

Discover New York's Wild Side

DEC's Watchable Wildlife Program brings people and nature together.

By Ellen Bidell

Some people plan their vacation around an amusement park or a great beach. My family plans our trips based on the wildlife that can be seen. We travel throughout the country and world to view wildlife in its natural habitat. Despite all the amazing places we have been, we've found that some of the best wildlife viewing opportunities are right here in New York State. Whether it's following bobcat tracks in the swamp near our home, or catching a fleeting glimpse of a moose near our camp in the Adirondacks, the resident wildlife never disappoints us.

To fill out our "lifetime list" of wildlife species, several years ago we visited a campground in Old Forge known to have a healthy bear population. We weren't disappointed (although we did have to wait until we were leaving to see our first bear). Now, what started out as



bobcat

Scott Smith

a weekend trip to see a bear or two has turned into an annual tradition, and this fall four generations of our family will join us.

Watching wildlife can be as simple as enjoying birds at the birdfeeder in your yard, to planning a vacation in an area known for its viewing opportunities. With thousands of species calling New York home, the opportunities are endless—whether you are interested in birds, mammals or even fish!

The Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) owns and operates millions of acres of state forests, forest preserves and Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) which offer plenty of opportunity for wildlife watching. The WMA program is part of a long-term effort to establish permanent access to lands in New York State for the management and promotion of its fish and wildlife resources. There are more than 85 WMAs scattered across the state for your use and enjoyment. Together, these areas contain more than 200,000 acres, providing enough room for all of us to get outdoors and have fun.

If you're not sure how to begin, check out DEC's Watchable Wildlife Program which provides information about the



black bear

best spots to view wildlife, including many public lands. The Watchable Wildlife website (www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/55423.html) breaks the state into nine geographic areas, with more than sixty locations listed. Each site description includes the species that can be viewed there, the best places for

James Clayton



red-shouldered hawk

Susan L. Shafer



fawn



viewing, other recreational opportunities like hiking, boating, skiing, hunting or fishing, and specific directions to the location. The website also includes a list of upcoming Watchable Wildlife events across the state, as well as tips on viewing and photographing animals.

Whether you choose to spend a single day birdwatching near home, or a full weekend camping and looking for bears, New York offers wildlife viewing and recreational opportunities in every part of the state. So grab your binoculars, a guidebook and bring your family or friends to spend some time enjoying New York's wild side.

Ellen Bidell is a citizen participation specialist in DEC's Division of Public Affairs.



A Sample of Watchable Wildlife Sites

Prospect Park—Brooklyn, Kings County

The next time you're in New York City, visit Prospect Park—inhabited by reptiles, amphibians, and dozens of forest and water birds. Hikers may see red-tailed hawks, black-crowned night heron or American coot. Anglers can catch large-mouth bass and other freshwater fish. Activities include horseback riding, bicycling, paddle boat rentals and ice skating. The Prospect Park Zoo and Botanical Garden are located within the park.

Mongaup Valley WMA—Sullivan and Orange Counties

The bald eagle can be seen from various observation buildings along the roadway. Goshawks, turkey vultures, great-horned owls and woodcock live in the area. Visitors may see white-tailed deer, black bears, coyotes and beaver. Hiking, hunting, fishing and boating (no motors) are allowed.

DEC Five Rivers Environmental Education Center—Delmar, Albany County

The varied habitats (fields, orchards, forests and wetlands) on the 450-acre property make Five Rivers a paradise for the more than 225 species of birds that visit here. Visitors can picnic, walk (or ski) trails, and observe wildlife including birds, deer, squirrels, muskrats, beaver, turtles, frogs and several fish species.

Salmon River Fish Hatchery—Altmar, Oswego County

Visitors in September and October (and also in early April) can see large salmon or trout jump up the fish ladder or watch biologists take eggs from female fish and fertilize them with the milt (sperm) taken from male fish. Brown trout, steelhead trout and several species of salmon can be viewed in outdoor raceways and circular tanks.



spotted salamander

James Clayton



Up-close look at a frog

Susan L. Shafer



dragonfly

Susan L. Shafer

bluebirds



DEC photo

Upper and Lower Lakes WMA—Canton, St. Lawrence County

Upper and Lower Lakes WMA is an important nesting area for water-dependent birds, a migratory bird concentration area, and valuable wetland furbearer habitat. The Indian Creek Nature Center features trails, observation platforms and a picnic pavilion. Visitors may spot wild turkey, common loon, muskrat, otters and beaver. Hunting, fishing, hiking, birdwatching, canoeing, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are all allowed.

Montezuma Wildlife Refuge—Seneca Falls, Seneca County

Situated in the middle of one of the busiest bird migration routes on the Atlantic Flyway, Montezuma Wildlife Refuge is best known for the tens of thousands of birds that migrate through the area each year. There are more than 240 species of birds, 43 species of mammals, 15 species of reptiles, and 16 species of amphibians found on the refuge. The visitors' center has an "Osprey cam," which offers a real-time view of an osprey nest.

Conesus Inlet WMA—Livingston County

Two scenic overlooks and nature trails provide plenty of opportunities for viewing wildlife, while each spring, spawning walleye and northern pike draw angling enthusiasts to Conesus Inlet. Birdwatchers can look for falcons, marsh birds and ruffed grouse. Hunting and boating (no motors or trailers) are allowed in the area.

Tillman Road WMA—Clarence, Erie County

Tillman Road WMA includes a variety of habitats—wet lowland, marsh, open water, grassy fields, a deciduous swamp and hardwood forest. Seven different species of frogs serenade visitors along the boardwalk in spring and summer. Other common species include Canada geese, herons, beaver and cottontail rabbits. Visitors can enjoy hiking trails, a viewing tower, birdwatching, cross-country skiing, fishing and trapping.

For additional Watchable Wildlife sites in New York State, click on the owl eyes logo on DEC's homepage at www.dec.ny.gov. And be sure to check out DEC TV at www.dec.ny.gov/dectv/dectv.html for helpful clips on watchable wildlife and recreational opportunities in New York.

raccoon



Susan L. Shafer

eastern cottontail



Susan L. Shafer



Providing for the Future

Sometimes, the best places to view wildlife are also the best locations to hunt and fish.

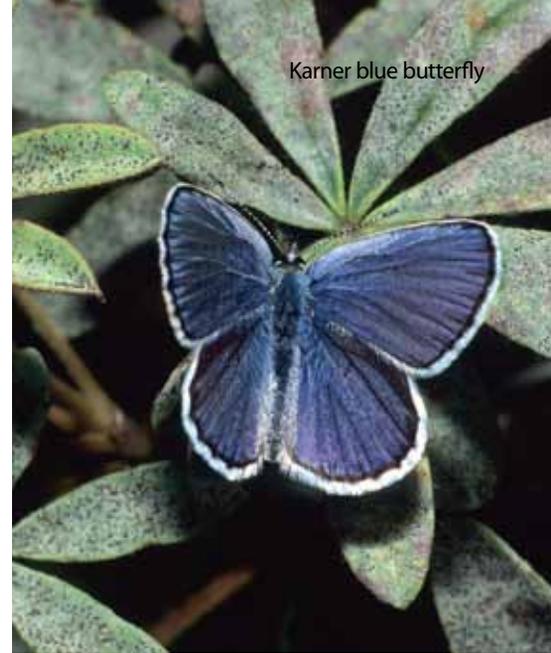
Beginning in the early 1900s, DEC and its predecessor (the NYS Conservation Department) began working with the federal government, state government, and sportsmen and women to secure parcels of land to designate as Wildlife Management Areas. These areas are primarily for the production and use of wildlife.

For more than 60 years, the Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration Act of 1937 (Pittman-Robertson Wildlife Restoration Act) and the Sport Fish Restoration Act of 1950 (Dingell-Johnson Act) have provided a reliable source of funds for the recovery of fish and wildlife populations and other conservation projects through excise taxes on the purchase of firearms, ammunition, archery equipment, fishing gear, and boats and boating equipment. In 2011, New York State is projected to receive \$20 million.

These acts ensured that public lands were truly set aside for multiple public uses, for hunters, hikers, anglers and boaters to share.

Federal Aid projects include:

- **Protecting and restoring wildlife through the management of habitat, regulation of use, and the acquisition of natural areas**
- **Monitoring the status of fish and wildlife populations**
- **Providing hunter safety education courses**
- **Improving wildlife and fisheries management through research**
- **Educating the public about water resources**



Karner blue butterfly

Walley Haley



gray fox kits

Dr. Michael J. Walawender



walleye

Dick Thomas



family fishing

James Clayton