

Ansel Adams | Parks in Winter | Outdoors Women

NEW YORK STATE
Conservationist

FEBRUARY 2014

New York is
OPEN
in Winter





Dear Reader,

Under Governor Cuomo’s New York Open for Fishing and Hunting initiative, DEC recently unveiled its new, more convenient electronic licensing system. As part of this initiative, the Governor also announced reduced sporting license fees, expanded seasons and new three- and five-year hunting and fishing licenses.

In January, Governor Cuomo introduced the new Adventure License, a driver’s license that allows the owner to proudly display his or her commitment to outdoor recreation with icons representing lifetime hunting or fishing licenses, as well as the Boater Safety Certification and State Parks’ new Lifetime Empire Passport. Now you can choose to carry just one, multi-purpose license. Learn more about the optional NYS Adventure License at www.licensecenter.ny.gov.

Governor Cuomo also has announced plans to expand sporting and outdoor recreation on an additional 380,000 acres of existing State and easement lands through the creation of 50 new land access projects. These projects include new and improved boat launches, bird watching areas, trails, hunting blinds, access for people of all abilities, and more. Under these many new initiatives, sporting and outdoor recreation opportunities in New York State have never been better.

If you prefer indoor exploration in the winter months, now is the perfect time to visit a local museum. Museums play a critical role in public education, and one can learn a great deal about our natural world by visiting museums such as the American Museum of Natural History in New York City (profiled in our December 2012 issue), the NYS Museum in Albany, and The Wild Center in Tupper Lake (profiled in our October 2013 issue). And as you will see in this issue, The Hyde Collection in Glens Falls is exhibiting a collection of Ansel Adams’s early works this winter.

Indoors or out, wild or curated, take a little time to sample some of the many new and exciting winter experiences available in the great state of New York!

Regards,
Commissioner Joe Martens

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Maple sugaring at DEC's
Five River's Environmental
Education Center.



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Susan L. Shafer

February 2014 Volume 68, Number 4

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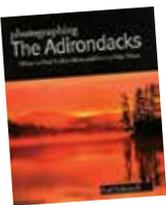
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Front cover: Rocky Mountain overlooking Fourth Lake by Carl Heilman II | **Back cover:** Ansel Adams (see back cover for photo credit)





Photographing THE ADIRONDACKS



Text adapted from *Photographing the Adirondacks—Where to Find Perfect Shots and How to Take Them* by Carl Heilman II, available from The Countryman Press at www.countrymanpress.com.

For as long as I can remember, the spectacular Adirondack Park region has been in my blood. My grandfather bought property there in the early 1950s. As a child, I would travel to the Park from southern Pennsylvania with my parents, who later bought property there as well.

After moving to the Adirondack region full-time in the early 1970s, I began hiking and exploring the mountains.

It was during my first winter hike in the High Peaks, while snowshoeing up Algonquin peak, that I was inspired to pick up my first camera (a Minolta SRT 101) to try and capture on film the sense of wonder I felt. It was many rolls of film later before I began to understand the dynamics of composition and light, as well as the principles of aperture and shutter, and was able to capture images that evoked a sense of place.

Decades later, I'm still seeing new angles and places, and I continue to marvel at the diversity of light, moods, textures and drama of the Adirondack landscape. While some locations are physically more dramatic than others, they all have a wild, rugged beauty, and I enjoy every place I've been.

The charm of the Adirondacks comes from its spectacular combination of lakes, mountains and waterways. The drama

Above: Hornbeck canoe along the shore of Henderson Lake
Facing page: Sunset over the Moose River from the Green Bridge, Thendara



comes from the interplay of the four seasons, mixed with weather conditions that arrive from places as diverse as the Arctic, the Great Lakes, the continental U.S., and the Gulf Stream in the Atlantic Ocean. This mix of weather conditions throughout the year offers unique photographic opportunities.

To really absorb the Adirondack mystique, you should paddle a wild lake on a moonlit night with loons calling to one another under the amazing canopy of stars. Or view the spectacle of an Adirondack fall—hillsides glowing red, crimson and gold in “magic hour” light when the sun is low in the sky and near the horizon. Experience the solitude of winter on a remote snowcapped peak, or relax in the spray of a backcountry waterfall, rainbows dancing in the mist. It won’t take long for you to succumb to the magic elixir of the area.



High peaks from Clear Pond on the Elk Lake Lodge private preserve



Rustic architecture at Great Camp Sagamore

New York's Adirondack Park offers some of the most striking and dramatic natural features to be found anywhere in North America.

So it's no small wonder that photographing the Adirondacks is my passion. Today I take almost exclusively digital images, and generally work with only four basic features on my camera: aperture priority mode, shutter priority mode, ISO setting, and exposure compensation. The first two are used for specific creative options, while the last two help adjust the exposure. Making use of the camera's automatic metering settings allow for greater personal creativity. It allows you to put more thought into composition rather than the camera settings and mechanics.

Composing a shot is an art, and every person sees each scene in his or her own way. However, it does help if there is an effective tonal balance to the details that help draw the eye throughout the photograph. You need a dynamic balance of contrasts and colors to keep the eye moving across an image. If a picture doesn't seem to be working, change the perspective or look for another shot. Walking a little farther down the trail, going to the next bend in the road, or waiting for the light to change will open up many new possibilities.

I carry a range of lenses with me (ultrawide to telephoto, and a fish-eye and macro) as well as a sturdy, adjustable tripod. If I'm heading into the back country, I carry a comfortable backpack to hold all my camera equipment, as well as hiking gear, food, water, first aid kit and emergency gear. Being mindful of the weather is essential, and I make sure to dress in layers so I can easily adjust to any changing weather conditions.

Weather in the Adirondacks can range from clear and vibrant skies where you can view distant mountain tops, to thick pea soup fog where you can hardly see a few feet ahead of you. But no matter

Cedars and bluets at the base of Buttermilk Falls on the Raquette River







the day, all lighting is good for photography—it's just a matter of deciding which subjects and type of imagery work best in the light at hand. Every type of light enhances a subject differently.

All four seasons in the Adirondacks have their own charm. Spring is a subtle season as foliage emerges and leaves transition from gentle to more vibrant shades. Summer has blue waters and deep-green forested mountains, and summer storms bring fog, mist and rainbows. Fall is visually spectacular with brilliant colors and frosty mornings with occasional snowfalls that decorate the colorful leaves and mountain peaks with a delicate white icing. Winter comes early and stays late

in the Adirondacks. It covers the dramatic landscape in a beautiful blanket of white that provides the photographer with stark contrasts.

All in all, New York's Adirondack Park offers some of the most striking and dramatic natural features to be found anywhere in North America. And no matter how long you are here, there is always a new place to explore and the photo possibilities are endless.

Carl Heilman II is an award-winning outdoor photographer who specializes in New York State and Adirondack landscapes. To see more of his incredible photos, and to learn how to attend one of his nature photography workshops, check out his website at www.carlheilman.com.



If you are interested in picking up some additional photo techniques, check out Carl's latest how-to book *101 Top Tips for Digital Landscape Photography* or his earlier book *The Landscape Photography Field Guide*, both available online.

Opposite page: Lines and tonal contrasts lead the eye from one subject to another in an image



Winter Fun

at New York's State Parks

There's no reason to think it's off-season

By Wendy Gibson

The dog days of last summer are a distant memory, but many intrepid New Yorkers thrive in winter and are eager for falling temperatures and continued snowfalls. To these hardy adventurers, a few extra layers of clothing combined with the snowy terrain of parklands, and some gear thrown in for good measure, is a winning recipe for fitness, togetherness and outdoor fun.

In fact, a number of New York's 179 state parks remain open for activity this time of year, offering a winter wonderland in which to experience nature's splendor. From cold-weather sports to the quiet beauty of snow-covered landscapes, snowshoe treks to winter carnivals, skating rinks to seal walks, New York State Parks are popular destinations for winter recreation and the perfect remedy for cabin fever.

Allegany State Park is the largest state park in New York at 65,000 acres, and this flagship property offers four seasons of adventure. Many outdoor enthusiasts consider Allegany to be a premier winter destination for cold-weather fun in the northeast. Frequent lake-effect snow covers the park's higher terrain in beautiful blankets of white. Allegany features 18 trails with 80 miles of hiking

Above: Snowshoeing, pictured here at Moreau Lake State Park, is a great winter recreational activity.



With 90 miles of groomed trails, Allegany State Park is a snowmobiler's winter paradise.

and snowshoeing, more than 25 miles of cross-country skiing, and 90 miles of groomed snowmobile trails. While the mercury may be dropping, the park heats up as families enjoy winter activities and snow-based recreation in this vast, near wilderness setting. Convenient and affordable winter lodging options at the park include heated cabins and cottages available for rent.

With winterized cabins and the incredibly scenic Genesee Valley gorge as a backdrop, Letchworth State Park is another ideal destination for winter sports. Winter activities include snow tubing, cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. Families can also rent the Maplewood Lodge, located in the middle of the park near the entrance to the Highbanks Camping Area. A popular choice for snowmobilers, it connects to the New York State snowmobile trail system.

The three-bedroom lodge sleeps up to eight people and consists of a furnished kitchen, living room with cozy fireplace, dining room and a full-size bath and powder room.

Wellesley Island State Park along the St. Lawrence Seaway in the Thousand Islands is another prime location with winterized accommodations to host weekend getaways or an impromptu overnight when available. The park's Minna Anthony Common Nature Center is open year-round and includes nine miles of hiking trails, and five miles of cross-country ski and snowshoe trails. During the winter months, visitors can warm up by the fireplace and meet other explorers. The trails have a diversity of habitats, including field, forest, wetlands and views of the St. Lawrence River.

In Cooperstown, Glimmerglass State Park offers a variety of child-friendly



Tom Hughes

Winter fun at state parks doesn't need to be limited to just skiing and snowshoeing. Many parks, such as Glimmerglass State Park, offer opportunities for other activities such as ice fishing.

activities such as tubing, ice skating and winter trail sports. Reserve one of the cottages that sleeps eight at nearby Betty and Wilbur Davis State Park, and bring the whole family to enjoy a day of snowmobiling.



John Rozell

Spend a day cross-country skiing at one of the state's many parks, and then warm up at one of the many options for lodging, like a cozy cottage at the Betty and Wilbur Davis State Park (inset).

In and around the Capital District, several state parks including Moreau Lake, Grafton Lakes, and Schodack Island have activities and events such as regular guided snowshoe hikes, skating and weekly bonfires, winter festivals, ice fishing, cross-country skiing and winter nature programs. While these parks do not offer accommodations, a range of lodging is available nearby.

For upscale lodging options within a few hours' drive of New York City, Saratoga Spa and Bear Mountain State Parks each feature luxury accommodations, a restaurant and a spa set among properties steeped in a long tradition of year-round hospitality. The blazing fire at Saratoga's

warming hut offers respite from a day hitting the groomed cross-country skiing and snowshoeing trails, or skating on one of the park's rinks. And visitors can soothe those tired muscles with a mineral bath and treatment at the Gideon Putnam Resort and Spa located on this national historic landmark property. Farther south in the Hudson Valley, Bear Mountain State Park is located in the Hudson Highlands and draws many families from the tri-state area to its renovated Bear Mountain Inn and popular skating rink amidst expansive views.

For city-dwellers or visitors to New York, Riverbank State Park in Manhattan, built on a rooftop along the Hudson River, features a covered, outdoor ice rink that draws skaters young and old. Out on Long Island, the annual 5K run series is

held at multiple state parks in the region throughout the winter. For a slightly slower pace, visitors can "meet the locals" with a guided seal walk at Jones Beach and Montauk Point State Parks and learn more about these favorite park residents and their habitat.

So if the long days of winter are making you feel cooped-up, head outside. There is no "off-season" for a number of the state's parks, and every reason to get outside and embrace all types of cold-weather recreation among the wintry landscapes.

For more information on the various parks, visit <http://nysparks.com>.

Wendy Gibson heads the marketing and promotions unit in the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation office in Albany.



Winter Fun is Everywhere!

Visitors enjoy a horse-drawn wagon ride at Grafton Lakes State Park.

In addition to New York's wonderful state park system, other municipal, state and federal properties, including city parks, state forests, wildlife management areas, and national wildlife refuges also offer boardwalks, trails, forested roads, and a variety of field, forest and fens in which to frolic.

The following two DEC environmental education centers run outdoor programs year-round:

Five Rivers

With more than 450 acres of fields, forests and wetlands, and 10 miles of trails, Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, just outside of Delmar in Albany County, offers people of all ages a rich variety of opportunities to encounter nature directly throughout the year. During winter, snowshoes are available for rent when conditions are appropriate, and a visit to the bird feeding station is always popular with visitors. Join us on Feb. 15th for our Great Backyard Bird Count when birders across North America tally birds in their yard or local parks. Visit us any Saturday afternoon in March for an introduction to maple sugaring, where you'll get to twirl a brace drill, pound a spile, inspect the sap flow in our sugarbush, enjoy the aroma of sap boiling down in our evaporator, and take the maple taste test. Check out www.dec.ny.gov/education/1835.html for more more information.

For those seeking a more rustic experience, visit any of the nearly 790,000 acres of state forests found across the state. While these areas contain few to no amenities, they offer you the chance to enjoy the state's stunning winter vistas, often in relative solitude. There are a number of cross-country ski trails within DEC managed forests, for both the novice and intermediate cross-country skier, and snowshoers and hikers can enjoy hundreds of hiking trails on state lands.

Prior to heading outdoors in the winter, make sure you are properly prepared for the weather. Carry extra gloves, hat and socks, and be sure to bring water, a snack, map, compass, whistle, waterproof matches, and first aid kit. Also, dress in layers. As always, make sure you tell someone your planned route and timing. For more safety tips, check DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/28708.html

Reinstein Woods

Located in Depew, Reinstein Woods is a unique 292-acre complex of forests, ponds and wetlands surrounded by suburban development. Reinstein Woods offers families and people of all ages a variety of opportunities to explore and learn about nature. In addition to free guided tours of the woods, DEC offers a variety of special programs throughout the winter months, including snowshoe and ski adventures, as well as winter walks. Visitors may rent snowshoes and skis at the education center. For more information, including a list of events, check out our website at: www.dec.ny.gov/education/1837.html



The American Landscape through the Lens of
ANSEL ADAMS



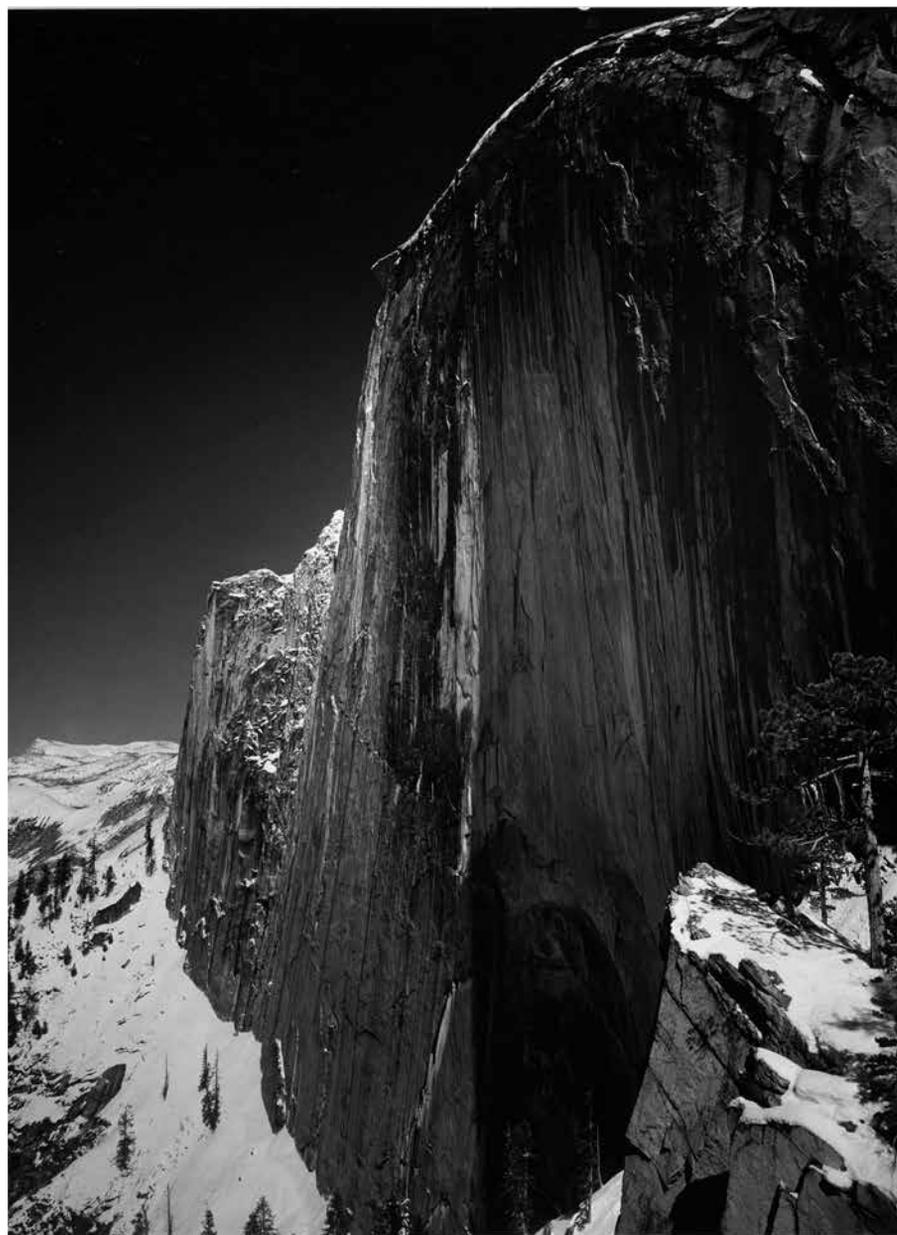
*Pine Forest in Snow, 1933, vintage silver gelatin print,
20 x 16 in., New York: Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith
Hochberg, ©2013 The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust*

Also known as “Trees and Snow,” this photo captures the purity of the icy season in an untouched Yosemite National Park forest. Adams photographed several images of freshly fallen snow on trees; people no doubt recognize many as belonging to Adams due to their familiar stark contrast of white against black.

Text adapted from: The Hyde Collection exhibit "Ansel Adams: Early Works"; "Ansel Adams Biography" by William Turnage, for Oxford University Press; the Biography Channel; and the Ansel Adams Gallery, Yosemite National Park, California

Sweeping landscapes; breathtaking black-and-whites; Ansel Adams is probably best-remembered for his detailed images of the American West. Throughout his life, Adams worked as a commercial photographer for employers such as the National Park Service, Kodak, and *Life* magazine; he also partnered with notable artists including Dorothea Lange, Paul Strand and Georgia O’Keeffe. His technical skill was unmatched; he even developed a complex method of controlling film exposure and development called the “zone system.” His mastery of his craft is to be revered, but the photographer should also be remembered for his dedication to the environment.

Born in San Francisco in 1902, Ansel Adams grew up amid the sand dunes of Northern California, where his love of nature was born. In 1919, he joined the Sierra Club and became friends with a lot of the members—many, the founders of America’s fledgling conservation movement.



Monolith, the Face of Half-Dome, 1927, vintage silver gelatin print, 18 x 14 in., New York: Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg. ©2013 The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust

This is the best-known photo from Adams’s *Parmelian Prints of the High Sierras* portfolio, which consists of 18 prints. During trips to the High Sierras, he captured large-format, black-and-white images of many of the region’s well-known features, including Kings Canyon, Muir Gorge, and the pinnacles at the headwaters of Kings River.



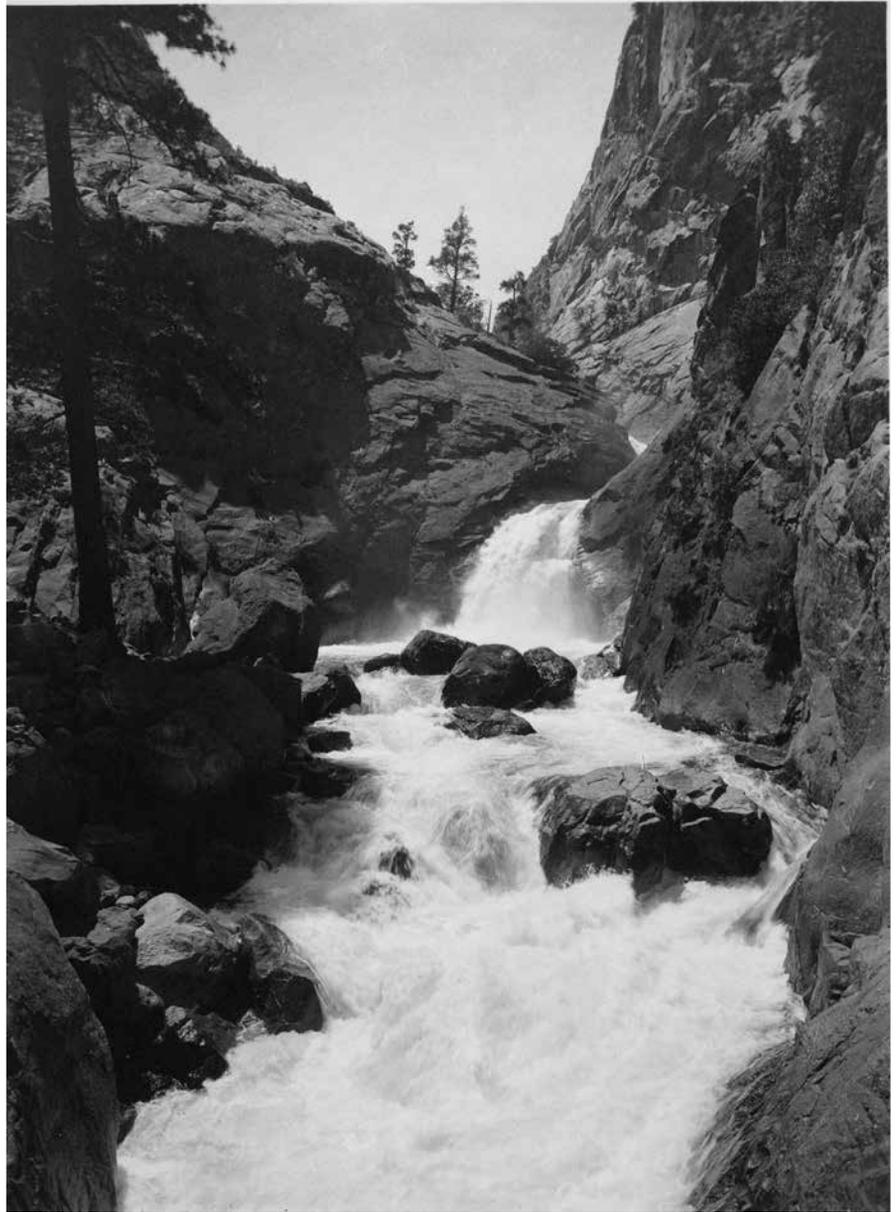
Moonrise, Hernandez, New Mexico, ca. 1941, vintage silver gelatin print, 16 x 20 in., New York: Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg, ©2013 The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust

In Adams's own words: "I had been photographing in the Chama Valley, north of Santa Fe. I made a few passable negatives that day and had several exasperating trials with subjects that would not

bend to visualization... But defeat comes occasionally to all photographers, as to all politicians, and there is no use moaning about it. We were sailing southward along the highway not far from Espanola when I glanced to the left and saw an extraordinary situation—an inevitable photograph! I almost ditched the car and rushed to set up my 8×10 camera. I was yelling to my companions to bring me things from the car..."

The group spent summers hiking, usually in the Sierra Nevada, or what John Muir called the “Range of Light.” Adams was the photographer for these outings, and during one of these hikes, he photographed *Monolith, the Face of Half Dome*. This photo would be the stand-out piece of his first portfolio, *Parmelian Prints of the High Sierras*, published in 1927.

During the 1930s, Adams moved toward the straight, unmanipulated photography for which he is well-known. He also cofounded the short-lived Group f/64 with Imogen Cunningham, Edward Weston and Willard Van Dyke, whose sharp-focused images are oft-associated with this style of photography. During this time, Adams traveled to New York and met photographer Alfred Stieglitz, an artist whose work and philosophy Adams greatly admired. In 1936, Stieglitz featured Adams’s images in a one-man show at his gallery, An American Place.



Roaring River Falls, ca. 1925, vintage silver gelatin print, 18 x 14 in., New York: Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg, ©2013 The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust

In 1934, Ansel Adams was elected to the Sierra Club Board of Directors, which allowed him to play a key role in environmental policy in America for 37 years. In '34, he went to Washington, D.C., to lobby for Kings Canyon, Sierra Nevada to be made a national park. There, he made a strong impression with his portfolio of photographs—including this photo of Roaring River Falls in Kings Canyon, which is from his first portfolio, *Parmelian Prints of the High Sierras*. Congress established Kings Canyon National Park in 1940.

Over the years, Ansel Adams attended countless meetings and wrote letters in support of conservation reform. He fought for new parks and wilderness areas, for the Wilderness Act, for wild Alaska and the Big Sur coast of central California, for endangered species, and

for clean air and water. He believed in both the possibility and the probability of humankind living in harmony with its environment. His voice was powerful, but perhaps his greatest influence came from his photography. His images became the very icons of wild America.



From January 25–April 20, 2014, The Hyde Collection in Glens Falls is showcasing 40 early works by American landscape photographer Ansel Adams in its exhibit, *Ansel Adams: Early Works*. The exhibition highlights key images by Adams, from the 1920-1950s, particularly illustrating the evolution of his style; from the warm-toned, painterly images of the 1920s, to the sharp-focused “straight photography” work in the 1930s; and after the War, toward a cooler, higher-contrast style. The pieces are part of the Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg, and the exhibition is organized by art2art Circulating Exhibitions.

The Hyde Collection is located at 161 Warren Street, Glens Falls and is open Tuesday-Saturday; closed Mondays and most national holidays. The entire Museum is handicapped accessible. There is a small admission fee; check the website at www.hydecollection.org for pricing, hours and directions.



Marion Lake, 1925, vintage silver gelatin print, 14 x 18 in., New York: Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg, ©2013 The Ansel Adams Publishing Rights Trust

This photo is also from Adams’s first portfolio published in 1927. Marion Lake was named in 1902 by Joseph Nisbet LeConte, a charter member of the Sierra Club, for his wife Helen Marion Gompertz LeConte, while they were on a pioneering trip up Cartridge Creek in Kings Canyon, Sierra Nevada.

Editor’s Note: While we are thrilled to share some of Ansel Adams’s stunning work with our readers, the actual prints are even more spectacular when viewed in person. So be sure to check out Ansel Adams: Early Works on display at the Hyde Collection in Glens Falls (details in sidebar to the right).



Carl Heilman II

On Patrol

Real stories from Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers in the field

Contributed by ECO Lt. Liza Bobseine and Forest Ranger Capt. Stephen Scherry

Surprise Visitor—Broome County

Residents at Willow Point Nursing Home in Vestal got a surprise when a white-tailed deer crashed through a window at the facility. The deer sustained injuries from the broken glass and damaged the office in which it was confined. Fortunately, Lt. Ric Warner and ECO Andy McCormick were able to tranquilize the deer and safely remove it from the building.

Not Passing the Bucks—Delaware County

ECO Vern Bauer received several complaints about the driver of a red pickup truck hunting from the road in Fleischmanns during archery season. While on patrol, ECO Bauer noticed two red pickups in a residential driveway. He pulled in to speak with two men he had seen from the road. As Officer Bauer approached, he observed the men field dressing a nine-point buck; a ten-point buck was nearby. ECO Bauer interviewed the men, who said they had taken the deer with bows. However, their story quickly fell apart when Bauer found gunshot wounds in both bucks. Upon further investigation, it was revealed that the father of one of the men had shot the bucks two days earlier—one in the Town of Shandaken, Ulster County, and the other in the Town of Halcott, Greene County. ECO Bauer seized the bucks and a .22 caliber rifle, and interviewed the shooter, who provided a written statement and showed the officer where he had shot the bucks. The man was subsequently charged with two counts of killing a deer with a gun during bow season and two counts of hunting deer with rimfire ammunition.



LOST!—Essex County

One evening, at the Johns Brook Outpost, hikers reported having heard cries for help. Ranger Scott VanLaer responded and soon found two subjects not far away. They had been hiking the Gothics but became disoriented as darkness fell. The 18-year-old female was dehydrated and had blisters on her feet, and the 28-year-old male had

fallen. Ranger VanLaer quickly assessed their condition and gave them food and drink. When they had recovered sufficiently, he loaned them headlamps to help them return to their vehicle.

Cardinal Sins—Bronx County

ECO Eric Dowling received an anonymous call that an individual was trapping cardinals at his house in the South Bronx. The complainant gave specific information, including the individual's name and address, the number of birds, and how the individual was trapping them. When ECOs Dowling and Nathan Favreau went to the person's home, many species of birds that are legal to possess were caged on a porch. After obtaining the homeowner's permission, the officers entered the backyard and found six male and four female northern cardinals caged separately. A caged mockingbird also was found in a shed. The owner was issued a summons for illegal possession of songbirds, which are protected. After the birds were determined to be healthy, they were released back into the wild.



ASK the ECO

Q: When ice fishing, must I put my name and address on all my tip-ups?

A: Yes. The law requires that you write your name and address on all ice fishing tip-ups you have in use.



Kelly Stang



BECOMING *Outdoors* WOMEN

By Debbie Jackson and
Gloria Van Duyne

photos courtesy of Becoming an Outdoors-Woman

Fishing, shooting, archery, hunting, camping, canoeing, outdoor photography, map and compass, survival and outdoor cooking. These are just a few of the skills that women who attend a Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) workshop can learn.

For the past twenty years, the BOW program has been successfully teaching women such outdoor skills. Participants rave about the program, which was established to teach women skills they might otherwise never have the opportunity to learn.

These “workshops have really changed my life,” said one participant. “I [now] participate in so many activities that I never would have tried otherwise. My husband doesn’t hunt or fish, so when I go out to do these things I’m alone and the education I got here gave me the start I needed to get going and continue enjoying these activities.”

Another participant summed it up by saying: “It is a life experience! I wanted to learn skills that my husband, brother and father never had a chance to teach me. And to challenge myself without the guys around, I felt this was my chance.”

Recently, two DEC staff attended a BOW weekend workshop. Here are their stories, in their own words.



BOW participants learning some basic shooting skills

Debbie Jackson:

I love being outdoors. Whether it's backpacking, camping, hiking, canoeing or kayaking; just being in nature replenishes me. My husband and I have shared those experiences with our kids and some of our favorite memories are being outdoors together. The children are now grown, and my husband and I still camp and kayak, but I also enjoy hanging out with my female friends.

For years, my office has posted information about the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program, advertising upcoming workshops. So, when my friend Terry Laibach suggested we go, I agreed. Here was a great opportunity to be outside, learn new things, get together with Terry, and make some new friends.

When I first received the list of sessions, I was a little overwhelmed. From archery and fishing, to reading a compass and wilderness first aid; there were so many choices, and they all looked good. It took me awhile, but I finally made my selections.

The workshop was held at Silver Bay on beautiful Lake George in the Adirondacks. When I first arrived, I was immediately impressed with the number of women there. They ranged in age from late teens to 80s, and were from all walks of life. Some were sisters, some were multi-generations (mothers, daughters, granddaughters), some were friends, and others came alone. But they all had one thing in common: They were looking for new outdoor adventures and experiences!

People running the program were warm and friendly, and we quickly jumped right into the first session. I had signed up for Backpack Camping, hoping to get ideas on how to lighten my load (I hate to admit it, but I'm getting older). Our group was incredibly diverse. There were young and old women, city dwellers and rural residents, newbie campers and seasoned hikers, and everything in between.



Silver Bay on Lake George provides a beautiful setting for BOW participants.



With the skills she gained in her Map and Compass class, Debbie Jackson feels confident of her ability to navigate in the wilderness.

The session was great! Our instructor, Leslie Surprenant gave us a lot of good information and even had a summary hand-out so we didn't have to take a lot of notes.

My next class was Map and Compass. I thought this would be a good choice since I like to hike, but rely way too much

on my husband's navigational skills. I wasn't disappointed. The instructors, Sheila and Sonny Young, provided classroom and outdoor training, and I learned a lot. In fact, I'm confident that with a little more practice, I could use a map and compass to find my way around any deep woods!

The author in her crossbow class.



I have to say my favorite session was Crossbow. With no experience in archery, I was a newbie. But our instructor Chuck Dente was great. He made us all feel comfortable with the crossbow, and provided interesting targets to shoot for. We had a blast hitting the targets and were impressed by the strength we didn't know we had!

To top off a fun and busy day, there were more activities at night. Since Terry took different sessions, we exchanged stories on our way to the evening festivities. Both of us thoroughly enjoyed our classes, and discussed coming back to take others.

On our last night we were treated to two slide shows: "20-Year Anniversary" and "You Were There." Everyone enjoyed the shows, especially the second one which featured photos from that weekend. It was entertaining to see ourselves learning and having fun.

I couldn't believe how fast the weekend went, and I am already making plans for next year. I'm hoping to try something way out of my comfort zone and want to take a rifle course. Having never handled a gun before, I can't think of a better environment to try it in—great instructors giving everyone the confidence to try!

Gloria Van Duyne:

Ever since I read *The Omnivore's Dilemma* by Michael Pollan, I wanted to procure meat for my table. I like eating meat, including venison, and thought it would be a good experience to harvest



Shooting sports classes are led by certified instructors who stress safety.

it myself. However, I did not grow up in a hunting family, and needed someone to teach me about guns and gun safety, as well as get my hunter education certificate.

Enter BOW.

I had heard from other BOW workshop graduates that it was a great experience. So when I learned that I could earn my hunter education certificate and practice handling a gun at a BOW event, I decided to take the workshop as a birthday present to myself.

Upon arrival, everyone seemed open and friendly, and we quickly got to know each other. Women came from all over

the state—from NYC to Buffalo, and way up north near the St. Lawrence River. I came alone, but others brought friends and family members.

I had signed up for the Beginning Rifle, Beginning Shotgun, Field Dressing Game, and Hunter Education classes. Because I was working toward getting my hunter education certificate, I needed to study online materials at the International Hunter Education Association's website (<http://homestudy.ihea.com/>) prior to my classes. The pre-work took about 12 hours, and covered a myriad of topics, including types of guns, gun parts, how to make sure a firearm is unloaded, wildlife

conservation, conservation funding, and hunter ethics. Safety was stressed first and foremost, with coursework covering important concepts like how to walk when carrying a gun, how to cross streams with firearms, and how to transfer your firearm to another person safely. I learned a ton and felt it was well worth the effort.

In each of my classes, participants ran the gamut in their experience. Like me, some had no prior experience with guns. Others grew up in hunting families and around guns but did not go out with their fathers, brothers or husbands. One woman was a pistol instructor and wanted to learn to use a rifle, and a few just wanted to learn so they would be knowledgeable and safe around firearms. Because I had done “homework” prior to my classes, I discovered that I had a leg up on a number of my classmates.

The instructors were phenomenal. They kept politics out of the class, and kept participants focused on safe handling and use of firearms. I discovered I was a pretty good shot; that is, as long as the target wasn't moving. While I could repeatedly hit hanging clay pigeons with the shotgun, I couldn't even knick one that was passing overhead. However, I did manage to hit the target 90% of the time with the rifle, and even got a few bull's-eyes.

I approached Field Dressing Game with enthusiasm and confidence. After all, I'd need to clean whatever I successfully hunted. However, while most of my classmates were initially uncertain how they would react to handling dead animals, they all did fine, while I, on the other hand, became nauseous and light-headed right from the get-go. However, I rallied and did just fine as we cleaned deer, rabbit and fish.

Based on my reaction during that class, I decided not to get a big game license, but to hunt for turkey instead, which is probably better anyway: I have a small



The author proudly displays her target from the Beginning Rifle course.

freezer. A coworker is going to take me turkey hunting.

The whole weekend was amazing. Classes were first-rate, and the instructors were knowledgeable and really cared about our learning experience. Some instructors have been teaching for the entire 20 years BOW has existed. Volunteers, the instructors do it for the love of the topic and to share that activity with others. I had so much fun, learned a lot, and even earned my hunter education certificate!

I am looking forward to attending BOW next year. It's so exhilarating and inspiring. There was one participant who was 83 years old. She took a mountain-biking class. I only hope that I can take mountain biking when I am 83!

So whether you want to learn something new, or hone existing skills, consider signing up for the next BOW workshop. You won't regret it.

Debbie Jackson works for DEC's Division of Materials Management. **Gloria Van Duyne** works for DEC's Division of Lands & Forests.



Join Us!

The next Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshop is scheduled for **June 27-29** at Finger Lakes Community College in Canandaigua. Registration materials will be available in late March 2014. To learn more, check out BOW's webpage at www.dec.ny.gov/education/68.html.

Central Park, Manhattan

Best big-city wildlife viewing—size: 843 acres

A premier watchable wildlife site



Courtesy of Central Park Conservancy

It might come as a surprise that one of the most wonderful and accessible natural areas in the state exists in the heart of New York City. Even when snow and ice cover its woodlands, meadows, lakes and ponds, there are still many kinds of birds that overwinter in the park. Central Park is an important stop on one of North America's major bird migration routes, and in spring and fall, more than 275 migratory bird species have been sighted passing through.

Impressive rock outcroppings of Manhattan schist, the bedrock that supports

the city's many skyscrapers, are located throughout the park. One of the largest surviving stands of American elms grows along the mall between 68th and 72nd Streets. During the warmer months, visitors can enjoy a colorful display of native wildflowers in the meadow at 100th Street, just off East Drive.

The Central Park Conservancy has a website (see Site Features) where you can find a list of which flowers should be blooming each month.

Wildlife to Watch

Harlem Meer, a lake in the northeast corner, attracts overwintering mallards, black ducks, Canada geese and mute swans. Watching mallards in the winter can be quite entertaining, as courtship behavior begins and males' plumage is bright. Enthusiastic birders and park rangers assemble daily at Belvedere Castle to share their knowledge with visitors. Red-tailed hawks and peregrine falcons are often spotted from the upper terraces of the castle. The wooded 38-acre Ramble

Two black ducks and a mallard



in the center of the park offers the best birding. Turtle Pond is also an excellent birdwatching area. Cardinals, jays, tufted titmice, snowbirds, chickadees, nuthatches and woodpeckers flit among barren trees and hedgerows. Large flocks of starlings fill leafless branches with a cacophony of clicks and whistles. Ubiquitous pigeons and house sparrows gather around park benches, competing with the park's ever-present gray squirrels for handouts. If the ground is snow-covered, look for tracks of mammals, like raccoons and rabbits, as you go for a pleasant walk, or glide through the park on cross-country skis.

blue jay



Jeff Nadler



Courtesy of Central Park Conservancy



Site Features

Site Notes: Central Park opens at 6 a.m. and closes at 1 a.m. every day, year-round. Four visitor centers and a gift shop are located in the park. Guided and self-guided tours are available. Restrooms are located throughout the park. Several roads are open to vehicle traffic.



Trails: Central Park's many landscapes are connected by an extensive trail system accommodating a variety of activities. Visitors can enjoy hiking and cross-country skiing, along with many other park amenities. Winter is a popular time for sledding and ice skating as weather allows. The park has two outdoor ice rinks.

Accessibility: Facilities in Central Park are fully accessible.

Directions: Located from Fifth Avenue to Central Park West, between 59th and 110th Streets; call 212-628-2345, or visit www.nycgovparks.org/parks/centralpark or www.centralparknyc.org (Central Park Conservancy).



cardinal

Jeff Nadler

NORTHERN SNAKEHEADS IN NEW YORK!

The fish behind the headlines



Susan Shafer

By James MacDonald

“Rash of Frankenfish terrorizing Central Park waters!” screamed the *Huffington Post* headline. The same article described the fish as “ruthless and evil.” Terror? Evil? They can only mean one thing: the northern snakehead.

The northern snakehead’s alarming reputation inspires both fear and fascination. But behind the myth, what is the truth about snakeheads? What are they like? What kind of threat do they pose to New York ecosystems? Eight years of monitoring in New York City and the Potomac River are beginning to hint at answers.

Ever since their discovery in a Crofton, Maryland pond in 2002, biologists have been concerned about the potential ecological impacts of northern snakeheads. Part of a group of fishes of the genera *Channa*

and *Parachanna*, snakeheads are native to Asia and Africa. There are 29 species, but only the northern snakehead (*Channa argus*) is established in New York.

Snakeheads arrived in the U.S. through the food and aquarium trade, and some were subsequently released into local waters. It is not unusual for introduced species (not just fish but also plants, crustaceans, insects, etc.) to become highly disruptive in their new habitats, where their natural predators, usual parasites, and competitors are absent and local species are not adapted to their presence. In their native range, northern snakeheads are top predators, leading to concerns that snakeheads will heavily prey on and out-compete local species, like largemouth bass, for available food.

Snakeheads are obligate air breathers, meaning that they need access to air. A snakehead kept under water for too long will drown. Adapted to shallow, low-oxygen waters in their native range, snakeheads do possess a limited ability to move on land, can survive out of water for an extended period, and can tolerate a wide range of environmental conditions. Thus, there were concerns that snakeheads would easily disperse to new areas. Because of this, Maryland Department of Natural Resources staff eradicated the fish’s population in the Maryland pond where they were first discovered. However, despite their efforts, a population of northern snakeheads became established in the Potomac

Snakehead Facts

Description: thick, elongate, dark/dull green body with dark blotchy pattern; large head

Native Range: E. China, SE Russia, North Korea

Known Range in New York: Flushing Meadows and College Point, Queens; possibly a small population in the Harlem Meer, Central Park

Largest Caught in NYC (DEC electrofishing): approximately 32 inches and 12 pounds

Looks Similar to: bowfin, spotted hake, burbot

Habitat: can survive out of water for days, but cannot travel effectively over land

Diet: fish, small crustaceans

Snakeheads are believed to spawn multiple times per year, meaning they possess the potential to outbreed native species.



Biologists spray rotenone to kill snakeheads in a lake.

Susan Shafer



Juvenile snakehead

Susan Shafer

Basin, most likely prior to the Crofton eradication.

Northern snakeheads have been in New York since at least 2005, when DEC fisheries staff caught three in a hoop net during a routine survey in Meadow Lake, Flushing Meadows Corona Park, Queens. Since then, DEC has caught additional specimens in Meadow Lake and the connected Willow Lake each year during

electrofishing surveys. In April 2008, an electrofishing survey in Central Park's Harlem Meer turned up a single specimen. That same year, in May, a property owner in Orange County, NY killed two snakehead fish in Ridgebury Lake behind his house. As that water body connects to the Hudson River via several small creeks, DEC acted quickly and treated the lake and connecting creeks with rotenone

(a pesticide used to kill fish) and collected hundreds of adult and juvenile snakeheads. A follow-up treatment was conducted the next year to remove any survivors, and there were no more sightings of snakeheads outside of Queens until 2012, when an angler reported catching one in the Harlem Meer—the first in that pond since 2008. However, electrofishing surveys by DEC failed to find any additional specimens in the Meer.

As biologists took action to monitor and control the invader, the image of a toothy, air-breathing fish with “snakehead” for a name proved too much for popular imagination to ignore. Soon, the legend grew and the fish's limited ability to move over land became the perceived ability to walk on land. Concerns about predation on local fish species evolved into fears of predation on pets and children. A *Queens Tribune* article about the 2005 discovery described the fish as “flesh-eating” and deadly. Even the staid *New York Times* described snakeheads as “nightmarish.” There were several horror movies released that featured the snakehead as a villain, and the angler's report of a snakehead in the Harlem Meer in 2012 was reported internationally, in multiple languages.

So, all the hype aside, what is the current situation in New York? As far as anyone knows, there is no evidence of an established population anywhere else in New York besides Meadow and Willow Lakes in Queens. Fortunately, these are isolated ponds, only connected to each other and by a long tributary to Long Island Sound. While northern snakeheads have been shown to tolerate a certain amount of salinity (as high as 18 parts per thousand), they cannot survive in full saltwater, so the Sound provides a natural barrier to their spread. DEC fisheries staff continue to keep tabs on these lakes, annually monitoring for any changes in populations of snakehead or other fish species. New regulations regarding

snakeheads are in place (see sidebar below) and signs warn anglers not to release any snakeheads they might catch.

So far, repeated surveys indicate that while snakeheads are breeding in Meadow and Willow Lakes, they have yet to dominate these waters. In fact, the percentage of snakeheads vs. other fish species caught has remained fairly constant since 2006, and indications are snakeheads don't seem to be increasing in population. In addition, survey results show that other fish species populations (e.g. pumpkinseeds) are not decreasing, and largemouth bass, a species biologists feared might be harmed by competition with snakeheads, were captured in electrofishing surveys for the first time in both lakes in 2010, after the snakehead introduction. These are hopeful signs.

The real question mark is the future. While the population in NYC is contained, the population in other areas, such as the Potomac basin, is not, and is so firmly established that it never will be. However, reports from Maryland and Virginia indicate a tenuous coexistence of snakeheads and native species, despite a steady population increase in the Potomac River and the spread of snakeheads into adjoining tributaries and watersheds, like the lower Delaware River.

Snakeheads grow quickly in North America, faster than in their native countries. This has led biologists to fear that these fish will reach sexual maturity earlier and perhaps have greater reproductive success. Snakeheads are believed to spawn multiple times per year, meaning they possess the potential to outbreed native species. A few large specimens (more than 32 inches) have been found in Queens, and a certified 17 lb., 6 oz. world-record fish was recently caught in Maryland. When biologists dissected several larger snakeheads found in Queens, they discovered numerous sunfish and other local species in the stomachs, a clear indication that snakeheads prey on native species.



DEC photo

Adult northern snakeheads can grow to three feet long!

In the meantime, the question remains how best to handle the snakeheads that are here. Several states, including Virginia, have hosted snakehead angling tournaments. In New York, snakeheads are identified and regulated as a fish that is dangerous to native fish populations. As such, all snakeheads that are caught must be euthanized, as possession of live snakeheads is prohibited. The federal Lacey Act prohibits importation and interstate transportation of live snakeheads. Anglers who catch one are required by New York State law to report their catch to DEC.

So where does the situation stand? The bottom line is that while it is very difficult to eradicate a nuisance species after it is firmly established, it is possible to prevent a population from expanding. Given the continuing uncertainties surrounding snakehead impacts, biologists will work to prevent their spread into new river basins, like the Hudson, while continuing to monitor established populations. Eradicating an outbreak can be costly and comes with considerable collateral damage to other species, so it is not undertaken lightly.

For now, though, there is no need to panic, and apart from what you may have read, your children can still play outside.

James MacDonald works in DEC's fisheries office in New York City.



DEC photo

You Can Help

If you catch or spot a northern snakehead, please be sure to report it to DEC. Current fishing regulations state that all snakeheads encountered must be killed. No live possession or release is allowed.

Check out DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov/animals/45470.html for more information on northern snakehead, including how to report sightings or catches.

WILDLIFE HEALTH CORNER:

A Look at Lead Poisoning in Bald Eagles

By Kevin Hynes

Bald eagles have made a remarkable comeback in New York and many parts of the U.S. in the past 40 years. Once numbering only a single nesting pair, New York now boasts more than 170 breeding pairs of bald eagles. However, eagles face a largely unrecognized toxic threat from ingesting lead ammunition.

Every year, DEC's Wildlife Health Unit (WHU) diagnoses eagles that have died from lead poisoning. Most lead-poisoned eagles in New York are found in winter and early spring, when frozen waterways cause eagles to switch from a diet of primarily fish to more scavenged mammal and bird carrion, including discarded hunter-killed deer carcasses.

Fragments of lead rifle bullets embedded in discarded deer gut piles and carcass parts, or lead shotgun pellets in other game carcasses, pose a serious threat to eagles that ingest them. When an eagle (or other avian scavenger like a crow, raven, or vulture) consumes bullet fragments or shotgun pellets, the lead is dissolved by the bird's strong stomach acid and transported in the blood to the brain, where it affects the nervous system. Lead-poisoned eagles are usually found dead or in a weakened condition, unable to fly. Sometimes, poisoned birds can be treated with chelation therapy, but often by the time an eagle is captured, it is too late to be saved.

When we examine eagles killed by lead poisoning, they are typically in fair to poor body condition, have nearly empty stomachs and intestines, and may have green, bile-stained tail feathers. Interestingly, it is unusual to find lead bullet fragments or shotgun pellets in a poisoned eagle's stomach, because eagles will regurgitate pellets of undigested hair, feathers, and bone, including remaining

lead fragments. We confirm lead poisoning by testing lead levels in the bird's liver or kidney. The WHU diagnosed five such cases of lead-poisoned eagles in 2011 and seven in 2012. However, it is likely that more eagles died from lead poisoning but were never found.

Rifle bullets used for hunting are typically constructed of a lead core surrounded by a thin copper jacket designed to expand on impact. When the bullet hits a bone or expands inside of the target animal, small lead fragments are deposited along the wound tract. Some fragments can travel 12 to 18 inches away from the main wound channel. Big game animals like deer and bear are usually shot through the chest. The heart, lungs, and abdominal organs are removed during field dressing and are usually left in the field where the animal was shot. Eagles are opportunistic scavengers, and commonly feed on gut piles and discarded carcasses. Ingesting as few as two small lead pellets can result in clinical, if not fatal, lead poisoning.

Non-toxic substitutes are available in many popular rifle calibers. Solid copper bullets often have better accuracy and more controlled expansion than conventional copper-jacketed lead bullets. In addition, solid copper ammunition is non-toxic to birds of prey and is comparable in price to premium-grade lead ammunition. To reduce lead exposure to hunters, their families, and eagles, DEC recommends that hunters consider using non-lead ammunition. Hunters are the original conservationists, and we hope that when they realize the potential threat lead ammunition poses to eagles and other birds of prey, they will readily make the switch to non-toxic ammunition.

DEC photo



Immature bald eagle ready for necropsy [Green staining of feathers near the feet indicate the bird has not eaten for an extended period of time.]

DEC photo



Lead bullet fragments from the stomach of a lead-poisoned bald eagle

courtesy of National Parks Service



Lead bullets (pictured left in photo) fragment much more than non-toxic copper (shown at right).

Kevin Hynes is a biologist with DEC's Wildlife Health Unit in Delmar.

Editor's note: See dec.ny.gov/outdoor/48420.html and October 2012 Conservationist for more information on using non-lead ammunition.

purple pitcher plant



Tom Barnes

Mark W. Skinner

Two Million and Counting

The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) recently added the two-millionth plant specimen to its digital archive: the purple pitcher plant, a native, carnivorous species collected in Dutchess County where it is rare. The NYBG is a third of the way to its goal of digitizing all seven million of its dried plant specimens. The National Science Foundation hopes to make the majority of all biological collections in the U.S. available online by 2020. NYBG has also played a lead role in the Global Plants Initiative, a project working to digitize the world's known "type specimens" (specimens that serve as reference points for defining a particular species). To date, the Garden has digitized about 140,000 of 150,000 type specimens. Visit <http://bit.ly/1dx2ptu> to see the Virtual Herbarium.

Power Up!

Owens Corning, New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, and the electricity and natural gas supplier company, Constellation, recently completed a 2.7-megawatt solar installation project at the Owens Corning plant in Feura Bush.

The power system is the largest project to date under Governor Cuomo's NY-Sun initiative, and is composed of 9,000 ground-mounted photovoltaic panels on more than nine acres. The installation is designed to supply approximately six percent of the plant's annual electricity needs. The project was also awarded the Governor's Award for Pollution Prevention, part of the Environmental Excellence Awards Program, which recognizes individuals and programs for environmental innovation and leadership in their communities. Visit www.dec.ny.gov/public/945.html to learn more about the awards.

Raising Pheasants

The application period for DEC's Day-Old Pheasant Chick Program is open from now until March 15, 2014. The program provides pheasant hunting opportunities through a partnership with DEC, sportsmen and women, 4-H youth, and landowners who are interested in rearing and releasing pheasants. Chicks are available at no cost to participants who are able to provide daily care to monitor the health of the birds, a brooding facility, a covered outdoor rearing pen, and an adequate release site. Approved

BRIEFLY

applicants receive chicks in April, May or June, and the pheasants may be released beginning when they are eight weeks old. All release sites must be open for public pheasant hunting opportunities and approved by DEC. In 2013, DEC distributed more than 41,000 day-old pheasant chicks to qualified 4-H and sportsmen applicants. Please visit DEC's website (www.dec.ny.gov) for more information, including how to receive an application. To print or download a pheasant rearing guide, visit www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7271.html.



Jim Clayton



Winter Weekends

DEC and partners are again hosting the annual "Winter Weekends" at Camp Santanoni in Newcomb. The Winter Weekend events fall on the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday in January; the President's Day holiday in February; and the weekend closest to St. Patrick's Day in March. Skiers and snowshoers are welcome to recreate on the 9.8-mile round trip cross-country trail and surrounding lands on any day during the winter; however, during the Winter Weekend events, the Gate Lodge and Main Lodge are also open to the public. (For those who don't have their own skis or snowshoes, the Adirondack Interpretive Center

provides snowshoes free of charge.) The Artist's Studio at Camp Santanoni is also open as a warming hut! Visit www.dec.ny.gov/lands/94034.html for more information about Winter Weekends.

Can You Dig It?

Last fall, along the shores of DEC's Million Dollar Beach, Lake George, archaeologists with the New York State Museum discovered Native American artifacts dating as far back as 8,000 B.C. Archeologists were originally looking for French and Indian War relics, but instead discovered pieces like arrowheads and sharp-edged rocks; possibly used to skin animals or for chopping. You can see many of these artifacts on display this winter at the State Museum; visit www.nysm.nysed.gov for hours and directions.



Native American projectile point



A biface (or stone cutting tool) found in Lake George, NY



Eagle Food-Fight

My wife and I made many, early morning trips along the Hudson River in Peekskill, trying to time our visits when the ice floes were moving along the shoreline, hoping to spot a bald eagle. Much to our surprise, we spotted many, and I was lucky enough to photograph this immature eagle tussling with a mature one protecting its meal.

Joe DeMarte
White Plains, Westchester County

That mature eagle isn't going to give up dinner that easily!
—Conservationist staff

Lunch-Time Capture

This picture was taken from the west shore of Cayuga Lake. I was surprised to see a mink fishing close to shore. He was quite curious and watched me closely. He would jump in the lake, swim a bit, and then jump back onto the ice. He did this a number of times. The last time, he came up with lunch!

Haidee Oropallo
Auburn, Cayuga County

Great photo, Haidee! Mink are generally solitary animals and live near lakes, streams and swamps across the state. As you saw, they are equally at home on land or in water. Medium-sized weasels, adults average 1½-2 feet long and 1-3 pounds



in weight. They are carnivores, and will eat a variety of items including small mammals, fish, birds, amphibians, crustaceans, insects and reptiles. During winter, fish are a common meal.

—Jenna Kerwin, Staff Writer

Tailless Pheasant?

Laurie Dirx of Ontario, Wayne County sent us this photo of a ring-necked pheasant. Note the missing tail. This is not uncommon. You'll often see birds with missing tail feathers. At least one of the functions of these feathers is to give a predator something to grab onto so that the bird may get away relatively



unscathed. The pheasant will begin to grow new tail feathers in a matter of days, and will replace its tail in a matter of weeks. Some birds won't replace missing feathers until their next molt.

Unique Company

This was taken from the shores of Onondaga Lake in Syracuse. The coyote was a long, long way out. I thought it was pretty cool to see him out there with the blue herons! He wandered back and forth and up and down the ice for the entire four hours I was there on eagle watch.

Everet D. Regal
Phoenix, Oswego County



You were lucky to come across such a rare and unique sight. It may surprise some of our readers to see great blue herons (GBHs) in winter. While GBHs prefer to feed in shallow water on fish, frogs, crustaceans and insects they catch with their beaks, they will switch over to small mammals when cold

temperatures lock their normal dining areas in blankets of ice and snow. If the period of ice cover is prolonged, herons will move south in search of warmer climes. Interestingly, some GBHs will also return north in spring before ice-out, and those herons must also feed on small mammals and other things they find on the ground. Check out our "Community Photos-2011" album on our Facebook page to see a photo of a heron with a chipmunk!

—Dave Nelson, Editor



Hooked on Fishing

We recently had a fun and rewarding day ice fishing at Great Sacandaga Lake. My twin boys landed this 25-inch, 5 lb. walleye (bigger than I've ever caught). At first, I thought they had caught a large northern pike when they were unable to get the fish out of the hole. I ran over and the fish was still in the hole, unhooked, but it was so big that it was unable to swim away. I think it's safe to say my boys are "hooked!"

Howard Goebel

That is an impressive catch! Looks like you have some skilled anglers in the family. It's always great to see people passing on the love of the sport of fishing, and what a fun way to spend a winter day outside together. Thanks for sharing.

—Eileen Stegemann, Assistant Editor

Contact us!

✉ E-mail us at: magazine@gw.dec.state.ny.us

✉ Write to us at: Conservationist Letters
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Albany, NY 12233-4502

📘 [facebook.com/NYSDECtheconservationist](https://www.facebook.com/NYSDECtheconservationist)



Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

Night Flying by Dave Nelson

I am flying.

Only my feet know that I am not *really* flying. But in the new moon darkness, the rest of my body feels like it is.

I have felt this way only once before in my 50+ years, and that was more than 30 years ago. Then, I could ascribe my foolhardiness to youth. Now, I have no such excuse.

Then, it was bicycling across a newly paved parking lot in front of a store that hadn't yet opened. I was coming home from work, at night, in the dark. I had been watching the store go up that autumn, waiting for the time to be right. Earlier that day, I had scoped out the lot on my way to work, and it was perfect. No barriers, curbs, nor even paint lines to break up the lot's newly paved surface.

And then, on my way home that evening, punctuated only by streetlights at either end, the lot lay before me; black against blackness. I entered the lot at one end at high speed. The light from a streetlight in the lot behind me threw my shadow ahead, growing longer and dimmer until it vanished into the pavement.

At the lot's distant other end, another streetlight drew closer, imperceptibly at first.

And in between—total darkness. I knew the pavement was beneath me, but I couldn't see it. With a cold breeze blowing in my face, it felt like I was flying. If I pedaled just the right speed, even my bike was silent.

Tonight, hands clasped behind me, I am reminded of my youth. Leaning forward, I push one foot to the side, and then back, then the other in turn. In a Zen-like rhythm: right, then left, then right



Josh Nelson

again. My skates bite into the ice for just an instant, and then glide in long strokes across the frozen pond's glassy surface.

I am doing my best Hans Brinker impression. Trading his revered canal for my 15-acre beaver pond, I skate in silent darkness. I shut my eyes for several seconds, and continue skating. I am flying again.

I briefly turn on my headlamp against the dark. Checking for cracks in the ice, I make sure there's nothing lying on the surface, like a beaver-chewed stick. I turn it off again.

Tonight is about freedom.

Slowly, I glide to a stop, and listen. For several seconds: silence. A barred owl hoots in the distance; he is my sole companion. The rest of the family has politely declined to join me in my frivolity, preferring instead the warmth and security of the hearth. Only *I* know what they are missing.

Stars pierce the sky on this brilliantly clear winter night. The Milky Way is incredible. It must be below zero. The cold is heavy.

The ice agrees. Contracting, it shudders underfoot, jolting me back to the present. The booming sound reverberates across the pond and then disappears into the forest. Silence once more. I turn, and head for home. Light streaming through the windows bathes our house in a Kinkadee-like glow.

I reach the dock. Sitting, I untie my skates and set them aside; I am alone with my thoughts.

A lifelong fancier of birds, I long to fly. To soar above the tree tops, the wind in my face. One day, perhaps, I will summon the nerve to skydive. Or learn to hang-glide.

For now, night flying will do. Very well indeed.

Editor **Dave Nelson** skates more frequently on indoor ice sheets with a goal at each end.

M. G. Linse



Trees and shrubs prevent soil erosion and keep rivers cool for fish.

Trees for Tributaries, Shrubs for Streams *Restoring protective buffers*

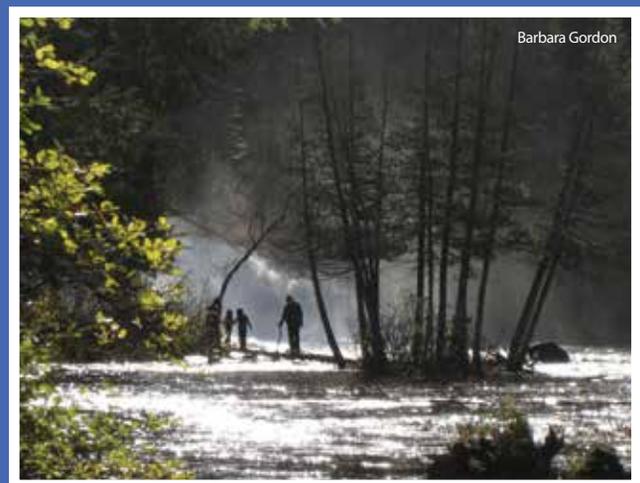
Trees and shrubs provide a critical role in flood protection. They slow the speed and force of water during floods, and their roots help hold the soil in place. On a daily basis, riparian buffers (trees and shrubs planted near streams) help reduce runoff from roads and farmland, keep mud out of trout waters and streams, and keep water clean for downstream users.

Without these riparian buffers, the devastating damage caused by the record storms and flooding of a few years ago could have been worse. Many streams required rerouting and structural stabilization after those storms. That was the “hard” work; now it’s time to think about the “soft” work of restoration planting.

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.

 Also, be sure to check out our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/NYSDECsaratogatreenuresery.



Barbara Gordon



*Clearing Winter Storm, Yosemite Valley, California, 1938, vintage silver gelatin print, 16 X 20 in., New York: Collection of Michael Mattis and Judith Hochberg, ©2013
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