange County. From the New York State Thruway (I-87), take the Harriman Exit 16. Go west on Route 17 to Exit 105 and take Route 42 South through Monticello. Approximately 10 miles from Monticello, take a right turn onto County Route 43 and go 2 miles.

Nearby: The Upper Delaware Scenic and Recreational River, forming the border between New York and Pennsylvania and managed by the National Park Service, is within a short drive of Mongaup Valley.

Contact: 845-256-3098;
[www.dec.ny.gov/
 outdoor/68639.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/68639.html)



DEC photo



New Fishing Regulations

New freshwater fishing regulations went into effect on October 1, 2012. The new regulations include some changes that apply to all waters in New York, while others apply only to specific waters. Highlights include changes pertaining to walleye, salmon, black bass, baitfish, and fishing gear; as well as changes allowing ice fishing on several stocked trout lakes in northern and western New York. A complete list of regulation changes can be found under “Recently Adopted Regulations (Previous Twelve Months)” on DEC’s website at www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/propregulations.html.

Grants across New York

Nearly \$1 million in grants was recently awarded to communities and organizations across the state for a variety of urban forestry projects, through the New York State Urban and Community Forestry Program, DEC Urban Foresters and volunteers from New York ReLeaf

(a program that informs people about trees). A total of 66 recipients across the state received grants to support a variety of projects involving community tree planting, tree inventories, and management plans. Recipients were chosen based on several factors, including how each project would benefit the local environment. For more information about New York State Urban and Community Forestry visit www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4957.html, and visit www.dec.ny.gov/lands/5307.html for more information about the New York ReLeaf Program.

Volunteers Wanted

If you have wild turkeys on your rural property, we want to hear from you! DEC is beginning a new turkey survival study, and we are looking for cooperating landowners in upstate New York (all of NY except NYC and Long Island) who are willing to allow turkey trapping on their property. Once turkeys are banded, they will immediately be released unharmed at the same location. This study will provide

valuable information on turkey survival rates and population size to help guide future management of this important game species. For more information on this project, send an e-mail to fwwildlf@gw.dec.state.ny.us. Put “Turkey Study” in the e-mail subject line. We’d also like to know if you see flocks of turkeys this



James Clayton

winter. Observations can be reported using the Winter Flock Survey form found on DEC’s website at: www.dec.ny.gov/animals/48756.html.

Restoring Fish

DEC and partners recently re-introduced two fish species to New York State waters. Approximately 1,200 gilt darters (2- to 3-inch long bottom feeders) were released in the Allegheny River and Oswayo Creek. In summer, male gilt darters develop striking yellow, black and green shades across their backs. Although they are found in 12 other states, to the best of our knowledge, gilt darters have been absent from New York for 75 years. Improvements to water quality and land

Isaac Szabov/Engbreitson Underwater Photography



gilt darter

use conservation practices bode well for the fish's future survival. Read more about gilt darters at www.dec.ny.gov/animals/26039.html.

In collaboration with the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey and the Great Lakes Fishery Commission, DEC recently re-introduced the "bloater fish" (a deepwater cisco) into Lake Ontario. Deepwater ciscoes were once an abundant prey fish in the lake and supported many commercial fisheries. Bloaters feed mostly on invertebrates and spawn in the winter at great depths. Overharvesting and expanding populations of invasive alewife and rainbow smelt led to the fish's decline by the mid 1900s. The bloaters' re-introduction will provide food for predators like trout and salmon, and diversify the Lake Ontario fish community. For more information about the re-introduction, visit the press release at www.dec.ny.gov/press/86806.html.



James Clayton

Programs Awarded for Excellence

Seven organizations recently received New York State Environmental Excellence Awards for outstanding commitment to environmental sustainability, social responsibility and economic viability. These DEC awards recognize those who are improving and protecting New York's environment and contributing to a healthier economy. This year's winners are: Ecovative Design, LLC (pictured with DEC Commissioner Martens) for producing bio-based, zero-waste packing material to replace traditional foam; City of Rome, for using green infrastructure in its Canopy Restoration Project Owens Corning's EcoTouch™ Insulation for using a starch-based binder in place of formaldehyde; Solar One-Green Design

Lab™ for teaching NYC school students to be better environmental stewards; Monroe County Crime Lab, whose building is the first of its kind to earn LEED Platinum Certification; The Golub Corporation (Price Chopper) for its Corporate Sustainability Model; and IBM East Fishkill for its catalytic hydrogen peroxide wastewater treatment system. For more information, and to apply for the 2013 awards, visit www.dec.ny.gov/public/945.html.

Honoring the Hudson

U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar recently added the Hudson River to the National Water Trails System. The System is designed to protect and restore the nation's rivers and other waterways, and to boost outdoor recreation along their shores. The Hudson's National Water Trail designation will shine a spotlight on the river as a recreational resource, and increase eco-tourism in the Hudson Valley, said Mark Castiglione, acting director of the Hudson River Valley Greenway and National Heritage Area. Check out RiverNet e-news at www.dec.ny.gov/lands/86223.html for more details.



Susan Shafer



Extraordinary Grouping

This photo was taken in our backyard last September. It's not often you get a shot like this. During one week we had six or seven bears, two bucks, and two does eating acorns. The most fun was watching the bear cubs climb trees to shake the acorns out. Sometimes they walked out on the branches as far as they could and then snapped the branch off to get the acorns. After they left, it looked like a wind storm went through.

Helene Goodman

North Creek, Warren County

What an amazing photo! We agree: you've captured a rare sight, indeed. It is interesting to note that while the interaction between the deer and bears seems relaxed at first blush, the posture of both the buck and sow indicate they are on alert.

—Conservationist staff



Weasel Meets Snowman

My husband and I are wondering what type of weasel this is and why it isn't white.

Laura Snell

Malta, Saratoga County

This is an adult long-tailed weasel, and you are right in stating it is not in typical winter pelage. As with most furbearers, their coats vary from animal to animal. Generally speaking, weasel populations in the south do not exhibit the white coloration in the winter, whereas in the north, they usually do. Your encounter could be an example of localized natural selection. For example, during winters where snow accumulation is minimal, animals that change to white may have a harder time avoiding mortality, such as predation, where the ones that maintain the brown pelage may have the advantage of increased survivorship based on the lack of snow, and thereby avoid predation.

—William Hoffman, DEC Fish and Wildlife Technician

Deer Tree

My sons and I were walking along our property last spring when I noticed something unusual high in a tree. I took a closer look, and it turned out to be a deer hoof. I think the only way it could have gotten there is if an animal dragged it up to gnaw on, but I would like to hear other theories as well.

Tom Smith

Duanesburg, Schenectady County



Interesting sight! The deer was most likely scavenged by an animal and the hoof taken away. For instance, a raccoon may have brought it up the tree for safe keeping. That, or someone is "pulling your leg"!

—Michael Matthews, retired DEC Sportsman Education Coordinator



Write to us

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Posing Owl

I took this photo on a farm in Yates of what I believe is a juvenile, male snowy owl.

Aaron Luczak
Alden, Erie County



Great photo! We checked with DEC biologists, and based on the photo, we believe the owl is either a mature female or immature male snowy owl.

—Conservationist staff

Back to Life

I was at Bear Creek Harbor on Lake Ontario photographing some trout anglers when one of the gents said a garter snake was floating in the creek. He tossed it to shore and I immediately put the snake in a plastic container and set it on my vehicle’s dashboard. I put on the defroster and within five minutes, I could see life coming back into the snake! I then brought it back to my mare’s hay storage barn where I know other garters overwinter in the organic heat of the hay. I sure hope it fared well!

Laurie Dirx
Ontario, Wayne County



Cold-blooded animals, most garter snakes spend the winter with other garters tucked away under large rocks or inside mammal burrows. We wondered how the snake ended up in the river, so we asked our biologists who told us that there could be a number of explanations. For instance: the snake’s hibernation site may have been flooded; a brief spell of warmer weather may have prompted it to emerge; or it may even have been stressed by a disease. Biologists also mentioned that it’s probably best not to interfere with the natural course of events, and that a license is required to possess or move wildlife.

—Conservationist staff

What “Grand Canyon?”

After reading “Grand Canyon of the East” about Letchworth State Park in the October 2012 issue, I felt it would have been appropriate to include a photo that more accurately illustrated that title. Anyone not familiar with Mr. Letchworth’s gift would have no indication as to why the name was used.

Jack Wannewetsch
Holley, Orleans County

We agree. That’s why we’re including this photo by New York-based photographer, Ray Minnick.

—Conservationist staff

Ray Minnick



Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

John Bulmer

Let it Snow by Eileen Stegemann

There's nothing better than a cold, clear, snow-covered winter day...at least according to my husband. Winter is his idea of heaven—a time to grab one of his many pairs of cross-country skis (all necessary, so I'm told, as one needs to match the correct ski to the location and current weather conditions) and head outside. And while my ideal day runs more in the low to mid-60s temperature range, and I'd prefer to be out canoeing and fishing, I have to admit that I thoroughly enjoy cross-country skiing on a beautiful winter day.

I was lucky—the first time I went cross-country skiing was one of those picture-perfect, almost magical, winter days. The sky was bright-blue, the temperature in the low 30s (perfect for cross-country as you often work up a sweat),

Most of the time we're looking around—we've seen deer, fox, hawks and owls, as well as a myriad of animal tracks...

and more than a foot of fresh snow had fallen the night before, blanketing everything in a thick layer of white. It was truly a winter wonderland. And despite the fact that I had never skied before and spent probably just as much time on the ground as I did upright on my skis, I couldn't stop smiling.

But it hasn't always been picture-perfect, and I confess that there have been many times when I have been less than enamored with the sport. This was especially true during my early skiing years when I would try and keep up with my husband and friends (all good, strong, seasoned skiers who were much faster—and in the case of downhills, much

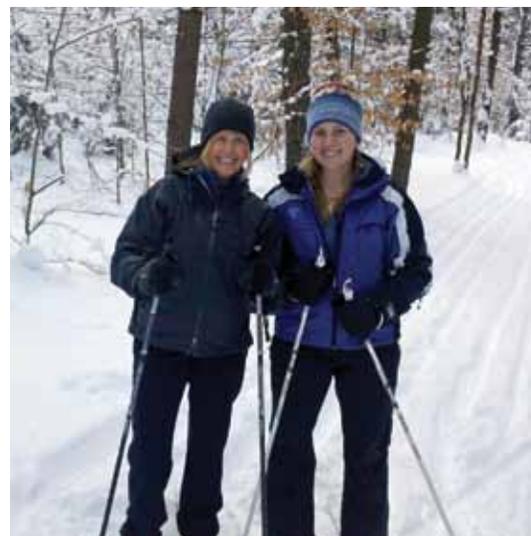
braver—than me). Let's just say that it wasn't always pretty and didn't always end well. It wasn't until I realized that it was okay to go at my own pace and that I could walk down challenging slopes (skis are removable, after all) that I truly fell in love with the sport.

When we started a family, we brought the kids along—first in a backpack, and then on their own skis. It's a great winter family outdoor activity, and while it required patience early on, it wasn't long before the kids were outskiing us (okay, maybe just me).

Cross-country skiing is also a great workout! But since you can choose the terrain (e.g. with or without hills), and set your own pace, you can make your ski as hard or easy as you'd like. While my

husband and son like to go fast and do lots of hills, my daughter and I generally like to take it a bit more slowly. Most of the time we're looking around—we've seen deer, fox, hawks and owls, as well as a myriad of animal tracks (including moose)—but there are always one or two flat stretches where she and I do a fast sprint! To me, that's the beauty of cross-country skiing: you can go as fast or as slow as you wish. Either way, you're still getting great exercise.

New York has countless places to cross-country ski—from ski centers with equipment rentals and groomed trails (with trail fees), to state or county lands and parks where you bring your own gear



The author and her daughter

and have to break your own trail. Golf courses that allow skiing make excellent cross-country ski sites; some even have groomed trails. My family also enjoys exploring the woods and fields near our house. There's something fun about strapping on a pair of skis (or snowshoes) and going right out the front door.

While a part of me longs for warmer days at this time of year, I celebrate blue-sky days with fresh snowfalls when I can take out my cross-country skis and head into the woods. (Just don't tell my husband or he'll want to go every day!)

Eileen Stegemann is assistant editor for *Conservationist*.

Author's note: Check out DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/353.html for places to ski.

Natural Storm Protection



Susan Shafer

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See pg. 18

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