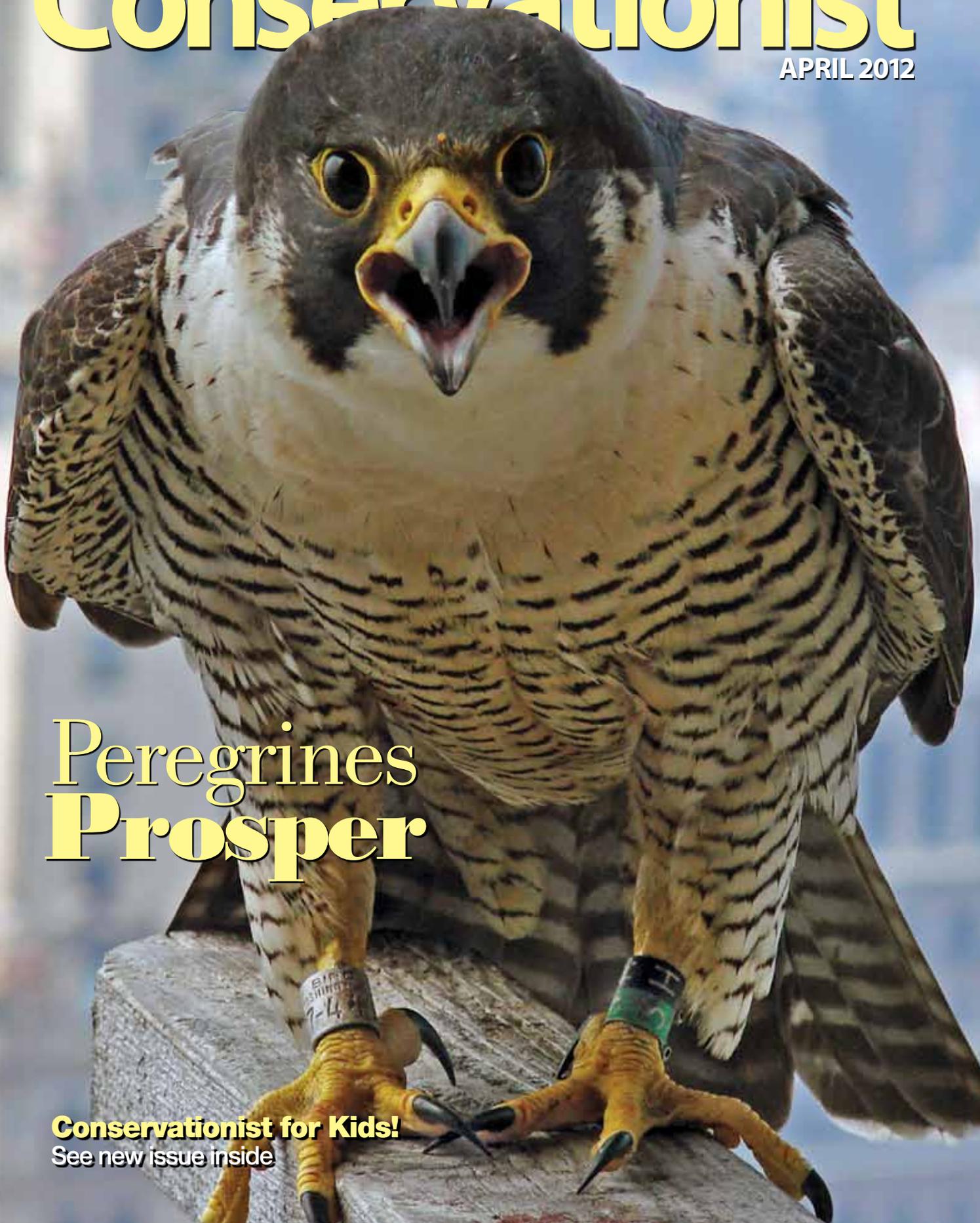


Trout Fishing | Forest Photo Contest | Outdoor Safety

NEW YORK STATE

Conservationist

APRIL 2012



Peregrines Prosper

Conservationist for Kids!
See new issue inside



Dear Reader,

As I write this on the first day of spring, the record-setting, mild winter is yielding to temperatures that feel more like mid-June, and my thoughts turn quickly to getting outside. Tune up the bike, find those hiking boots and break out the fishing gear—it is time to experience New York’s great outdoors!

Like all state agencies, DEC is working hard to support Governor Cuomo’s push for economic growth. And we have many great opportunities at hand since New York has more spectacular and diverse outdoor recreational opportunities than any other state. One of my priorities as commissioner is to promote nature-based tourism that will benefit the state and especially local economies.

More than 4.6 million people per year hunt, fish or view wildlife in New York’s great outdoors along with thousands more who hike, camp or ski in the state. New York’s natural resources generate \$11.3 billion dollars of revenue for businesses throughout the state. From the Adirondack High Peaks to Letchworth State Park and from Niagara Falls to the beaches of Long Island, you can hike, hunt, fish, boat and kayak within minutes of your community.

To find parks, trails, campgrounds and water access locations visit www.dec.ny.gov and click on “Outdoor Activities.” You’ll find information on where you can indulge in a range of traditional outdoor pursuits and a helpful Places to Go link that will take you to a list of destinations in any part of the state. You can also visit <http://nysparks.com/> to explore New York’s unparalleled state parks and historic sites.

Of course, when you’re making plans to enjoy our trails and waterways, remember to take a few simple precautions. I am very proud of the work that DEC’s professional forest rangers do to ensure the safety of New Yorkers who get lost or run into trouble in their outdoor activities. Through the winter and early spring, our rangers and conservation officers have helped many of those who were injured or lost return home safely.

While it’s great to know there is help available when needed, it’s even better to avoid situations that put you at risk. As you will read in the excellent article by Kelly Stang that begins on page 21 of this issue, taking a few simple precautions before you head into the woods will assure your trip remains a positive experience.

So whatever your favorite activity, New York’s spectacular nature offers an experience that can’t be beat anywhere else—enjoy!

Regards,
Commissioner Joe Martens

NEW YORK STATE Conservationist

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Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of New York State

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CELEBRATING

New York's Forests



Forests enrich our lives. They provide clean air and water, habitat for fish and wildlife, open space for public recreation and enjoyment; they protect watersheds, and contribute to our economy through the forest products industry. Within our cities and urban areas, trees beautify streets, parks and yards, and make our communities more livable.

New York State is blessed with an abundance of forests. In fact, currently 63 percent of the state's landscape is covered with trees, making New York one of the most heavily forested states in the country. This is due in large part to the state's long-standing history of protecting and restoring its forests, which continues today. The Empire State is committed to "Keeping Forests as Forests."

To celebrate the importance of our forests and to raise awareness on issues of sustainable management, sustainable development, and conservation of all types of forests, the United Nations declared 2011 to be the International Year of Forests. Governor Cuomo furthered this effort by proclaiming 2011 as the New York Year of Forests.



In honor of these declarations, DEC's Division of Lands and Forests held a photo contest titled "Celebrating New York's Forests." We accepted photos in five categories: Nature, Enjoying the Forest, Trees Where We Live, Forest Products, and State-owned Forests.

Here are a few of the best of the more than 500 photos we received. You can view others at www.dec.ny.gov/lands/75396.html.



"Brookfield Woods" by Wells Horton
Charles Baker State Forest, Madison County
Morning light shines through the forest.



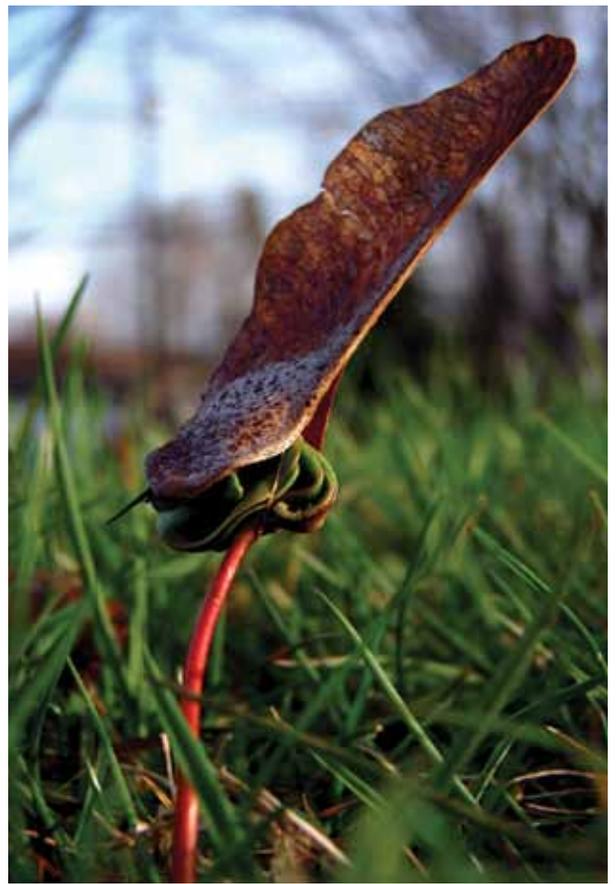
"Fiddleheads in the Forest" by Joanne Hihn
Catskill State Forest Preserve, Sullivan County
Fiddlehead ferns had recently pushed their heads through the damp, rich forest soil. A misty morning enhanced the ethereal scene.



"The Wild Center" by Richard L. Endres
Tupper Lake, Franklin County
This railing in the back walkway of The Wild Center shows great use of natural forest products in everyday life.



“Around the Grandmother’s Tree” by Wayne Jones
Warrensburg, Warren County
The white pine known as the Grandmother’s Tree at Pack Forest is a famous and historic tree in New York. Four kids and Grandpa couldn’t reach around it!



“Legacy” by Kim Kiefer
Whitesboro, Oneida County
A sprout emerges from the last batch of seeds dropped after her favorite climbing tree was cut down from her grandparents’ yard.



“Forever Wild” by Wayne Jones
High Peaks, Essex County
Snow clouds cover Algonquin Peak after the first snow of autumn. This iconic, expansive view from Adirondack Loj Road extends from Mt. Colden (left) to Wallace (right).



"From out of the Trees" by Anne Brewer
Rainbow Lake, Franklin County

Anne Brewer was kayaking alone when two moose emerged from the woods and into the lake. When they re-entered the forest, they seemed to vanish!





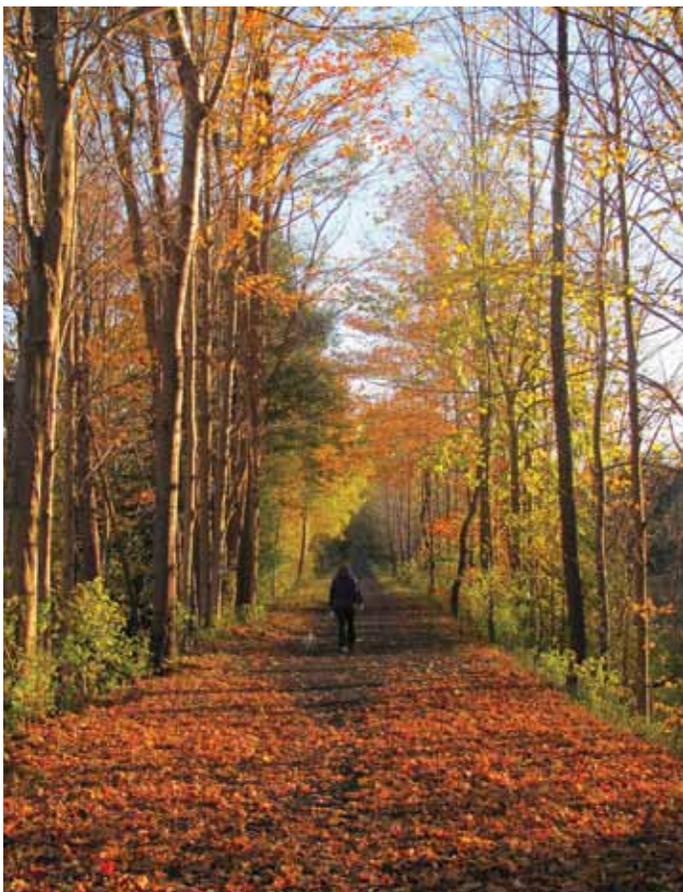
"Harriman" by Mark Kalan
Bear Mountain, Rockland County
An aerial view of Harriman State Park and Route Six from Perkins Memorial Drive.



"Eagles" by Kathryn Andrews
Saranac Lake, Essex County
A pair of bald eagles rests in a tree on Upper Saranac Lake.



"Fishing the Mist" by Michael Linse
West Branch of the Delaware River at Hale Eddy, Delaware County
A solitary fly fisherman stands in the mist as the Delaware River flows through verdant woodlands.



"On the Towpath" by Troy Bishopp
Marshall, Oneida County
Walking along the Marshall Towpath (formerly the Deansville Railroad Station area) on a sunny, fall day.



"Lost Pond" by Wells Horton
Charles Baker State Forest, Madison County
A secluded pond remains untouched under a dark, autumn sky.



One fish, two fish; enough fish?

—trout stocking in New York State

The large truck pulls up alongside the stream and the first bulging net of squirming, splashing trout is handed down to be released. A crowd starts to gather. Some are here because they know the fish are being stocked; others just happened by and are interested in what's going on. Everyone—young children and veteran anglers alike—have expressions of delight on their faces as the fish are carried down to the water and released into the stream.

A few in the crowd question if a nearby stream will also be getting some

fish, and someone asks how, and if, they can have some fish stocked into their favorite stream. Both are questions that have been asked many times as trout stocking is arguably the most familiar fisheries activity the public sees. In fact, stocking is a major tool used by biologists to manage a trout stream fishery, and approximately 3,000 miles of coldwater streams in New York are actually stocked annually.

So how do DEC biologists decide which waters should receive hatchery-raised trout and which waters have

By Phil Hulbert and Fred Henson

enough wild trout to sustain themselves? And for streams that are to be stocked, how do biologists determine how many trout to put in there? The answer is complicated, and one that took decades of studying streams where angler creel surveys (anglers are interviewed to find out how many fish were kept) and biological sampling surveys had been conducted.

Known as Catch Rate Oriented Trout Stocking (CROTS), the process that directs New York's trout stocking was actually developed nearly 30 years ago

and remains the basis for DEC's stocking program today. CROTS uses biological data (wild and stocked trout mortality rates, and estimates of a stream's ability to support a trout population) and estimates of fishing pressure, angler catch and harvest rates to determine where and how many fish to stock. For example, if the current population (or standing crop) of wild trout occupies most or all of a stream's estimated capacity to support trout, stocking is not necessary.

Likewise, waters where there is limited public access, very light fishing pressure, or ecological conditions that make trout survival unlikely (such as high water temperatures or low oxygen levels), would not receive stocked fish either.

When deciding how many fish to stock in an area, a manager's goal is to achieve a healthy balance between resident fish left in the stream and fish available for anglers. In New York State, the intent of the CROTS system is to attain an

average catch rate of one fish for each two hours of fishing effort over either part or the entire fishing season. This rate was selected largely because it was the average observed in many of the historical creel surveys conducted in New York, and it was judged to be a satisfactory catch rate to most anglers.

With any management strategy, adjustments are often necessary. For example, high quality streams that can support larger numbers of trout, and streams managed with very restrictive creel limits (number of fish an angler can take) and high minimum length limits (smallest size fish an angler can keep), are typically managed to allow anglers to catch more and possibly larger fish than might be available if the statewide limit (currently five trout per day, no minimum length limit) was in effect. This provides anglers with additional fishing opportunities, but still maintains healthy trout populations in those waters.

Many changes have occurred since CROTS was first developed, and so DEC is taking a hard look to see if more permanent adjustments should be made. Together with the Cornell University Cooperative Fish and Wildlife Research Unit, DEC biologists are currently working on a statewide study to determine if the underlying assumptions in the system are still valid, and ultimately figure out what, if anything, needs to be adjusted. For example, when the system originated, most anglers kept the trout they caught. Today, however, many anglers release most, if not all, of their catch, even if the fish can be legally harvested. Therefore, a greater number of trout survive than was factored into the original CROTS model. Conversely, increased predator numbers such as mergansers, and an increase in extreme weather events associated with climate change could lead to more rapid depletion of stocked trout in some waters, which translates into lower catch rates.

James Clayton



Hatchery staff scooping out fish to be stocked.





Biologists use electrofishing to help determine how many stocked trout survive in a stream.

The statewide study is being conducted on nine streams. Fieldwork began in 2011 and will continue for several more years. For each stream, biologists are: stocking known numbers of specially-marked fish which allows biologists to determine when they were stocked; conducting fish population estimates after stocking to assess the persistence of stocked trout (how long they remain/live in a stream section); and counting and interviewing anglers who are fishing the stream (a creel survey).

Fish are marked at the hatchery prior to stocking by clipping one or more fins in a pattern unique to that batch. Since multiple batches of fish are often stocked in the same stream during the course of the season, this helps biologists identify the rate at which fish from each batch are removed. DEC personnel look carefully for these clips during both the population assessments and the creel survey.

During a creel survey, a creel clerk is assigned to each stream to perform counts of anglers and to interview them about their catch. The hours that the clerk is present on the stream are based on a ran-

domized schedule designed to capture representative angler use on weekdays, weekends and holidays. In addition to looking for fin clips and measuring harvested trout, clerks ask how long the angler has been fishing that day, how many fish they catch/release, and their zip code. Knowing anglers' zip codes enables biologists to determine how far anglers travel to fish a particular stream. Clerks also ask anglers whether they drive alone to the stream, or share a ride with another angler. This information helps biologists estimate the number of anglers based on a count of parked cars, very useful for streams where it is difficult to see all of the anglers from the road.

In addition to creel surveys, biologists are estimating trout populations to determine how many stocked trout survive in the streams. Biologists use nets to isolate a designated section of stream. A crew outfitted with equipment that generates an electrical field strong enough to immobilize the fish then makes three passes through the section. After each pass, the stunned fish are scooped into a holding tank and then weighed, measured,

and examined for clipped fins (indicating whether they are wild or stocked fish) before being released downstream of the isolated section. Some fish elude capture during each pass, and the total number of fish captured on each pass should decrease.

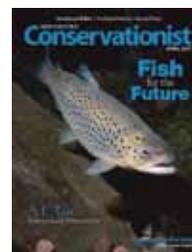
Ideally, the field work for estimating the trout population is done twice a season: once within two weeks of stocking to assess early season mortality; then again toward the end of the season. Once all the data is collected, biologists can apply a mathematical equation that uses the number of fish captured on each pass to estimate the total number of fish present. Thus the number of trout stocked can be compared with the number of trout that are still present at two dates during the fishing season.

Last year, biologists and creel clerks had the opportunity to speak with numerous anglers who enjoyed hearing about the work being done. Hopefully, the next few years will provide many more opportunities like this, and shed light on jobs that need to be done before that first net-full of stocked trout hits the water.

DEC and Cornell are excited about re-examining the CROTS model to see how applicable it is to today's fishery. They know that New York licensed anglers have a significant investment in hatchery-reared trout, and are committed to make sure we use stocking to enhance recreational fishing in a way that makes scientific, social and economic sense.

Phil Hulbert is the chief of DEC's Bureau of Fisheries. **Fred Henson** is an aquatic biologist responsible for the coldwater fisheries unit.

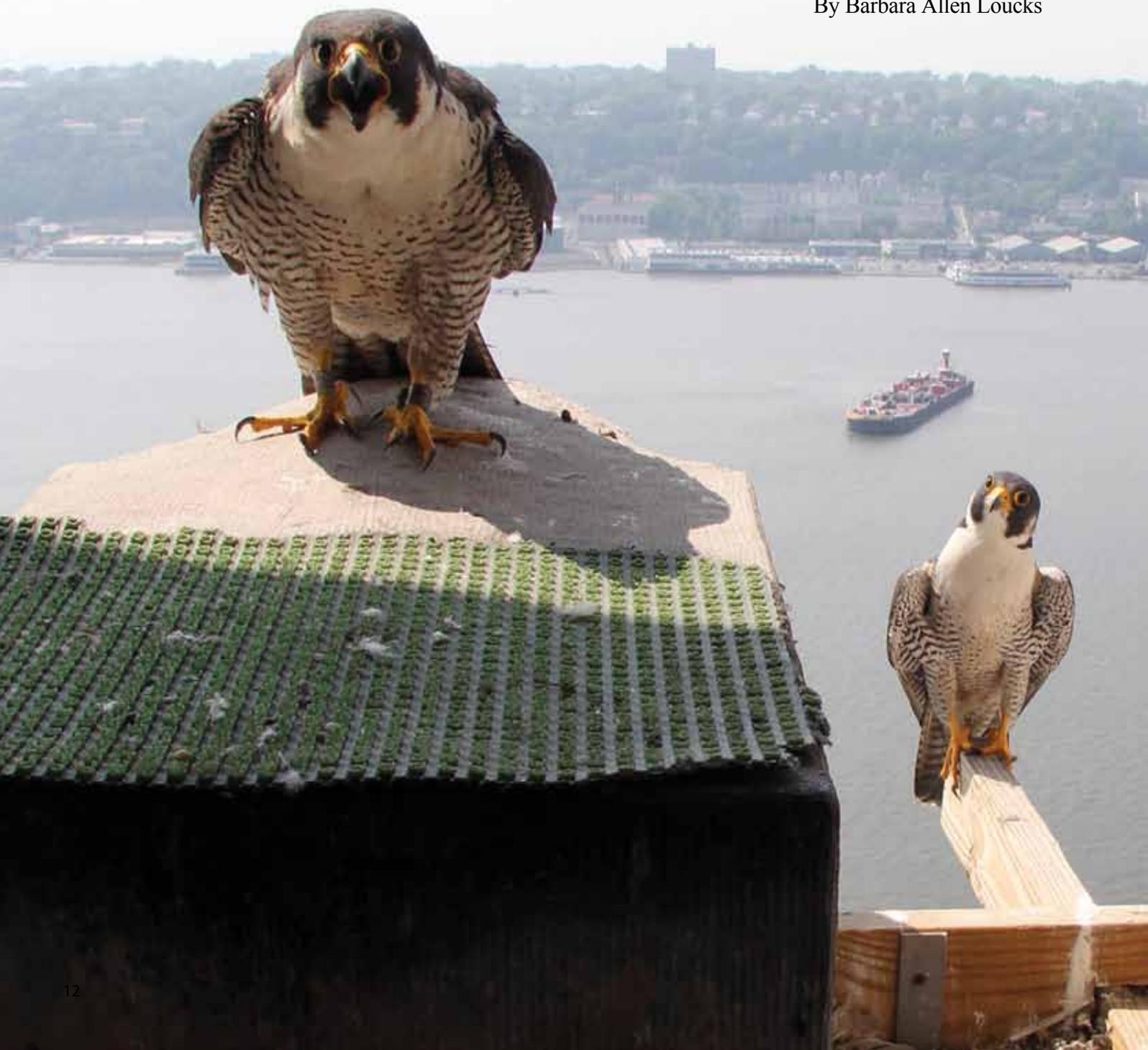
Editor's Note: To read more about fish stocking in New York, see "Labor of Love" in the April 2011 issue of *Conservationist*.



On^{the} Edge

—the perils and rewards of banding peregrine falcons

By Barbara Allen Loucks



I wasn't expecting the blow to the back of my head. The adult female peregrine falcon took advantage of my back being turned and hit me hard in my helmet with her feet. I was entering the doorway going inside the top of the Kodak Tower in downtown Rochester, and had to stop for an instant, momentarily dizzy. We had just finished putting her young back in the nest box after banding, and she was demonstrating her displeasure at our intrusion.

Peregrine falcons are notoriously aggressive around their eyries (or nest sites) during the breeding season, and the longtime resident female here had a reputation for being particularly unfriendly at our annual visits. As "wing man" for my colleague Mike Allen, I protected his shoulders and back with a broom and served as a target while he grabbed the young out of the nest box. We both wore eye protection. As an added precaution, another person stood behind me, trying to defend me from the swiftly diving adult female which would suddenly disappear and reappear,

"kakking" loudly at times. We worked quickly to bring the young inside the building, and returned them to the waiting adults about a half hour later. Fortunately, adult males rarely attack, so we didn't have to ward him off as well.

Not too long ago, there wasn't a single peregrine pair nesting in New York State. The thinning of eggshells caused by DDT residues in their largely avian prey had eliminated this amazing raptor as a breeding bird from the entire east coast by the early 1960s. But through the release of captive-bred birds from The Peregrine Fund,



active restoration programs were successful in reestablishing breeding populations (see "Back from the Brink" in the April 2005 *Conservationist*). In fact, in 2010, of 76 territorial peregrine pairs in New York, 54 successfully raised 144 young—the largest population in the eastern U.S.! Biologists banded 75 of these young. Since the species started nesting in the state again in 1983, hundreds of peregrine falcon chicks have been banded.



(left) Pair of nesting peregrines in New York City. (above) The author climbing to reach a nest on a Hudson River bridge.

I am fortunate to be part of a small group of DEC biologists who bands peregrines from NYC to Buffalo. The banding enables us to gather information—such as mortality (how, when and where they die), movements, dispersal and longevity—about the population. The vast majority of young peregrines are banded in the southeastern part of the state, particularly the New York City area. Christopher Nadareski of the New York City Department of Environmental Protection is a key cooperater with DEC. Sometimes, we get lucky and an adult female will refuse to leave the nest box. When this happens, we take the opportunity to capture and band her as well.

For safety and other reasons, we focus our banding efforts on the more easily reached peregrine nests on urban bridges and buildings, rather than nests located on cliff sites which are difficult to access. The perfect time to band the young is when they are about three weeks old. Their legs are then large enough to determine if the smaller male band (size 6) or larger female band (size 7a) is appropriate. Also, the birds are half-feathered and can't fly, which makes them less likely to try to evade capture.

Unlike most hawks and eagles, peregrines do not build large stick nests, but instead lay their brown eggs in shallow depressions (called scrapes) that the birds form in whatever substrate is available. On a cliff it could be dirt and small pebbles. On a bridge girder or building ledge, it could have rough debris or be quite bare. At the urban sites, biologists often place nest boxes that generally consist of a shallow tray about three feet square, a roof, three sides, and several inches of pea-sized gravel. These artificial nests help increase productivity by protecting the eggs from damage, such as rolling off the ledge.

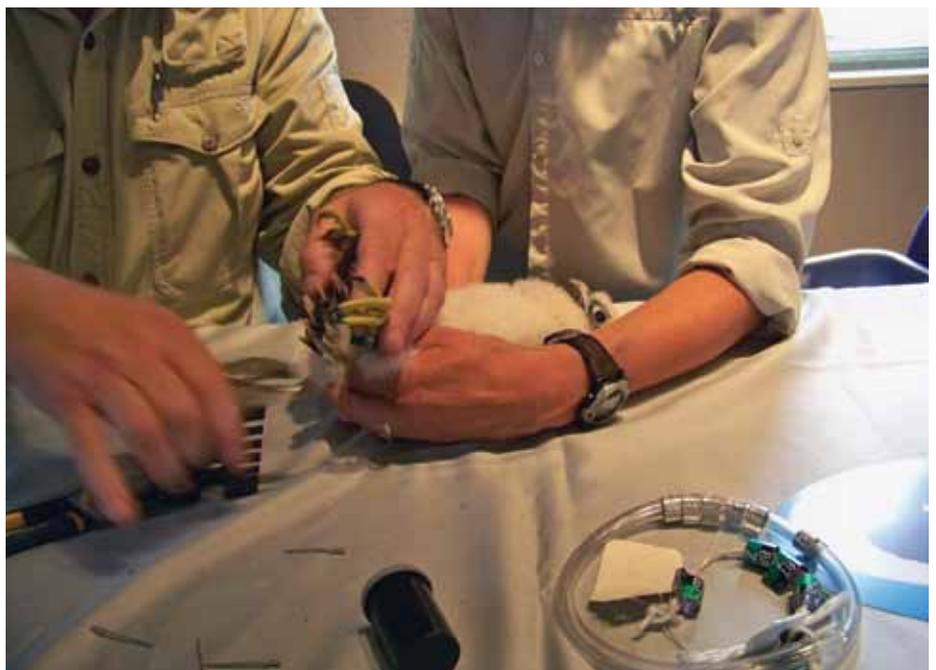
On some bridges, temporary lane closures are necessary to allow biologists

to climb above or below roadways to reach nests. At the Verrazano–Narrows Bridge in NYC, biologists and MTA Bridges and Tunnels employees (outfitted with safety harnesses, helmets and goggles) climb a series of ladders inside one of the two bridge towers, exiting at a point 693 feet above the water. It's exhilarating and unnerving at the same time, and you are rewarded with a commanding view of Staten Island, Brooklyn, New York Harbor and the Atlantic Ocean that few people are privileged to see.

At some sites, we need special equipment to reach the nest. For instance, in Albany, peregrines nest underneath one of the bridges over the Hudson River, so DEC biologist Nancy Heaslip works with the New York State Department of Transportation to use their snooper (a special truck with a bucket that goes over the side of the bridge) to reach the young peregrines. Across the state, DEC biologist Connie Adams once took advantage of the Darling Construction Company's offer to use their cherry picker to access a nest underneath the North Grand Island Bridge on the Niagara River. The picker was already on a barge being used for bridge cleaning.



Placing a nest box at a bridge over the Hudson River.



Biologists banding a peregrine chick in Rochester.

Carol Phillips



During banding, every effort is made to minimize stress on the falcons (both young and adults), including trying to limit the time it takes to band them to a half hour or less. In most instances, the one to five young can be banded right at the nest box; occasionally, however, they have to be momentarily removed to a nearby location. Biologists check the health of all young, including inspecting their eyes, ears, throats, feathers and general condition. We attach two metal leg bands: a silver-colored U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service band is placed on the right leg, and a two-toned band with alphanumeric codes is placed on the left leg. Recent color bands used on NY-raised peregrines (and others in the northeast) are black and green or black and red. In addition, any unhatched eggs are collected for later analysis, and any desiccated prey remains are quickly



Adult peregrine with recently hatched young in nest box on a NYC bridge.

checked and collected. If the box needs repairs after the nesting season, that is also noted. Interestingly, one NY study (C. Nadeski, pers. comm.) documented

that the remains of more than 120 different species of birds, as well as an occasional bat, have been collected from the various nest sites over the years.

The workers who assist biologists during the banding process often feel a special connection to the project and gain a deeper understanding of the value of their efforts to help protect this species. During maintenance and renovation work, workers avoid unnecessary disturbance of nesting birds. Some facilities have installed webcams so that everyone can be involved. These sites are very popular and generally can be viewed from early spring through midsummer. Viewers can follow the nesting process from egg laying through the young birds leaving (fledging) the nest. Many people contact DEC to say how much they appreciate these armchair opportunities to observe peregrine falcons across the state. (Check out www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7050.html for a listing of webcam sites.)

Through our banding program, we've discovered that peregrine falcons hatched in NY have traveled to and successfully raised young in various places scattered between Massachusetts and Wisconsin, and from Ontario to Washington, D.C. as well. Released birds have nested as far west as Nebraska, and been seen as far south as Texas. One female peregrine from NYC was found dead in Atlantic City—it was 13+ years old.

In the years I've been banding peregrines, I've seen their population make great strides. They are graceful and powerful birds, and I never tire of watching them. It's amazing to see a peregrine tuck in its wings, go into a steep dive—peregrines can reach speeds of more than 200 mph—and then snatch a bird in midair. It's something you never forget.

Each time we visit a site, I get a thrill by what we're doing and am excited at what we see. But I always keep in mind to stay alert; after all, I am the unwanted guest in *their* home.



Christopher Nadleski

A Nest Box for Falcons?

For years, biologists have been building nest boxes for peregrine falcons in urban areas in New York State. Biologists generally place the boxes at sites where the falcons have already attempted to nest. However, not all sites are appropriate for a nest box. For instance, an apartment building with balconies that are used by people is not a good place to have aggressive nesting peregrines. In some cases, we try to place a nest box on a nearby building, in a more suitable location. Sometimes peregrines choose an unsuitable site where there isn't a good place for a box. Fortunately, those pairs will generally relocate on their own.

People sometimes call DEC to ask how they can get peregrines to nest on their building, and to get plans to build and install a nest box. Many times they want a nesting

pair of peregrine falcons to help reduce the number of pigeons in their area. But while peregrines will eat the pigeons, there are often too many pigeons for a pair of peregrines to have a significant impact.

Like all birds of prey, peregrines are highly territorial. Left on their own, peregrines will space their territories. It is not uncommon to have aggressive encounters between adults, sometimes concluding in a fight to the death.

It's important to note that peregrines normally return to the same nesting site for many years. This means that once peregrines use a box, maintaining the box can be a long-term commitment. Since peregrines are federally and state protected, people may need to obtain state and federal permits to conduct certain activities near a nest site.

Barbara Allen Loucks is DEC's endangered raptor specialist.



On Patrol

Carl Heilman II

Real stories from Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers in the field

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

Through the Ice— Saratoga County

In March, New York State Police Trooper Vanderpool contacted ECO Robert Higgins about snowmobiles that possibly went through the ice near the Conklingville Dam on Great Sacandaga Lake. The ECO and trooper discovered three sets of snowmobile tracks in the area; two tracks ended in the open water near the dam and one set made it to the other side. There was an abandoned snowmobile in the vicinity which the two officers discovered was owned by a local female. It was neither registered nor insured. ECO Higgins and Trooper Vanderpool interviewed the woman and she admitted to snowmobiling with her husband and two friends the previous Saturday night. When her machine broke down, she rode with her husband. They and a friend went through the ice on their snowmobiles; the fourth member of their party made it across. Luckily they all made it out alive. ECO Higgins issued her tickets for various violations. The investigation will continue until both machines are recovered from the bottom of the lake. Law requires that any vehicles, ATVs or snowmobiles that fall through ice be removed to minimize negative environmental impacts.

To Catch a Suspect— Jefferson County

Recently, federal game wardens on the Fort Drum Army Base contacted ECO John Murphy about a deer that might have been illegally taken on the

property. It seemed to be the same one that was regularly seen in an area closed to hunting. Federal wardens found a blood trail leading from a gut pile to a nearby parking lot. They had a suspect in mind and interviewed the man the following day; he admitted to taking the deer but insisted he did so in an area open to hunting. Wardens called ECO John Murphy for assistance, and after persistent investigation he located a portion of packaged meat from the deer. The officer sent the meat and a portion of the gut pile to DEC's Delmar Lab for DNA testing. A few weeks later, the result was a positive genetic match. ECO Murphy charged the man with illegally taking a deer, discharging a firearm in a restricted area, and trespassing. He faces heavy fines and possible termination from his job on the base.

Alligator Bust—Suffolk County

Earlier this year, ECOs Erik Dalecki and Matt Krug assisted the Suffolk County Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals with an undercover purchase of an alligator. A subject from Syosset, New York was trying to sell his alligator. The buy and bust went successfully; ECOs seized the alligator and issued the suspect summonses for possession of the alligator without a permit.

Haste Hurts—Hamilton County

Recently, Forest Rangers John Ploss and Ian Kerr arrived at the Perkins Clearing Easement Trail to help a young

man who crashed his snowmobile. He was traveling along the trail at speeds too fast for conditions when he struck a tree and was ejected from the machine. He suffered severe leg lacerations and also complained of back pain when forest rangers arrived on scene. When Rangers Ploss and Kerr arrived, the subject was back-boarded and transported six miles to a waiting ambulance where he was taken to Nathan Littauer Hospital in Gloversville.

ASK THE ECO

Q: I heard that the saltwater fishing license requirement was repealed. Is there anything else I need to do in order to legally fish in the marine and coastal district of New York State?

A: Yes. You must register with the Recreational Marine Fishing Registry if you are 16 years of age or older and wish to fish in the marine and coastal district of NYS. You must also register if you are fishing for migratory fish from the sea (such as striped bass) in certain tributaries where they may be found (such as the Hudson River). You can register by telephone using DEC's automated license system (DECALS) at 1-86-NY-DECALS. The registry runs on a calendar year basis from January 1 through December 31 of each year. There is no charge for registering. For more information, go to www.dec.ny.gov/permits/54950.html





A Little Piece of Heaven

—fly fishing an old beaver pond

By Bruce Van Deuson

Summer dawns come early, and for the fisherman, it's most often the best time to be out, especially in a quiet, secret place. Some of my favorite memories are of visiting my old fishing haunt, a beaver pond tucked away from prying eyes. I loved being out with the first rays of sunlight filtering through the surrounding forest. A beaver, silently going about its morning business, would telegraph subtle ripples across the otherwise smooth surface of the old pond. The only disturbance was the gentle scraping of my canoe as I slid it into the dark, tannin-stained water.

I first discovered the pond when my parents rented a house on the property for

several years during my youth. Teenage enthusiasm demanded that the estate's many acres be explored, and my constant companions were only too eager to share in boyish adventures. From the cover of bank-side willows and blueberry bushes, many idyllic days were spent along the pond's banks, observing beaver, muskrat, wood ducks, kingfishers and herons as they went about their daily activities.

After moving away, a stint in the service, marriage and the demands of a regular job, I had all but forgotten about the pond until I read an article about the excellent fly fishing that can occur on well-established beaver ponds. My curiosity was piqued, so when I saw an

article in the local paper about how the property had been left to the church and was to be used as a conference center, summer camp, and small museum, I decided a visit was in order.

While at the museum, I had a lovely chat with the curator, describing to her what the property was like in the late 1950s. When I broached the subject about the possibility of fishing on the pond, she seemed receptive, but told me I'd have to check with the caretaker of the property whose house was just down the road. Imagine my surprise when the caretaker turned out to be Don, the father of a boy I had played and gone to school with while living there. He invited me in, and somewhere between coffee and talking about old times, I asked about the possibility of fishing on the beaver pond. He said he had never heard of anyone fishing up there and doubted the existence of fish, but that I was welcome to give it a try.

After a few hours of fishing, I was rewarded with more than a dozen brook trout. I only kept three; all in the 9- to 11-inch range. These were not stockers, but wild and possibly true native brookies with flesh a rather shocking shade of orange. Don could not believe it when I showed him on my way home, and he told me I could come up any time, but requested that I bring no one, and not tell anyone either—a promise I happily kept. It was an angler's dream come true—a private fishing hole!



Scott Cornett

If you've never seen a wild brookie, they are a gorgeous fish. In the black water of this pond, their upper bodies are almost black with pronounced, olive-tan vermiculations and a sprinkling of ruby-colored spots. Their white- and black-edged orange fins and orange bellies add a vivid contrast to their appearance.

Over the next several years, I made regular visits to the pond. Talking with the local conservation officers, I learned that because the pond and its entire watershed were on private land, no stocking had ever been carried out by the state. Estate records indicated no evidence of private stocking either, and I realized the fish in that old beaver pond were a real treasure, especially because 11-inch wild brook trout were considered large for that time and place. Barbless hooks and catch-and-release fishing soon became watchwords I lived by. If I wanted dinner, the stocked streams were easily available.

When I ventured out, a boat cushion, canoe, wood paddle for stealth, bailing sponge, pre-rigged 8½-foot fiberglass fly rod, well-stocked fishing vest, and a thermos of hot coffee were all that I needed for a morning's fishing. With as little disturbance as possible, I would ease the canoe into the first lane of water between the aquatic bushes and water lilies. Constant attention by the resident beavers kept the travel lanes open (which is typical of an active beaver pond many years old).

My favorite dry fly was a high-floating, rather bushy #12 March Brown. On more than one occasion, my casts were rewarded with a splashy strike. While not all strikes ended with a catch, they were always thrilling. I spent many a morning catching and releasing any number of magnificent wild brookies while savoring my good fortune at having this private place to enjoy the wonders of nature. I once heard it said, "A day spent fishing is a day added to one's life." I believe that.



DEC Bureau of Fisheries



James Clayton

It's been 50 years since I first discovered my pond, and although many miles currently separate me from that wonderful place, e-mail conversations with the property's administrators indicate they have hired experts to determine exactly what flora and fauna reside on the property and how best to preserve them for posterity. I have a standing invitation to visit and can only hope those jewels of the north remain alive and well. Upon my last inspection, the beavers

were still active, their dam was growing over with willow and maple, and a bog was gradually filling in the upper end. Regardless of these changes, I hope to bring my grandchildren there so they too can marvel at one of nature's wonders.

Bruce Van Deuson was raised on the north shore of Oneida Lake in Oswego County where he learned to fly fish. He currently resides in North Carolina.



Help Me Make it Through the Night

—surviving a wilderness emergency

By Kelly Stang

"I am just..."

...going for a day hike/ going to run ahead/ going to scout for deer sign/ going to do some fishing at the lake. These simple words can quickly lead to trouble, landing you in a dangerous situation where Mother Nature tests you and

even threatens your life. There may be an unexpected change in the weather, or you might lose your paddles or capsize your canoe and be miles from your vehicle. Or you could get lost or sick or injured; a simple twisted ankle could prevent

you from getting back before dark. The bottom line is when pursuing outdoor activities, expect the unexpected, because if you're not properly prepared, the end result can be disastrous.

According to wilderness safety expert Peter Kummerfeldt, those three words "I am just..." are the most dangerous words uttered in the outdoors. Peter, an experienced wilderness survival trainer, has instructed thousands of outdoor enthusiasts to gain an understanding of the physical, mental and spiritual preparation needed for those unexpected events that knock on our outdoor experiences. His instructions provide practical advice on what to do when you find yourself in trouble because of the "I am just..."

I recently had the opportunity to take Peter's "Surviving a Wilderness Emergency" class in which he cites many examples of individuals who ended up in survival situations; several succumbed



Lower Ausable Lake

John Bulmer

as a result of their unpreparedness. Peter states that “It is easy to convince yourself that nothing life-threatening will happen—after all, you are ‘just...’”

According to Kummerfeldt, “Survival is the ability and desire to stay alive, all alone, under adverse conditions, until rescued. Those who are prepared will usually survive an emergency, while those who are not, probably won’t.” Preparation and the ability to save yourself are two of the most important topics taught in Peter’s class.

The class stresses practical, not primitive survival skills. Many of the “reality” survival shows on TV today demonstrate starting fires by rubbing sticks together, building debris shelters out of sticks and evergreen boughs, and getting water by digging solar stills (a low-tech way to distill water that uses natural evaporation and condensation). While these skills could help you, they require many, many hours of practice to master and are not practical for a lost or injured person to do while the sun is setting and a cold rain begins to fall.

It may seem obvious, but Peter emphasizes that you have a much better chance of survival if you simply prepare beforehand. He explains how a few simple rules and essential pieces of survival gear can turn a life-threatening situation into a survivable (and even somewhat comfortable) night in the woods.

Rule number one is to carry a survival kit with you at all times. A survival kit does no good if it is in your vehicle at the trailhead or in your pack back at your campsite while you are exploring. You should also make sure your kit is lightweight and compact (see pg. 23 for survival kit contents.). If it is heavy and bulky, you are more likely to leave it behind. If you don’t always carry a pack, buy or make a carry case for the survival kit to attach to your belt.

Darren McGee



Another important tip is to always let someone know about your plans. No one is going to look for you unless they know you are missing, so leave a detailed trip plan with someone reliable every time you head out to hike, hunt, camp, fish, bike, etc. The trip plan should include detailed information on your planned route (give GPS coordinates if you know them), possible side trips you might take, date and time you

Susan Shafer



will be returning, who is going with you, the make, color and plate number of your vehicle, the color of your tent, and your cell phone number. Ask that person to check that you got home safely when you said you would. And by all means, if you do get into trouble, stay put! Search and rescue becomes much more difficult if you stray from your planned itinerary.

Also, keep in mind that today’s technology is great, but do not rely on it to save you. Cell phones, GPS units and satellite trackers can be fantastic when they work, but batteries die, and signals can be sporadic (especially in mountainous terrain). Plus, what happens if you drop them or they get wet? Even if you do manage to contact someone, it can take awhile for them to reach you, and in the meantime you need to try to keep dry and warm.

I recommend that you check out Peter’s website www.outdoorsafe.com where you can purchase the survival items he swears by (large brightly-colored bags, metal match and others). He also has a terrific book called *Surviving a Wilderness Emergency* that should be required reading for everyone who ventures into the outdoors.

In the end, it’s always good to “Hope for the best, but plan for the worst.” And, of course, make sure to never say “I am just...”

Kelly Stang is a wildlife biologist in DEC’s Albany office and is the coordinator of NY’s Becoming an Outdoors-Woman program.

Editor’s note: Peter Kummerfeldt is one of a number of wilderness safety experts who offer classes. For a list of others, you can contact your local DEC forest ranger.

Basic Survival Kit



When exploring the outdoors, you should always carry a basic survival kit. If things go wrong, having a kit can literally make the difference between life and death. Wilderness safety expert Peter Kummerfeldt teaches participants in his “Surviving a Wilderness Emergency” class that a minimal survival kit (see photo) must contain the basics of survival: shelter, fire and signaling.

Shelter

A windproof and waterproof shelter is most important in a survival situation. It is practically impossible to make this kind of shelter out of natural materials, and the amount of effort needed to do this is an energy waster. Peter recommends carrying at least one large, contractor grade, 55-gallon garbage bag in your survival kit. With only a small hole cut out for your face (avoid arm holes), you can be in a windproof and waterproof shelter within minutes. Bags in bright colors (royal blue, yellow, red or orange) increase your visibility to rescuers. These bags can also be used as a ground cloth, a tarp, or to collect or hold water. Peter prefers this to the mylar space blankets as they do not provide head-to-toe windproof and waterproof cover, and they shred easily.

Kelly Stang



James Clayton

Fire

Carrying a fire starter is another crucial item in a survival kit. Having a fire provides both physical and emotional comfort, and can also help signal your location to rescuers. Peter recommends carrying a metal match (matchless fire-starter comprised of magnesium and a striker) and some cotton balls saturated with petroleum jelly in a waterproof container. The soaked cotton balls will burn for minutes even in wet and windy conditions, more than enough to fuel the beginnings of a wood fire. Burning green materials (evergreen boughs) creates a lot of smoke which is great for signaling.

Signaling

Place both a loud whistle and a signal mirror in your survival kit. A whistle can be heard up to several miles away and is much easier than yelling for help. A signal mirror can be seen more than 40 miles away in open terrain and can be used to signal to aircraft flying overhead if they are looking for you.

James Clayton



Editor’s note: In addition to the items listed above, DEC rangers suggest you also include several other items (such as a simple first aid kit, any medications you are on, a knife or multi-use tool with a cutting edge, small flashlight with extra batteries, and a compass) in your survival kit. For more information, visit www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/28708.html or check out “Lost in the Woods” in the June 2007 *Conservationist*.



Walking for Sunshine

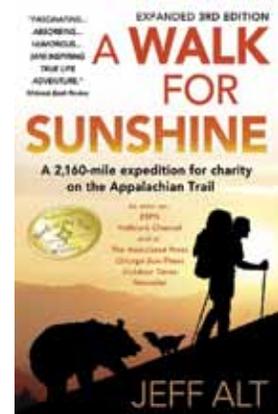
Text adapted from *A Walk for Sunshine* by Jeff Alt
 photos courtesy of author except where noted

On March 1, 1998, I began my northbound expedition along the Appalachian Trail. Four-and-a-half months later, with a new perspective on life, a few scars, a beard, and a very lean body, I climbed the final summit, fulfilling a dream that I shared with several hundred individuals with disabilities, their families and friends.

Each year, between 2,000 and 3,000 hikers attempt to hike the Appalachian Trail (AT). Only an estimated 20 percent actually complete the 2,160-mile journey. For 147 days, I put one foot in front of the other, an estimated five million times.

Everyone who decides to hike the AT does so for different reasons. I wanted to get back to a simpler life. I grew up in the computer age. These electronic wonders are supposed to simplify our lives, freeing our time and enhancing the quality of our life. Indeed, computers have simplified many tasks, but they have not simplified our lifestyles. Americans work longer than they did 20 years ago. We spend less time with our families, and we are in a constant, fast-paced routine. Fast food has become the norm for many busy families, while home-cooked meals are a thing of the past. I wondered what it would be like

to step back into an era without cars, to spend five months with my only worries being food, shelter and sleep, similar to our nomadic ancestors. I hoped to gain



a better perspective on life and improve the quality of my life at the same time. Hiking the Appalachian Trail became my goal.

My brother Aaron was born in 1973 with cerebral palsy and mental retardation. All his life, he's been dependent on others for his daily needs. Aaron lived with my family until he was 12. We all cared for him, fed him, played with him. Eventually he grew too large for us to be able to give the quality of care he needed and deserved.

When Aaron's needs outgrew our ability to meet them, we began our search for assisted care for the developmentally disabled. We found Sunshine Inc. of Northwest Ohio, which has provided Aaron the best care that he could get, and he has lived at the home for more than a decade.

In 1997, during my last semester of graduate school, I set a goal to hike the Appalachian Trail. I wanted to dedicate my journey to Aaron out of love, but I also wanted to give back to the Sunshine home for all that it has done for my brother and my family. Little did I know at the time that my hike would also inspire the adoption of a new annual fundraiser, "Walk With Sunshine."

Each year, between 2,000 and 3,000 hikers attempt to hike the Appalachian Trail. Only an estimated 20 percent actually complete the 2,160-mile journey.

I began my journey at Springer Mountain, Georgia, on a clear, early March day. Despite meticulous planning, I was not immune to mistakes, such as leaving my arch supports behind, or attempting to go too far that first day. By the time I crossed into New York some three months later, I had become an experienced hiker.

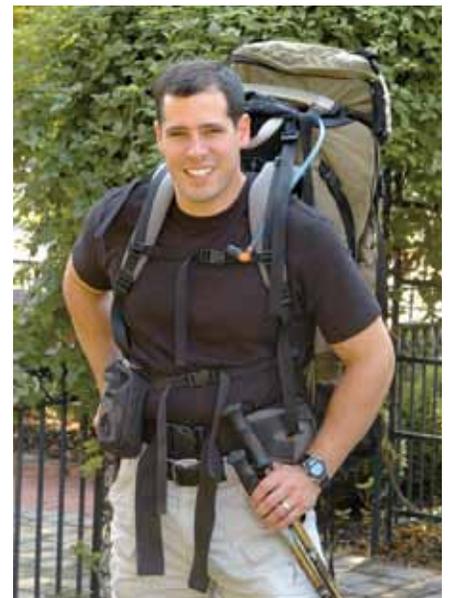
On the trail in New York, I came across the Appalachian Trail Train Station. From here, you can actually take the train into New York City. A couple



hundred yards north of the train station, a sign posted along a rural highway read, "Deli, ½ mile."

Hikers burn 4,000-6,000 calories a day, the caloric equivalent of running two marathons. I could polish off a large pizza and a half gallon of ice-cream just for a snack! So, a New York sub sounded pretty good, and I pounded the gravel alongside the interstate to the deli.

Inside, I ordered two foot-long subs, one to snack on then and one for dinner when I reached the shelter. Along with the subs, I bought a pint



of ice cream, a pop and a candy bar. After eating, I shouldered my pack and headed back toward the trail with a few miles left to go. After crossing another road, the trail markers led over a stile—a small A-frame ladder used to cross barbed-wire fencing—and through a cow pasture.

Since I had entered the State of Virginia, cow pastures had become a regular fixture. I was always careful and kept the cows in sight. They would usually stare at me for minute and then

go back to grazing. Stepping in a cow pie was more of a concern than being harmed by a cow.

This time, things were a little different. A small herd of Holstein dairy cows were grazing off the left-hand side of the trail. Shortly after I crossed the stile into the pasture, two rather large bulls with menacing horns began ambling toward me. Bulls usually were not mixed in with the cattle—at least that had been my experience in other pastures. As they approached, I figured I could scare them off. I yelled, "Back,

back!” They moved closer. Was my red backpack drawing their attention? Now all I needed were some matador skills and I would be all set! Unfortunately, I felt instead as if I were a rodeo clown.

One of the bulls got within 10 feet. I held one of my hiking poles toward his nose and again yelled, “Back, back!” This just seemed to make him mad. He blew air out of his snout and charged. I was 50 yards from the other side of the pasture. My only option was going back the way I came. Wondering if I could outrun a bull, I turned and ran as fast as I could. As soon as my feet hit the stile steps, I jumped, leaping into the air. Bam! I smacked the ground face first on the other side of the fence, my heavy pack landing on top of me.

As I lay there, thankful that I made it out of the pasture alive, I heard laughter. A gold Honda had pulled off the road, across from where I sprawled. A family of four saw the whole event and thought it was hysterical. The man driving the car yelled out the window, “Are you all right?” “Yeah,” I replied, dusting myself off. Still laughing, the man said, “You shouldn’t have looked at the heifers.” Real funny, I thought.

I wondered to myself: “How the heck do I get around this pasture?” As I started walking, I noticed blue blazes indicating an old section of the trail that eventually linked back to the current route. A few miles of climbing up away from the road led me to a shelter. After rolling out my sleeping bag, I dug out my sandwich, which just happened to be roast beef. I savored every bite with vengeful pleasure.

During my time on the trail, I couldn’t help but think that society has a way of building up one’s mental armor to protect you from getting hurt. Benton McKaye, the visionary of the Appalachian Trail, believed in the power of the wilderness to provide a rejuvenating escape for people weary from the hustle and bustle of modern life.



Hikers pass numerous cow pastures along the Appalachian Trail.



I found that the longer I was removed from domestic living, the more I grew to trust my surroundings. My life had been simplified to that of a nomad. I was alone most of the time on the trail; my social life was limited to brief chats with hikers and townsfolk during my weekly supply visits to small towns along the way. One day, I came across a man out for an early evening jog. As he passed, I said hello. He didn't wave; instead he kept running, clutching a can of mace at the ready. I guess I did look like a vagrant. (As a rule of thumb, stand upwind from a thru-hiker!) My unkempt beard probably didn't help my appearance. The encounter reminded me that, true to McKaye's vision, I had shed my protective societal shell over the last 1,400 miles.

For me, the AT was a great opportunity to boil life down to its simplest

form, allowing me to filter out unwanted distractions. I learned that life is as simple or as complicated as you make it.

I also learned that the American spirit is alive and well. Steeped in history, the trail blazes through many of the original colonies. I walked the same wilderness footpaths where our country's founders marched off to battle in pursuit of freedom. Along the trail, many people offered rides, lodging, food and water. This country was founded on patriotism, survival, kindness, trust and integrity, all of which were very much alive during my journey. To me, the AT is just as much a part of the American spirit as baseball and apple pie.

Though my AT adventure has ended, I have taken on a new adventure: raising children. Children are the key to wilderness preservation. I believe taking my family on outdoor adventures will

develop strong, healthy, well-rounded kids who will grow up to preserve our nation's great trails.

I hope that one day my children will reach their own Mount Katahdins. In the meantime, we continue to visit various sections of the Appalachian Trail, Benton McKaye-style, to escape from the hustle and bustle of everyday life... if only for a little while.

Jeff Alt is an expert hiker, speaker, teacher, speech-language pathologist and freelance writer. He lives with his wife and two children in Cincinnati, Ohio and continues to host the annual 5k Walk With Sunshine inspired by his Appalachian Trail journey, which has raised more than \$225,000. Visit www.jeffalt.com for more information.



Hiking has become a family affair for the author and his family.



TREES FOR TRIBS:

Linking Land, Water and People



By Rebecca Moore

Photos by James Clayton, except where noted

The regional forester notes my shoes. John Gibbs is in charge of all matters of public and private forest management for 11 counties with some of the largest acreages of working forest in the state, but at this moment, his concern is my socks becoming saturated with mud. I swap my respectable utility boots for his spare set of waders and finish unloading supplies from my vehicle. The sky is a uniform

grey, and low, but it's not raining. "Rain is good for trees," Gibbs reminds us, and we're willing to spare a little comfort for the well-being of some tree seedlings.

At a parking area next to Wentworth Bridge off NY-415 in Steuben County, the view of the wide valley is punctuated by rolling, forested uplands with steep slopes and flat tops. Today, DEC's Trees for Tribs program is restoring some

forest to a public fishing spot along the Cohocton River. "Tribbs" refers to tributaries, and describes streams in the context of a whole network of water bodies and ecosystems which rely on one another. My forester colleague, a serious fisherman, calls our tree-planting effort "Trees for Trout," an equally applicable title for its benefit to fish habitat and tributary health.

The fishing is particularly fine on the Cohocton, but as our volunteers can attest, you won't find fish in these open river sections. The tree canopies that shade land and water from sunlight and keep summer water temperatures cool enough for fish to spawn are nonexistent here, and the soil appears to be ready to let go and make a trip downstream. Community members recognized they could change that by planting trees to create a riparian forest buffer: a natural filter and protective layer between land and water.

Trees for Tribes was conceived by DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program to help reverse the state of denuded streambanks and associated problems affecting the Hudson Valley. Many of these streamside corridors, like the bank we're on today, have been cleared of forest for generations for farming or development. The sight of pasture blanketing a valley right up to the water's edge is familiar to many of us, but deforestation dislevels rivers, affecting stabilization, filtration, shading and cooling, habitat, and water absorption in an area. In developed areas, the increased runoff created from buildings, driveways and yards can cause some landowners to have receding properties as once babbling creeks turn into sizable channels, jagged with exposed soil.

Planting riparian buffers is like putting up that tent rainfly you think you won't need until you wake up and realize you're in a rainstorm. Extreme weather events can cause a tremendous amount of damage to unprotected stream corridors. Trees typically help streams flow more steadily, regulating flow of water over the surface in the spring, absorbing water through roots, and keeping the ground moist in the summer. After major storms, rivers swell outside their banks in part because forests would typically retain runoff and reduce overall volume of the stream.



Trees planted along streams help regulate water flow and act as natural filters for sediments and pollutants like phosphorus and nitrogen.

Rebecca Moore



Volunteers who help plant trees in the Trees for Tribes program include local 4H groups, Cub Scouts, and school children and their parents. Many have never planted a tree before!



(L to R) Town of Keene Supervisor Bill Ferebee, DEC's Division of Lands and Forests Director Rob Davies, and State Resource Conservationist Edward Henry pose for a photo at the Lake Champlain Trees for Tribes kick-off event at Marcy Field in Keene.

Without tree roots to hold the ground in place, soil is washed away. A forested strip along a stream corridor also improves water quality. A 35- to 150-foot forest buffer acts as a filter for sediments and pollutants like phosphorous and nitrogen. These are both essential nutrients for crop growth and lawn care, but when they occur in excess these nutrients can suffocate streams, causing algae buildup that depletes oxygen.

Beyond the pavement, the ground is soft, and closer to the river not all of last week's floodwaters have receded. We step carefully until we're used to the muck shifting beneath our feet, then plod along the streamside with buckets of tree seedlings soaking in water. Gibbs gives instructions. The eight local Cub Scouts and members of the local Trout Unlimited chapter who are helping out listen intently. Most of the kids and their parents have never planted a tree, especially one along a tributary stream. We survey this zone and interpret the flood line from spring's most recent hammering of rain and thaw. Based on the low and high points, we determine which of our native tree and shrub seedlings will best survive in this landscape. Despite the rain we are all having fun, and along the way, the third-grade boys squeeze mud between their hands.

As we place each seedling into the earth, the group's sense of satisfaction grows. Last summer's floods reminded us of the importance of stream buffers. There is good sense in repairing the natural systems meant to contend with natural disasters, and we realize that our personal activity can affect larger change.

In the three short years that the Trees for Tribes program has been in existence, thousands of volunteers have planted approximately 28,000 seedlings along 70,000 feet of stream in the Hudson Valley. In 2011, DEC began expanding the program to include the Champlain, Susquehanna and Mohawk Basins.



When trees are planted along stream corridors, their roots help keep the ground in place so soil is not washed away, like what has happened here.



Saratoga Tree Nursery

DEC's Trees for Tribes program offers technical assistance and free native trees and shrubs for qualifying riparian buffer planting and restoration projects. Currently the program is available within the Lake Champlain Watershed, Hudson River Estuary, Upper Hudson Watershed, Mohawk River Basin, and Susquehanna Watershed. Landowners with a workable streambank site who are willing to find volunteers to help with the plantings simply need to submit an application. To see a map of service areas and more, visit DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov/lands/43668.html.

Unlike the pace of our cultures's technological change, the improvements to these tributaries will take time. It may be some 40 years before these trees reach maturity, but the benefits will last for generations.

Today, we will keep planting tomorrow's trees, one seedling at a time.

Rebecca Moore is the NYS Trees for Tribes coordinator in DEC's Division of Lands and Forests.

THE ULTIMATE HUNTER

Paul Clark



—domestic cats and wildlife populations

By Christine Donovan

She cringed. She didn't even have to look down to know that her foot had just grazed the top of another dead bird. It was seven o'clock in the morning and she had stepped outside to get the newspaper, but instead was greeted by another "present" from her cat Trixie.

While not every cat owner has stepped on a wild animal first thing in the morning, most outdoor cat owners are familiar with the "gifts" (both live and dead) brought to them by their cats. What many people don't realize, however, is that these gifts are representative of the harm their cats can cause by going outdoors.

Americans are just learning about the dangers posed by domestic cats that spend some or all of their time outdoors. And while it may be hard for us to imagine that those adorable, purring members of our families can be a threat, the reality is that domestic cats are incredible hunters that take a huge toll on wildlife populations. In fact, through injuring and killing prey, house cats represent a serious ecological threat, and in many suburban and rural areas they are the most abundant predators.

According to *The New York Times*, domestic cats kill more than one billion (yes, I did say billion) small mammals and about one billion birds each year



To find out more about the effects of outdoor cats on wildlife populations, check out:

- *New York Times*' article "Tweety Was Right: Cats are a Bird's No. 1 Enemy" at www.nytimes.com/2011/03/21/science/21birds.html.
- American Bird Conservancy www.abcbirds.org/abcprograms/policy/cats/index.html.
- University of Maine's "Facts on Cats and Wildlife: A Conservation Dilemma" at <http://umaine.edu/publications/7148e>.
- Various articles and facts about free-ranging and feral cats by using the search bar at <http://joomla.wildlife.org>

nationwide. That's more than 100,000 times the number of birds killed by the BP oil spill.

A common misconception is that a cat fed at home will not kill animals. However, it appears that domestic cats' instincts to hunt are separate from their hunger senses. Owners of outdoor cats know this firsthand: they feed their cats well, yet cats still bring home "gifts." A study from 1976 featured in an article by American Bird Conservancy highlighted six cats eating a food that they enjoyed. However, when a live mouse was put in the room, each cat stopped eating to kill the mouse, and then continued eating its food. In one study, a well-fed cat killed more than 1,600 animals in 18 months. Even if the cat lets the prey escape alive, the prey almost always dies from stress and/or infections from the cat's teeth or claws.

Cats have the greatest impact on bird populations. According to *Wildlife Professional* magazine, domestic cats have had documented impacts on 254 species of threatened, near threatened, and

extinct bird species worldwide. In the U.S., almost one-third of bird species are endangered, threatened, or in significant decline due to stresses such as habitat destruction. Meanwhile, the number of house cats has almost tripled in the last 50 years.

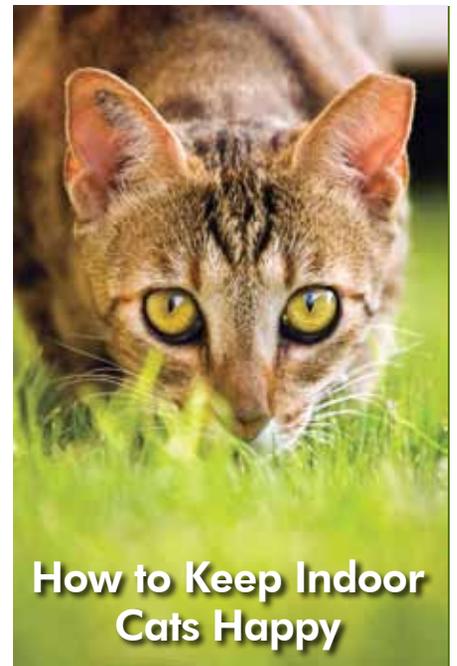
American Bird Conservancy states that house cats' main prey includes rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks, cardinals, blue jays and house wrens, and they will also prey on the endangered piping plover, Florida scrub-jay and the California least tern. A cat roaming outdoors averages 14 kills per year, and there are more than 100 million outdoor and feral cats in the U.S. The numbers add up, and directly affect the food available for native predators.

Cats are a particular threat in the early summer, during birds' vulnerable fledgling stage. Many people think that attaching a bell to their outdoor cat will keep it from catching prey, but this is not the case. Studies show that the bell usually does not alert prey until it is too late, or not at all.



Audubon Society, Portland, OR

These are the cat-killed birds brought into the Portland Audubon Society in one season.



Pet owners can help by keeping their feline companions inside. This protects wild critters, and is also good for the cat's own safety. It has been well-documented that cats that roam freely outdoors live between three and five years, while cats kept exclusively indoors live between 10 and 17 years. Outdoor cats are hit by cars, fall prey to wild predators (fox, fishers, mink, coyote, owls, hawks), and can be exposed to poisons and diseases. In fact, thousands of cats are killed each year due to poisons such as pesticides, rodenticides and antifreeze, while others contract deadly diseases such as rabies, feline leukemia, distemper and feline immunodeficiency virus. Keeping cats indoors can benefit their owners, as well. Outdoor cats can bring fleas, ticks, diseases and parasites into the home, exposing their owners to these hazards.

Parasites occur in much higher numbers in outdoor cats than in their exclusively indoor counterparts. One study found hookworm in 75% of feral cats. Furthermore, many diseases that domestic felines can carry are highly contagious and can go undetected by the cat's owner. The illnesses that your cat

carries may not only be harmful to it, but also to wildlife. For example, in the western U.S., house cats have spread feline leukemia to mountain lions, and in Florida, domestic cats may have infected the endangered Florida panther with feline distemper and an immune deficiency disease.

When you consider that domestic cats born and raised entirely outdoors have an almost 80 percent annual mortality rate, and that in a given year millions of outdoor cats do not come home, indoor life for a cat looks attractive. Owners of outdoor cats are nervous that their cats will be miserable indoors, but in fact, cats raised exclusively indoors generally show no desire to go outdoors. So if you want Trixie to stop leaving you inconvenient gifts, consider easing her or your next cat into life indoors. You'll be extending her life, and protecting local wildlife at the same time.

A senior at SUNY Geneseo, **Christine Donovan** was a summer intern at DEC.

How to Keep Indoor Cats Happy

- Provide a safe outside enclosure, such as a screened porch.
- Provide window shelves so your cat can monitor the outdoors from inside.
- Plant kitty grass (available at pet supply stores) inside so your pet can graze.
- Play with your cat each day. Paper bags and cardboard boxes are sources of never-ending delight while you are away.
- Clean litter boxes regularly.



Wild Leek

(*Allium tricoccum*)

By Thomas Adessa

Photos by Jaqueline Donnelly

For some, the first sign of spring is the purple flower of the crocus as it peeks up through the barren ground. For others, it's hearing songbirds voicing their unique melodies. Still for others—such as myself—it is the appearance of ramps. That's right: ramps, or what's more commonly referred to as the wild leek.

My first exposure to leeks was from my scoutmaster. On a spring camping trip we were learning about wild plant identification. The scoutmaster showed us leeks and that same evening we tried them three different ways: in a soup, raw, and the entire plant cooked. The experience remains with me to this day.

On the eastern seaboard, this perennial plant is primarily found from late winter through spring, from Quebec to South Carolina. It has smooth, long, light-green leaves that are similar in appearance to those of tulips. The scallion-like stalk and upper section of the bulb may also have a burgundy tint. All parts of the plant—

leaves and bulb—are edible. Wild leeks grow in clumps of a few to several dozen plants and have a strong root structure that can make them difficult to dig when the soil is dry.

Two varieties of wild leeks call New York State home. *Allium tricoccum* var. *tricoccum* has broad leaves and is the species most people encounter. *Allium tricoccum* var. *burdickii* (also known as Burdick’s wild leek) has narrow leaves and is endangered in this state, only known to occur in Chautauqua County.

The leek’s flavor is a combination of garlic and onion and lends itself to a variety of cooking applications—from soups and toppings, to chopped and added to sauces; or you can sauté the entire plant. It can even be pickled! It has become a delicacy in many trendy restaurants. But, natives of New York, Pennsylvania, and several other eastern states down to South Carolina have known about the leek’s many uses for decades. In many Appalachian states it is considered to be a spring tonic—originally labeled as such because before mass shipping and refrigeration, leeks were the first vegetable available in the spring.

Several states hold festivals that focus on leeks. For example, in Richmond, West Virginia, an annual “Ramp Fest” brings leek lovers from long distances to



Wild leek leaves wither away by the end of spring when a flower stalk emerges. The flowers bloom in mid-summer for a couple weeks, and then the seeds mature and fall.

sample various foods that feature wild leeks. Unfortunately, the plant’s popularity as a culinary treat is beginning to take a toll on its populations. With the recent focus on eating locally, wild leeks are being harvested in record numbers. This has led to the plant being listed as a species of special concern in several eastern states. In Quebec, the leek is a threatened species and its harvesting is restricted. However, in New York State, wild leeks (all species except the narrowleaf variety) can currently be harvested. But with leek numbers

dwindling, it’s a good practice to only gather a small portion of a group of plants and leave others as rootstock for future plants.

Wild leeks are only available for a short time each spring. I look forward to their arrival and even gather a few for friends who can no longer navigate the woods. If you are lucky enough to have some of these flavorful plants on your property, be sure to try them, but leave some to enjoy in the future.

Thomas Adessa is a Central New York native and an avid lover of the outdoors.

Caution About Dangerous Look-alikes.

Readers take note: false hellebore (a poisonous plant) can be mistaken for wild leeks early in the season. ALWAYS positively identify any plant before ingesting it.



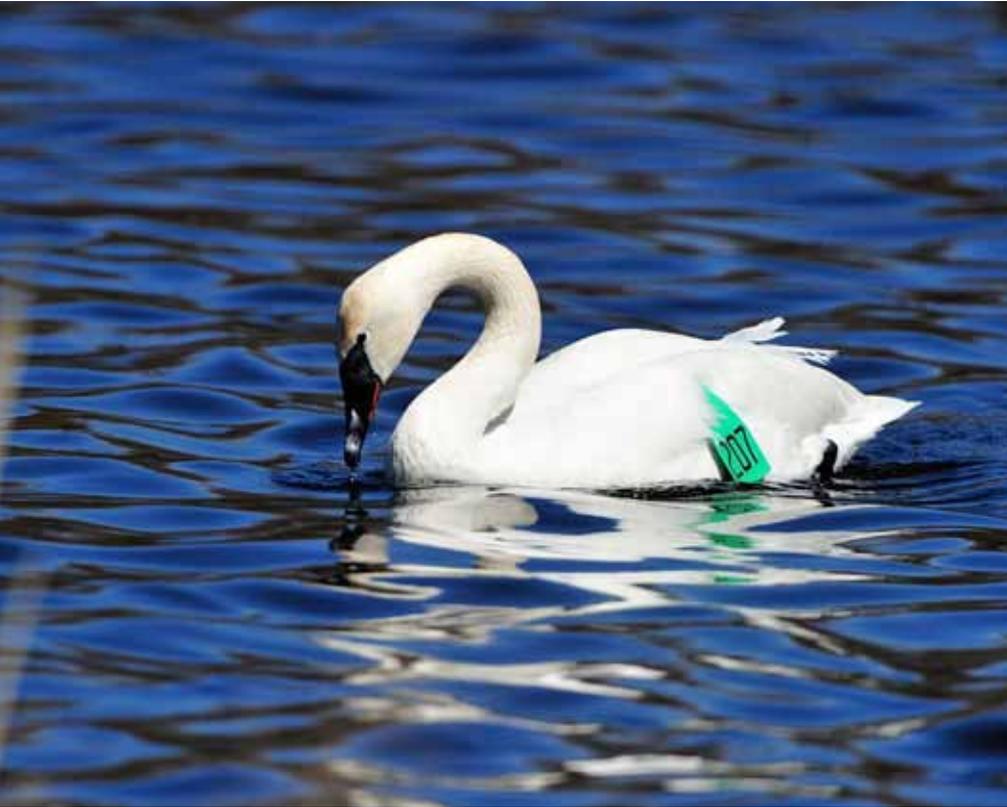
Roasted Leek Bread:

Clean one dozen leeks using just the bulb.
Roast in a glass-baking dish at 350°, with a little olive oil, until soft.
Cool. Place in a food processor with ¼ stick melted butter.
Puree, spread on Italian bread, and brown under a broiler.
Sprinkle on Parmesan cheese and enjoy!

Editor’s Note: For more delicious wild leek recipes from the author, visit our Facebook page!



Doug Racine



Trumpeter Swan Sightings

During the summer of 2011, DEC captured, banded and released trumpeter swans at the Montezuma Wetlands Complex near Savannah, NY and at the Perch River Wildlife Management Area near Brownville, NY. The swans received highly visible green rubber wing tags displaying three-digit numbers in addition to standard USFWS metal leg bands. Trumpeter swans are the largest native migratory waterfowl in the U.S. They can easily be distinguished from the non-native, invasive mute swan by their dark-colored bills; mute swans have almost entirely orange bills, with black knobs on adult birds. According to records, trumpeters have been observed in NY since the late 1980s and since then, a small but growing number of these birds has been successfully nesting in portions of the state that border Lake Ontario. The purpose of marking these swans is to learn where the birds move from one season to the next. Anyone

who sees a marked (or unmarked) trumpeter swan is encouraged to share his/her sighting by writing to swantags@gw.dec.state.ny.us.

Swimming Pool Survey

This summer, DEC is asking pool owners to participate in the Insect Bycatch Swimming Pool Survey. In a smaller version of the survey last year, volunteers across the state helped collect insects from pool filters to look for the invasive Asian long-horned beetle (ALB). Forests in Warren, Ulster, Franklin, Essex, Sullivan and Greene Counties are particularly susceptible to ALB infestation because many people camp and often transport firewood to these locales—the biggest mode of spreading ALB and other invasive pests. (See DEC’s “Don’t Move Firewood!” webpage at www.dec.ny.gov/animals/28722.html.) The survey was so successful last year that DEC is expanding the survey this summer to enlist the help

of homeowners across the state. But you needn’t bring in samples! If you’d like to help, contact Jessica Cancelliere at foresthealth@gw.dec.state.ny.us or (518)478-7813; you’ll be given information about what to look for and details about ALB. Then, if you think you found an ALB in your filter, simply send photos via email or mail.

BOW Workshop

The next Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) workshop will be held June 29-July 1 at Silver Bay YMCA on Lake George. The BOW program is designed to teach outdoor skills to women who might otherwise have little or no experience with outdoor activities. The program is a three-day workshop that offers many different classes over the course of a weekend, including: shotgun, trapping, kayaking, wilderness first aid, fish and game cooking, reading wildlife sign, and more. Participants can even take a hunter or trapper education class at the workshop. Visit www.dec.ny.gov/education/68.html for more information, including how to register.



BRIEFLY

Report Abnormal-looking and Sick-acting Deer

DEC wants to hear about any white-tailed deer appearing sick or acting abnormally. Recently, DEC identified an uncommon disease caused by the bacteria *Pasteurella* in a deer from Warren County. The disease doesn't affect humans, but DEC is seeking additional information to find the prevalence of it in the deer herd. Deer with the disease may have a swollen head, neck or brisket, and may exhibit excessive drooling, nasal discharge or respiratory distress. If you find a dead deer that was not struck by a vehicle, or come across a deer acting abnormally, please report it to your nearest DEC regional office or to an ECO or Forest Ranger. You should not handle or eat any deer that appears sick or acts abnormally. Visit www.dec.ny.gov/about/50230.html to locate your nearest DEC office.

iMapInvasives Training

Managed by the New York Natural Heritage Program, iMapInvasives is an online mapping tool designed to protect New York State from the threat of invasive species. Citizen scientists, educators, land managers and anyone interested in helping to keep the map up-to-date and accurate is encouraged to report invasive species locations and survey efforts. You must be trained to properly enter data, and this spring the iMapInvasives team is offering free training sessions throughout the state. Visit www.iMapInvasives.org/NYTraining for schedule details and registration, and contact imapinvasives@nynhp.org for general questions.

Youth Summer Camp

If you know a child who likes the outdoors, consider sending him or her to a DEC camp this summer. DEC operates

DEC Camp Colby



four residential camps for youth ages 11-13: Camp Colby in Saranac Lake, Franklin County; Camp DeBruce in Livingston Manor, Sullivan County; Camp Rushford in Caneadea, Allegany County and Pack Forest in Warrensburg, Warren County. Although spaces are already filled for this year, Pack Forest and Camp Rushford also feature Teenage Ecology Week, an environmental studies program for 14- to 17-year-old campers. For complete information and a list of available weeks, visit DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov/education/29.html or call (518) 402-8014. Also, be sure to check out DEC's Summer Camps Facebook page.

Combating Climate Change

The state's first complete report of vulnerability to climate change is now available. Funded by New York State Energy Research and Development Authority, *ClimAID: The Integrated Assessment for Effective Climate Change Adaptation Strategies in New York State* gives decision-makers information on the state's vulnerability to climate change, and strategies developed via local experience and scientific knowledge to help combat this change. The report describes

the need to plan for, and adapt to, climate change effects in water resources, coastal zones, ecosystems, agriculture, energy, transportation, telecommunications, and public health. Visit www.nyscrda.ny.gov/climaid to read the report.

Bobcat Management Plan

A new, five-year bobcat management plan has been put in place for the benefit of hunters, trappers, wildlife enthusiasts, nature photographers and many others. DEC staff worked closely with interest groups to guide bobcat management in the future. The plan will help maintain viable bobcat populations, monitor trends in bobcat distribution and abundance, provide for sustainable use and enjoyment of the animal by the public, and minimize negative bobcat-human interactions. Visit www.dec.ny.gov/animals/9360.html to read the full plan.



Gerry Lemmo



Gamebird Gymnastics

These two rooster pheasants were fighting over a hen. We have not seen two roosters together in years, so this was quite a spectacle! We hope it is a small indication that they may be growing in numbers.

Jeff and Marie Frew
Churchville, Monroe County

Great photo! Sparring rooster pheasants are a rare sight in our state, but your location is the last stronghold for this game bird. Pheasant populations in NY have declined drastically over the past 50 years due to changes in habitat. To combat this decline, DEC is partnering with government and private conservation organizations to establish the Genesee Valley Pheasant Habitat Focus Area (www.dec.ny.gov/animals/72543.html). Hopefully, conservation efforts like this will allow people to enjoy the sight and sound of sparring and cackling roosters for years to come.

—Michael Schiavone,
DEC Wildlife Biologist

Take-Down

I was taking photos from a duck blind when a single (quite large) coyote chased down and took a deer within 50 feet of me!

Jim Yates
Kingston, Ulster County

What an amazing event for you to witness. While it is sometimes hard to see an animal's life taken in front of you, it's also incredible to see "Mother Nature in action."

—Conservationist staff



Hey—Move Over

I took this photo at the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge. There were so many carp at this particular barrier that the water was absolutely brimming with them!

Laurie Dirxx
Ontario, Wayne County

This is a great shot of a group of spawning carp that typically crowd shallow, weedy areas during late spring into early summer to broadcast their eggs. It's quite a sight to see, and the event can appear quite frenzied, with the fishes' bodies sometimes exposed out of the water. Originally from Asia, common carp (pictured here) are found in waters across the state. They prefer clean waters, but can tolerate low water quality. Carp taken from clean waters are excellent to eat.

—Conservationist staff



Eying a Vulture

I took this photo at Treman State Park. There were a bunch of turkey vultures roosting in a tree right near a public highway. They are so amazing.

Abigail Bixby
Tompkins County

What a great photo! We were curious about the white lesions near the eye and checked with DEC pathologists and a Cornell veterinary scientist who thought they might be normal characteristics that become prominent during the breeding season.

—Conservationist staff



Beautiful Bloodroot

We found this flower in the woods next to our home. Any idea what it might be? “Naddy”

This is a double bloodroot—and a gorgeous one at that! See the wildflower profile about bloodroot in our April 2008 issue.

—Conservationist staff

Cricket Frogs Article

I seriously appreciate your publishing my article [on cricket frogs in the February issue]. My own theory [regarding the population decline] was described in the piece as attributable to “some scientists,” which, coming from a first-person narrative penned by me, suggests (in error) that this is not my own theory. I would like to see the record corrected.

Thanks for providing a great publication, as well!

Jay Westerveld

—Conservationist staff enjoyed the article, and we regret the error.



Ask the Biologist

Q: I was out turkey hunting last spring when I flushed a grouse off of her nest. I took a look and was surprised to see two large eggs, which I realized were turkey eggs. I know that some birds, such as wood ducks, will dump eggs (lay them in another bird’s nest) for various reasons. Is it possible a turkey did this? And, could the grouse hatch the turkey eggs?

—Noah Funicello

A: It is not unheard of for a female turkey to dump eggs in a grouse nest, or vice-versa. Both species pick similar nest sites, and the females are stimulated to lay by the sight of eggs. So, in areas where grouse and turkey ranges overlap, it is not surprising that one species might encounter the other’s nest and put her own egg in it.

It is unlikely, however, that a grouse could hatch turkey eggs because turkey eggs take longer to incubate: 28 days for turkey eggs; 21 days for grouse eggs. As grouse hens start incubating the eggs after the last one has been laid, all the eggs start developing at the same time. Once the eggs hatch, hens leave with the chicks about 24 hours later and do not seem concerned about unhatched eggs. Since turkey eggs still need another week of incubation, they won’t hatch.

—Michael Schiavone, DEC Wildlife Biologist and Bill Healy, USFS Wildlife Biologist (retired)

Editor’s Note: December’s cover inspired people to send in photos of snowy owls. There’s been a recent irruption of these owls, possibly due to fierce competition for the birds’ main food source (lemmings) in their Arctic home. Thus, the owls have been flying farther south in search of food.

To see more photos of owls and other wildlife taken by readers like you, be sure to visit and “like” our Facebook page. Also, be sure to send us your photos! You might see them here or on our Facebook page.



Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

Reely Seeing by Richard DeMarte

Each time I head out on another fishing trip, the birth of the new day never ceases to amaze me. For the past ten years, ever since my fishing adventures first kicked into high gear, I've seen more sunrises than any other person I know (besides Dad, my best friend and fishing partner). As we climb aboard our boat and pull away from the dock before sunrise, the calm soft silence of the new day embraces us and my heart starts to race thinking about what lies ahead. It's a sequence of events that never ceases to amaze. It never gets old, and no two days are ever the same.

Finding bait is always our first order of business, so with the sky starting to lighten we search for bunker, the twelve-inch baitfish most sought after by the striped bass we're fishing for in our home waters of western Long Island Sound along the New York/Connecticut border. A telltale slap on the water's surface catches my eye and within a heartbeat I throw my snag-hook and have caught my first bait of the day. A few dozen casts later, our baitwell is full and we're dropping anchor along the rocky shoreline in one of our favorite striper spots. Within minutes, we deploy four baits (two live and two chunks) and almost immediately one reel starts to scream. The day is already a winner!

Being out so early is a treat for a number of reasons. Oftentimes the families of ospreys that have returned to this area after a twenty-year absence put on a show, screeching and swooping high over our heads. They see the same pods of baitfish we do and demonstrate

their superior fishing skills as they swoop down to the surface, zoom along at high speed, extend their talons and latch onto a bunker. The show usually ends as they make their way back to their nest to feed their young. It really is a sight to behold, and one that I'm fortunate to witness dozens of times each year.

Caring about western Long Island Sound is a family tradition. For four generations, my family has contributed to protecting this amazing and awe-inspiring estuary by participating in and supporting environmental activities and organizations like the Fishermen's Conservation Association and the Marine Fish Conservation Network. And while I never begrudge any angler a fresh-caught meal, I practice catch-and-release and am proud to have personally tagged, measured, weighed



and released more than 750 striped bass in the last few years—a couple of which measured nearly four feet long and weighed close to 36 pounds. I figure that if only five percent of the fish I released were breeding-aged females, that's 37 females returned to the water to spawn. Given that each female between 10 and 20 pounds lays one to three million eggs, that's a lot of potential future stripers. Even factoring in a tiny survival rate, the impact of release is profound, and to me, this is what balancing recreational fishing and conservation is all about.

As my journey continues, looking ahead to my future, I can "reely" see that little contributions truly make a difference in helping to ensure the health of this estuary for generations to come.

Richard DeMarte is a junior pro fisherman and outdoor writer. Check out his fishing website at www.nyctfishing.com



ARBOR DAY— *140 Years of Tree Planting*



Arbor Day was first celebrated in 1872 as a way to encourage farmers and homesteaders to plant trees to provide shade, shelter, wood, fuel and to beautify open areas.

Today, tree planting is just as important as ever. On April 27 (National and New York State Arbor Day), millions of people will celebrate the significance of trees in our lives. Tree planting is especially important in communities and flood-prone areas. Trees planted along streams and rivers reduce flood damage by slowing stormwater flows and their roots help prevent streambank erosion.

DEC's Saratoga Tree Nursery is a great place to get native tree and shrub seedlings for your Arbor Day planting projects. The nursery offers more than 50 species of trees and shrubs, all specifically suited for New York's climate. Try planting shrub willows along a stream or as a "green" fence, or use conifers to create a natural snow fence or to grow as future Christmas trees. You can also attract birds to your yard by planting crabapples or highbush cranberries.



Available through mid May, seedlings are small, lightweight and easy to handle. To learn how to get some, visit www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7127.html.



See page 2

Michael Fey

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