

LETTERS Compiled by Alex Hyatt



Bully Guest

Our neighbor, Mrs. Bea Coryell, is a subscriber to your magazine. She thought you might be interested in this picture I took of what we think is a red-tailed hawk. The bird took over our birdbath for about 20 minutes. Needless to say, all the other birds immediately vanished.

Derek Lawrence
Cold Spring Harbor, Suffolk County

What you've photographed is indeed a red-tailed hawk; it is a juvenile and probably a female. I make this suggestion because it seems like a large bird, and female red-tails are often up to 1/3 larger than their male counterparts. Great shot!

—Alan Mapes, Environmental Educator (retired)

Barbie Pole Bullhead

My daughter caught this fish on her new Barbie pole. Can you tell us if it is a catfish or a bullhead, and what is the difference?

Michael Neelin
Henrietta, Monroe County

New York State waters are home to several catfish species, including the channel catfish, white catfish, brown bullhead, yellow bullhead and black bullhead. Although it's difficult to positively identify the species from a single photo, based on the fish's coloration, mottling on the sides, and shape of the tail (square, not forked like the channel catfish), I believe your daughter caught a brown bull-



head. Brown bullheads are the most common catfish in New York. They occur in a wide variety of habitats, from cool Adirondack lakes to warm water ponds, and larger, slow-moving streams. They are easy to catch, readily biting on worms fished near the bottom. Adult brown bullheads average 8-14 inches in length, so your daughter's catch is impressive. Thanks for the photo!

—Eileen Stegemann, Contributing Editor

One Casual Cat

I thought you might like this photo of a bobcat I took while out rabbit hunting. It was taken in the Town of Poughkeepsie at around 10 A.M. on a Saturday morning. I walked right past the bobcat while it was sunning itself and it showed no fear! I had time to snap a couple of shots before it decided to scurry away into a nearby swamp.

Richard Ponzini
Dutchess County

I can only guess why the bobcat let you get so close. Perhaps it is a young cat that hasn't learned to fear



humans yet. Maybe it thought you would pass by without noticing it as house cats do, but it doesn't have the wide-eyed expression one would expect in that situation. There

is a chance the animal has rabies, which is rare in bobcats, but not unheard of. In any case, consider yourself lucky getting such a close look, especially during the day!

—Scott Van Arsdale, DEC Wildlife Technician



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Plenty: One Man, One Woman, and a Raucous Year of Eating Locally

by Alisa Smith and J.B. MacKinnon
242 pages, \$13.95 paperback
Random House/Crown Publishing
www.randomhouse.com

It's day one of a year-long experiment. After many hours of shopping, much preparation and a grocery bill of nearly \$130 for a single meal, Alisa Smith turns to her longtime partner J.B. MacKinnon and says, "This might not even be possible." Smith is referring to a pact that she and MacKinnon have made to eat only local foods for an entire year—that is, foods, beverages and ingredients originating within 100 miles of where they live.

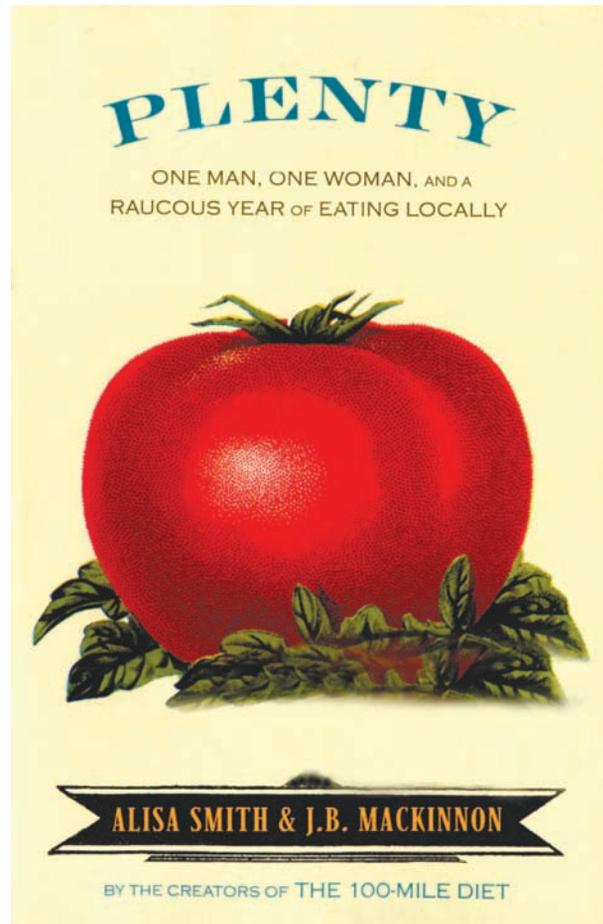
Apparently feeling both ambitious and optimistic, Smith and MacKinnon had invited another couple to share their first local-foods dinner. The initial feast was a big hit, and also a big revelation, even for two sophisticated, self-sufficient journalists who, by many people's standards, live a somewhat unconventional life.

Plenty is a month-by-month narrative of their challenging year, which turns out to be a difficult and occasionally exhilarating experiment. Each chapter begins with a recipe appropriate to the month for which the chapter is named. Coincidentally—or not—the first recipe is for a beverage, and the last is for a dessert.

As the year progressed, the couple's celebrity grew, requiring that they always practiced what they were preaching by buying and consuming only local food and drink. When a rare temptation to stray from the pact arose, there's nothing in the book to indicate that they surrendered to it.

One of the more creative attempts in the effort to adhere to the pact involved making cheese. With the year drawing to a close, MacKinnon and a friend followed instructions taken from the internet and made a cheese press cobbled together with "tin cans, old milk crates and bicycle tubes." Because it was their first such attempt, each wax-coated round was stamped with a skull and crossbones. When sampled, however, the briefly-aged cheese wasn't toxic, but it was exceptionally salty.

On the day after the official end of their mission, Smith and MacKinnon traveled 12 hours to collect seawater from which they planned to harvest fleur de sel—salt. The process is miraculous in its simplicity, and it reaped sufficient salt to last through another year of eating locally.



This book isn't just about two people pursuing a common—some might say lofty—goal. It's also about economics, environment, families and friendships, geography, history, traditions, weather, and society's increasing disconnect from the natural world. Whether you simply admire the idea of "living off the land," aspire to try it yourself someday, or have already tried and abandoned it, be sure to include *Plenty* on your reading list.

Bernadette LaManna is an editor in DEC's Bureau of Publications and Internet.