

Family Fishing | Monarch Butterfly | Adirondack Rescue

NEW YORK STATE

# Conservationist

JUNE 2016



Young Wildlife

# NEW YORK STATE Conservationist

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Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of New York State

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Dear Reader,

As I reflect on the Department's many accomplishments in the last month, one common theme runs through them: connecting people to the environment. This is fundamental to what we do at DEC, and there are many examples of connecting people with the environment throughout the pages of this issue. Whether it is helping students develop a sense of place with their local environment, or helping a child connect to nature through learning to fish, each of us can play a role in establishing and nurturing this connection.

During Earth Week in April, Governor Cuomo officially kicked off the Connect Kids to Parks initiative, modeled after the Every Kid in a Park effort launched last fall by President Obama. Through this initiative, all fourth-grade students in New York and their families can receive free admission to the many federal and state lands throughout the state. DEC is partnering with the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation to spearhead the effort. An important component of the initiative is providing transportation to take underserved members of the community to the many parks and recreation lands that New York has to offer.

On Saturday, May 7th, I was fortunate to be able to participate in I Love My Park Day, joining thousands of volunteers around the state in caring for their parks. Coordinated by Parks & Trails New York, this annual event further connects New Yorkers to their public lands, giving them an opportunity to help clean a park, remove invasive species, maintain a trail, or any number of other stewardship activities. This event was particularly exciting as it was the first time the effort included DEC lands. Helping to care for public lands gives people a greater appreciation of New York's tremendous natural resource bounty, and instills a sense of personal ownership of and stake in the future of public lands.

On May 10th, I was proud to stand beside Governor Cuomo as he announced the completion of the purchase of the former Finch, Pruyn, & Co. lands in the Adirondacks. The purchase of the nearly 21,000-acre Boreas Ponds Tract completes the largest Adirondack land acquisition in more than 100 years, adding approximately 69,000 acres to the Adirondack Park. This acquisition provides New Yorkers with additional places to explore and connect to the environment; it protects a jewel of the Adirondacks and will promote additional tourism in the region for years to come.

I hope you will take some time this summer to get outside and foster your own connections to nature and your environment.

Regards,

Basil Seggos, Acting Commissioner



**Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation**

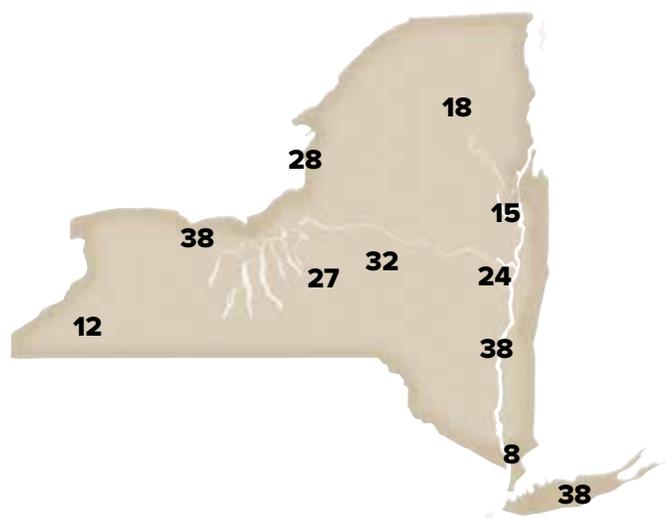


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**Front cover:** Fox kit by Melissa Groo

**Back cover:** Horseback riding at Baker Forest by Jim Clayton



# Young Wildlife

Melissa Rowell

*Late spring / early summer is when most animals are raising young in New York State. Fawns, baby rabbits, chipmunks, fox kits, bear cubs, baby robins, and a slew of other mammals and bird species are emerging and venturing out for the first time. These newborn and just-hatched wildlife are cute, so we are naturally drawn to them. But it's best if you enjoy young wildlife from a distance.*

Melissa Groo



Young woodchuck

*Taking pictures of young animals that you spot is a great and rewarding way to enjoy wildlife. You get to observe and preserve the image of the encounter, but you haven't interfered with the animal's natural development. Here are just a few of the many photos we have received from photographers (both professional and amateur) who have done just that.*

Jeff Nadler



Loon chicks are seen riding a parent's back.

Opposite page: These fox kits are enjoying a meal of a snake.



People often find baby robins on the ground or in low vegetation.

Sean Varner



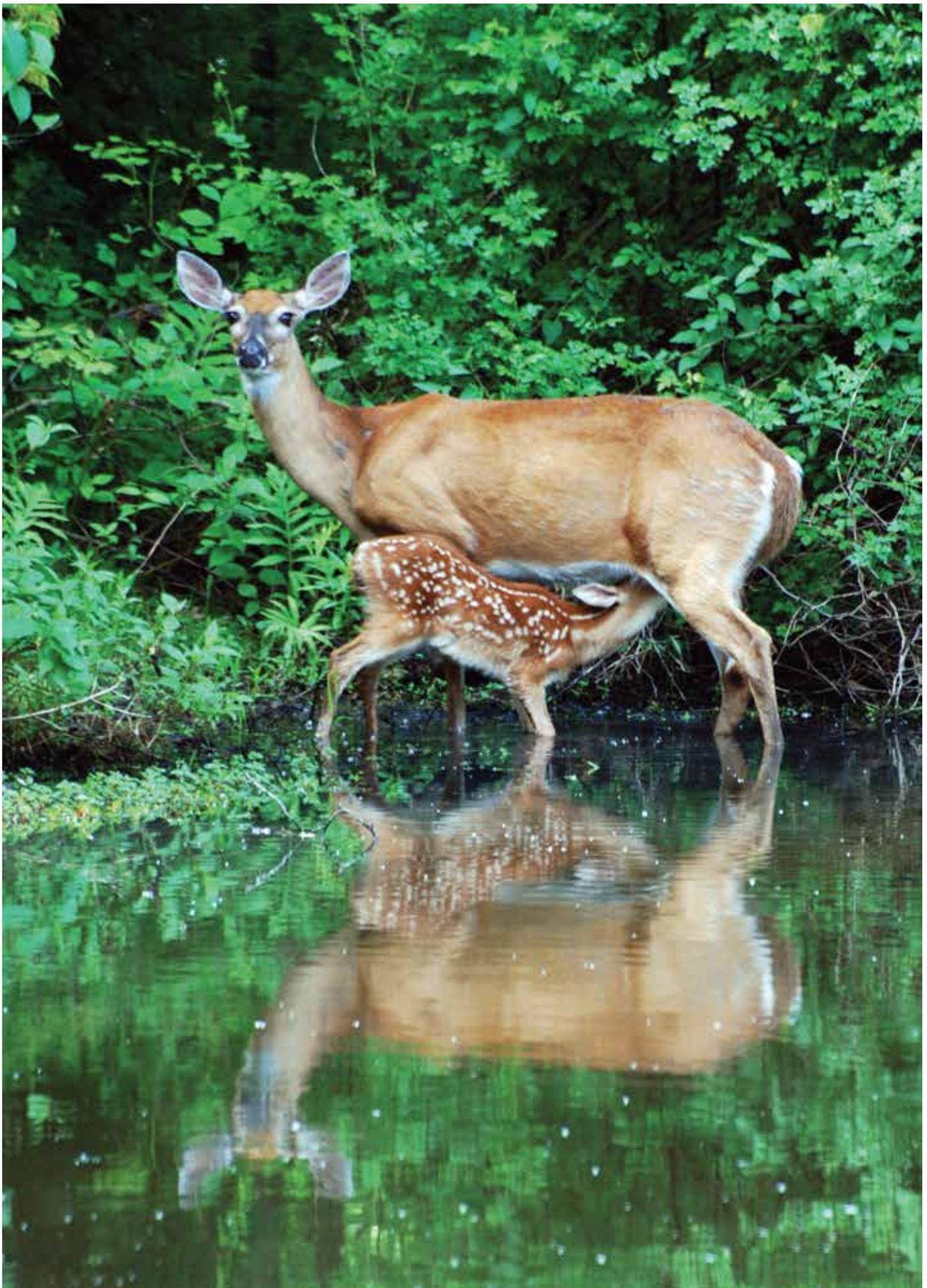
Rabbits often nest in unmowed grasses and low ground cover.



Commonly found on beaches on Long Island, plovers should be enjoyed from a distance.



Young red squirrels



A doe with her nursing fawn.

Jeanine Mulholland



Sow and cub black bear captured on a trail camera

Jeremy Taylor



Some wild animals like mallard ducks will nest in close proximity to humans.

Susan McGee



Young porcupine

# *If You Care — Leave Them There*

Every spring and summer, people come across newborn or just-hatched wildlife that appear to be alone. Many people assume these young wildlife are abandoned and need our help to survive. But in most cases, this is a mistake and our well-meaning actions generally do more harm than good.

When people mistakenly rescue young wildlife, they quickly discover they can't really provide proper care, and often the young animals die. Those that do survive in our care have missed the natural experiences that are critical for learning how to fend for themselves in the wild.

A young bird crouched in the yard, or a young rabbit in the flower garden is not generally alone. Often, wild animal parents stay away from their young when people approach, waiting nearby for the person to leave. In the case of white-tailed deer, fawns are often left alone during the first week or so after birth. They have not been abandoned. Fawns are almost scentless and immobile and the doe spends only brief

periods of time with them to avoid attracting predators. So if you find any young wildlife, enjoy your encounter, but keep it brief and maintain some distance. Remember the rule, "If You Care, Leave Them There."

Keep any pets you have inside for a few hours so they won't disturb the animal. Also, not only is it illegal to keep any wild animal as a pet, but wild animals do not make good pets—they are not well-suited for life in captivity and they may carry diseases that can be given to people or their pets.

If you do, however, find a young wild animal that is obviously injured or orphaned, there are wildlife rehabilitators who can help. Volunteers licensed by DEC, wildlife rehabilitators are the only people legally allowed to receive and treat distressed wildlife. To learn more about young wildlife and to locate a wildlife rehabilitator in your area, visit DEC's website at: [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6956.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6956.html).

Gert Federici



These newborn fawns should be left where they are—the mother is most likely close by.

# *A Sense of Place*

— *Connecting students with their local environment*



Students at Mercy College use canoes to conduct fieldwork at Iona Marsh against the backdrop of the scenic Hudson Highlands.

**By Meghan E. Marrero**

**Photos provided by author**



The Hudson River is a New York lifeline. It flows more than 300 miles in length, drains more than 13,000 square miles in its watershed, and provides drinking water, recreational opportunities, and critical shipping lanes for many communities. It is the “river that flows both ways,”\* is both freshwater and saltwater, and has a shape that tells tales of our area’s glacial past. Yet, how many New Yorkers do not appreciate its power and importance? Enter Mercy College.

Thirty undergraduates gathered in a building overlooking the picturesque Hudson River and the Palisades. They were ready to spend three weeks uncovering the waterway’s scientific secrets. When I asked how many students had never seen the Hudson River before, four or five of them raised their hands. This was not the response I expected. In fact, the question had seemed silly—after all, you could see the river from the windows in the lab across the hall. So I sent the students to do just that

before moving on with the discussion. But it struck me how this simple query exemplified how disconnected many of our local students—even those studying the STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields—are with the local environment. As a science and environmental educator, I see it as my job to help bridge the student-environment connection and inspire students to learn more.

The students were here for the Mercy College Intensive STEM Teacher Initiative (MISTI) summer immersion program. Sponsored by the National Science Foundation, the program’s goal is to improve students’ scientific research skills and heighten their interest in the field of education. This summer portion is part of a larger program designed to recruit and retain talented undergraduates in the STEM fields to become science and math teachers in high-need schools. MISTI is a partnership between Mercy College, Bronx Community College, Westchester Com-



Students wade with a seine (fish net) to collect fish and invertebrate samples.

munity College, and Rockland Community College. What better way to connect students from all four colleges than by studying a watershed that is so near?

During the next three weeks, the students were immersed, figuratively and sometimes literally, in the Hudson River. In the classroom, they practiced using laboratory and field equipment, accessed online data sets, and crunched numbers using statistics software. In the field, they went canoeing in beautiful Iona Marsh, where they observed native and invasive plants, fish and birds. Some even saw a bald eagle! Near Piermont, the students seined for fish and invertebrates, studied water chemistry, collected and observed plankton, extracted mud cores, and examined physical characteristics like flow rates and tides.

Local scientists and educators joined the group to share their own research on the Hudson River and surrounding areas. Topics ranged from history to climate change, bacterial counts to fish stock management, and macroinvertebrates to ancient climates. The experiential activities and discussions with scientists set the foundation for the students to ask their own research questions, collect and analyze their own data, and ultimately present their findings.

Students were given free rein to develop their own investigations. Working in small groups, they conducted library research to ground their topics, and began honing in on testable questions. The topics they chose and methods they employed ranged widely, depending on the group members' interests and areas of expertise. One group looked at archived salinity data and examined changes in the salinity during and after Hurricanes Irene and Sandy. Another team cultured bacteria from three sites, identified the strains that were present, and discussed potential health effects of their findings, while some examined the relationship between bacterial levels and dissolved oxygen in the water. Still others compared the plankton found at several sites or conducted experiments to examine how salinity and temperature affected algae growth.



Students examining the catch-of-the-day at river's edge.



Student teams moved indoors for additional, more traditional project research.

## Science for Everyone

There have been nationwide calls—including from the U.S. President, Secretary of Education, and Congress—to improve STEM education, and to encourage more students to pursue careers in these disciplines (particularly underrepresented groups like women and minorities). The MISTI program recruited a diverse population of students. Students were selected by a competitive process after meeting minimum GPA and course sequence requirements, and writing an application essay. Of the 62 participants over two summers, 68% identified as African American, Latino, or as a member of more than one racial/ethnic group, and 73% were women. The aim is to empower these smart, accomplished students to conduct their own research, propelling them forward as they pursue STEM careers.





The budding scientists put their findings under a microscope to discover the Hudson River’s scientific secrets.

As part of their projects, students received hands-on experience in several scientific research techniques. Some students collected water or plankton samples in the field and then analyzed them in the lab. Other students used online data sets available through the Hudson River Environmental Conditions Observing System (HRECOS: [www.hrecos.org/](http://www.hrecos.org/)), and then chose parameters to run their own statistics. Working with four faculty members and two teaching assistants, the MISTI students worked through the science inquiry cycle, ultimately ending up with even more questions to be answered.

At the end of their investigations, each team prepared a short scientific presentation about their study and held a “lesson,” during which they taught the other participants about their topic. Their enthusiasm and interest in what they had learned was evident. They were also excited about the broader implications of their work, passionately discussing such topics as human health, climate change, and sustainability. Several teams even went on to present at local and state conferences, including the New York State Marine Education Association ([www.nysmea.org](http://www.nysmea.org)) Conference and the Westchester Undergraduate Research Conference.

In just three short weeks, these budding scientists had become strongly connected to the Hudson River and its watershed. And by studying different aspects of the river, they developed

a “sense of place” within the Hudson watershed. Whether they lived in Rockland County or the Bronx, the students knew that their actions were connected to the river, and that there was a lot to learn about the surrounding area.

In feedback from participants, the comments were overwhelmingly positive. The students said MISTI gave them important insights into both the research process and how scientists work, and they felt the content they learned came alive. One student said she was definitely more excited about research after MISTI and that she was able to apply what she learned to other science classes she was taking. Another student remarked that he didn’t realize how complex the river system was and that he now had a greater appreciation for the Hudson Valley and the organisms in the Hudson River. Most students loved the hands-on approach, with more than one remarking that MISTI gave them a new view on how scientists work, and that going into the field and personally collecting data helped them understand the concepts much better. As an educator, comments like this are what keep you teaching.

To me, the takeaway from MISTI is the importance of engaging students—whether young children or young adults—in studies of their local environment. As environmentally conscious citizens, we should support and encourage educators and programs that get young people outside, experiencing and learning about their local environment. Consider supporting your local K-12 schools and colleges as they develop ways to get students outdoors to study their local environments. You might just inspire the next generation of scientists!

**Meghan E. Marrero** is an associate professor of Secondary Science Education at Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry, NY.

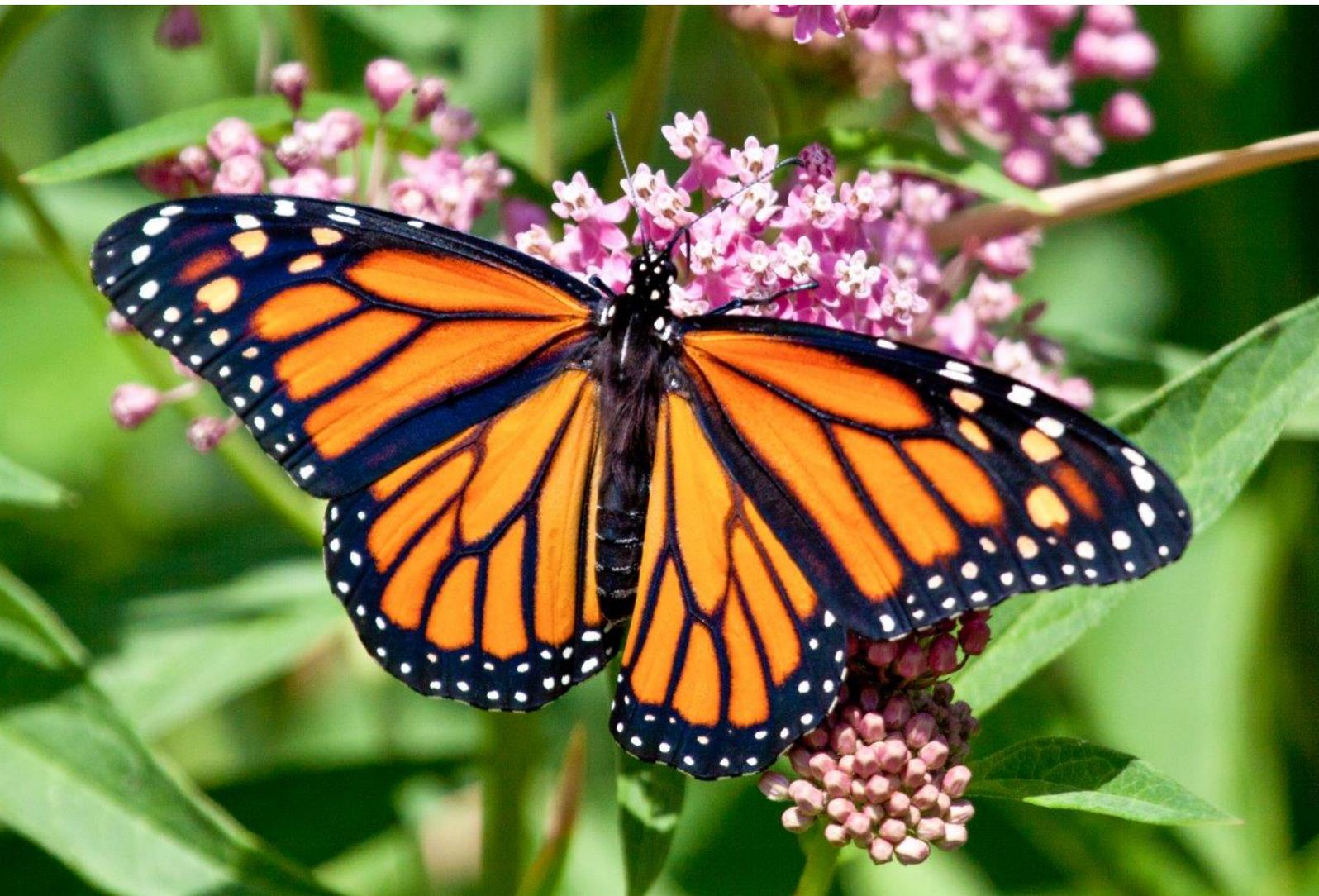
*\*Because the Hudson River is tidal up to Troy—with the water flowing upstream on the incoming tide, and downstream as the tide goes out—the Haudenosaunee referred to it as the River That Flows Both Ways.*

*Author’s note: This article is based upon work supported in part by the National Science Foundation under Grant Number 1339951. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this material are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the National Science Foundation.*



Diamondback terrapin





# GOT MILKWEED?

By Ellen Bidell

When someone mentions monarch butterflies, our minds often race back to our youth. Thoughts of the beautiful orange-and-black winged beauties, pudgy zebra-striped caterpillars, milkweed plants, and for the lucky few, perhaps memories of green chrysalises and metamorphosis come to mind.

But they are harder to spot than they once were. We've all heard about the monarchs' recent plight: once quite numerous, their numbers have been dwindling for years. As if multiple-generation migration wasn't hard enough on these incredible insects, they now face vast acreages of agricultural monoculture, and the daunting prospect of insecticides and herbicides. But what's a casual conservationist to do? If enough people take action,

something as simple as adding a few plants to your flower garden this spring can help support monarch butterfly populations.

Monarchs are known for their amazing migration journey as well as their beauty. While those in western North America overwinter in California, monarchs from eastern North America winter in the Sierra Madre Mountains of Mexico. The annual migration of the eastern population spans thousands of miles from Mexico to Canada, and takes up to four generations to complete. The year-long round-trip journey begins as the overwintering generation leaves its winter roost site and begins traveling north and laying eggs. The subsequent generations live for 2-5 weeks before laying eggs to start the next generation on



monarch caterpillar

the journey. The fourth and last generation travels back to overwintering sites in Mexico, and can live as long as nine months.

Monarch caterpillars' sole food source is leaves of the milkweed plant, a perennial flowering herb. For this reason, monarch butterflies lay their eggs only on milkweed. It's quite simple, really: without milkweed, monarchs cannot survive. Adult monarchs feed on the nectar of the milkweed, but need nectar from a variety of other plants as well.

Unfortunately, milkweed plants are disappearing for a number of reasons. As its name implies, people think of milkweed as a weed and cut it down. Roadside plants are removed during routine maintenance. Farmers' use of herbicides has rapidly increased due to herbicide-tolerant GMO crops. These herbicides kill the milkweed plant. Thankfully, some monarchs make it through this obstacle gauntlet, and continue on their journey.

Once the lucky few surviving monarchs reach their overwintering home in Mexico, they struggle to find suitable sites in heavily logged areas. There are only about a dozen such suitable sites in all of Mexico. In 2014, monarchs were found on only 1.7 acres of overwintering habitat, compared with more than 50 acres twenty years ago. This was the smallest occupied wintering area ever recorded, in a population which has declined by more than 90 percent since 1995. There are now fewer monarchs overwintering in Mexico than were killed in a single winter weather event in 2002, making the current population quite vulnerable to winter storms. Similarly, numbers of monarchs west of the Rocky Mountains have declined by more than 50 percent since 1997. These migratory butterflies in eastern and western North America represent the vast majority of all monarchs in the world.

In New York, monarchs begin to migrate south between late-August and mid-September. There are several ways you can help them on their journey.



### Create a Butterfly Garden

Plant native milkweed on your own land and encourage your local school or town park to do the same. Milkweed has special value to other pollinators as well, including native bees, bumblebees and honeybees.

Make sure to include other plants to attract adult monarchs to the area (they will also attract other butterflies and bees). If there is already milkweed growing nearby, help to maintain it. "Wild for Monarchs" from the group Monarch Joint Venture lists a variety of plants to include in a butterfly garden

<http://monarchjointventure.org>.

Make sure to plant the correct type of milkweed. Types of northeast milkweed include:

- Common milkweed—grows in well-drained soils and has a light pink flower
- Swamp milkweed—grows in damp, marshy areas and has a dark pink flower
- Butterfly weed—grows in well-drained soils and has an orange flower
- Whorled milkweed—grows in prairies and open areas and has a white flower

Laurie Dirks



- Avoid scarlet milkweed, a tropical variety that can actually disrupt the migration because it doesn't die back in the fall
- Cut other plants to the ground in fall at the same time native milkweeds die down
- Provide water and flat stones for places to rest and sun.

## Go the extra step

Plan a monarch festival in your community. The Jamestown Audubon Society (<http://jamestownaudubon.org/>) hosts a festival in August, including opportunities to hold butterflies and caterpillars, and watch scientists tag butterflies. At the end of the event, the tagged monarchs are released to begin their trek to Mexico. The Friends of Patuxent in Maryland ([www.friendsofpatuxent.org/](http://www.friendsofpatuxent.org/)) hold a festival where volunteers spend the afternoon planting milkweed.

Create your own certified waystation (habitat). Monarch Watch ([www.monarchwatch.org](http://www.monarchwatch.org/)) has information on how to do it, and will add certified waystations to the International Monarch Waystation Registry.

Visit Monarch Watch to see specific migration times in your areas and to report sightings.

Check out The Wild Center ([www.wildcenter.org/tag](http://www.wildcenter.org/tag)) for a link to follow the monarch migration on Google Earth.

Check out the Xerces Society ([www.xerces.org/](http://www.xerces.org/)) for lists of seed sources and information on conservation efforts. The Xerces Society is a long-established non-profit organization at the forefront of invertebrate protection worldwide.

*Update: In 2015, the number of overwintering monarchs increased four-fold (from 35 million to 140 million), according to a recent New York Times article. The number of acres occupied has also increased to 10 acres. Why the sudden change? Scientists say that new plantings of milkweed, along with mild weather and protection of more forest land in Mexico contributed to the dramatic change.*

*In addition, a recent study (April 2016) by Cornell professor Anurag Agrawal indicates that lack of milkweed in the U.S. may not be to blame for the decline in the monarch butterfly population as once thought. According to the research, the population decline begins to occur in the fall, after the caterpillars have fed on the milkweed over the summer. Agrawal says people should continue to plant milkweed, however, for the many pollinators that rely on this food source.*

**Ellen Bidell** is a citizen participation specialist in DEC's Albany office, and a frequent *Conservationist* contributor.

## State Pollinator Task Force

Widely appreciated for their beauty, monarch butterflies also play a critical role in nature by helping to pollinate plants. Pollination is an essential component of fertilization that allows plants to produce seeds. Approximately 90 percent of plant species depend on pollinators.

New York's pollinator population, which includes various species of butterflies and bees, as well as insects and birds, has been declining for the past 20 years. This potentially threatens crops of fruits and vegetables, as well as the livelihood of farmers and growers.

Recognizing the potential impacts on New York's agriculture economy and consumers, Governor Cuomo convened an interagency task force to develop a statewide action plan to conserve and restore pollinator populations. Co-chaired by DEC and the State Department of Agriculture and Markets, the task force includes New York State Parks representatives, scientists, farmers, environmental groups and other stakeholders.

A main focus of the task force has been investigating factors that are contributing to the decline of pollinators, including habitat loss, impacts of land management activities, parasites and disease, and pesticide use. Strategies to address these factors, promote the health and recovery of pollinators, and help ensure a vibrant agriculture ecosystem will be included in a New York Pollinator Protection Plan expected to be released in late spring/early summer.

For additional information or to learn what actions you can take to help protect and restore the pollinator population, visit: [www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/pollinators/](http://www.fs.fed.us/wildflowers/pollinators/) or [www.nrcs.usda.gov](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov) and search for pollinators.

Sue Shafer





# Lake George Marine Patrol

## — Proudly serving the boating public since 1962

By Captain Tom Caifa

Photos provided by author, unless otherwise noted

Thomas Jefferson once called Lake George the most beautiful water he had ever seen. Nicknamed the “Queen of American Lakes,” it is considered one of the cleanest, clearest lakes in the country. To this day, many local residents still use Lake George for their drinking water. Located about halfway between New York City and Montreal and easily within driving distance of both, Lake George became a booming tourist destination in the '50s and '60s. As a result, boat congestion on the lake swiftly became an issue.

### New Protectors

The Lake George Park Commission was created in 1961, shortly after aerial surveys done by the New York State Conservation Department (DEC’s predecessor) revealed that Lake George was by far the most popular boating destination in the state. At the time, there were more than twice as many boats on Lake George as there were on nearby Lake Champlain, which is 11 times larger. A canvass of property owners around the lake identified reckless boat operation as their highest priority concern. Number two was pollution. At that time, the Commission was a part of the Conservation Department.

In 1962, the Lake George Park Commission Safety Patrol (as it was then called) was created. The patrol’s mission was to educate and protect the public, with a secondary purpose of enforcing the NYS Navigation Law and addressing pollution-related issues. The Safety Patrol began the 1962 summer season with four officers and four 17-foot Boston Whaler patrol vessels. The officers worked six days a week from Memorial Day to Labor Day, with reduced staffing in spring and fall. Patrol vessel engines averaged between 1,200 and 1,500 hours of use each in that first year; that’s a lot of hours on a boat! These four officers were so busy that a fifth officer was added in 1963. In 1965, the first Marine Patrol Supervisor (later termed Marine Patrol



The original Lake George Park Commission Safety Patrol, created in 1962 and staffed by just five officers, focused on educating and protecting the public.

Sergeant) was appointed. In 1966, an unmarked 17-foot Penn Yann boat was added, bringing the fleet to five vessels.

Patrol vessels were sparsely equipped back then. Officers handled day-to-day operations with only a “Hi-Band” radio of very limited range, courtesy gas for those in need, a 75-foot tow

rope for stranded boaters, a spotlight, a first-aid kit and a state credit card for purchasing gas. The officers themselves were issued a badge, binoculars, two uniforms, a foul weather jacket, a law book, and some tickets.

## A Growing Need

By 1972 the patrol had increased to 10 officers and 7 vessels, including a 23-foot Chris Craft for Friday and Saturday night patrols. In 1977, a NYS Environmental Conservation Police Lieutenant was charged with overseeing patrol operations. In 1986, the Lake George Park Commission was made a separate state agency, but the Conservation Police Lieutenant was left in place to run the patrol. This position remained in place for more than 35 years through a unique agreement between the two agencies. It was intended to provide consistent enforcement of NYS laws and regulations throughout the Lake George basin. As a result of this relationship, the Lake George Marine Patrol has assumed a strong role in enforcing Environmental Conservation Law on the lake and works closely with Environmental Conservation Officers in the enforcement of regulations pertaining to recreational fishing, water quality, and invasive species, to name just a few.



With 11 patrol officers, 2 sergeants, and 8 patrol vessels operating day and night, the Lake George Marine Patrol has taken on a greater role in enforcing fishing and water quality regulations, as well as public safety.

Today, the Lake George Park Commission Marine Patrol consists of 11 uniformed patrol officers and 2 experienced sergeants, operating seasonally from May to December, with 8 patrol vessels in operation both day and night. The patrol vessels range in length from 19 to 23 feet and are equipped with police radios, fire pumps, search & rescue gear, tow harnesses, emergency gasoline, speed radar units, noise-testing instruments, field sobriety testing equipment, spare life jackets, and all the other equipment you would expect to see on a modern marine patrol vessel.

## Diverse Area, Diverse Challenges

The Marine Patrol has a very large and diverse area to cover. At 32 miles long, Lake George presents these officers with more than 50 square miles of patrol area, including the shoreline and some 245 islands. In addition, three counties (Warren, Washington, and Essex) and eight townships (Lake George, Bolton, Hague, Ticonderoga, Putnam, Dresden, Fort Ann, and Queensbury) touch the lake and have a vested interest in it.

To this day, Lake George continues to be a very popular destination for campers and picnickers. New York State owns more than 200 of the lake's islands, and allows camping and/or picnicking on most of them. The state also owns a large portion of land on the lake's east side, which is classified as forest preserve. The Marine Patrol remains vigilant in watching out for fire hazards, illegal tree cutting, littering, and other disturbances that might affect the natural resources of Lake George both on the islands and the lake shore.

It's interesting to note that one particular tract of state land along the lake is home to a sizable timber rattlesnake population. Snakebites are extremely rare, but rattlesnake sightings are not uncommon, especially when one of them decides to take a swim out to a nearby island. The Marine Patrol assists in the capture and relocation of wandering rattlesnakes just about every summer. As a threatened species here in New York, many timber rattlers have been marked or tagged for tracking and study.



## Boating Accident

As anyone who has boated on Lake George at night can attest, the lake looks very different than it does during the day. In 2005, some inexperienced boaters lost track of where they were, and ran headlong at full speed into one of the lake's many islands. Although there were injuries, luckily, no one was killed. Responding to accidents like this and conducting accident investigations are just two of the many things in which the marine patrol gets involved. And training people on safe boating practices to reduce the likelihood of such an event is time well spent.



## Lake George Marine Patrol Duties

### Public Assistance and Education

- Assisting stranded boaters
- Inspecting vessels
- Disseminating maps & publications
- NYS Safe Boating Course training
- First aid and rescue
- Suppressing vessel and forest fires
- Removing hazards
- Recovering lost or stolen property

### Law Enforcement and Public Safety

- NYS Navigation Law
- LGPC rules and regulations
- Vessel noise and speed laws
- Boating While Intoxicated and other unsafe operations
- Restricted Use Zone monitoring
- Safety and security at regattas
- Investigating vessel accidents
- Assistance to other agencies
- Resource protection

### Monitoring Water Quality

- Checking vessel sanitation
- Reporting invasive species
- Protecting fish, wildlife and state land



After more than half a century of service, public safety remains the primary role of the Lake George Marine Patrol.

Lake George is renowned for its wonderful sport fishing opportunities. Trout, salmon, bass, pike and other popular sport fish are plentiful; anglers come from all over the country to try their luck. The Marine Patrol works closely with the Environmental Conservation Police to enforce the laws that pertain to recreational fishing.

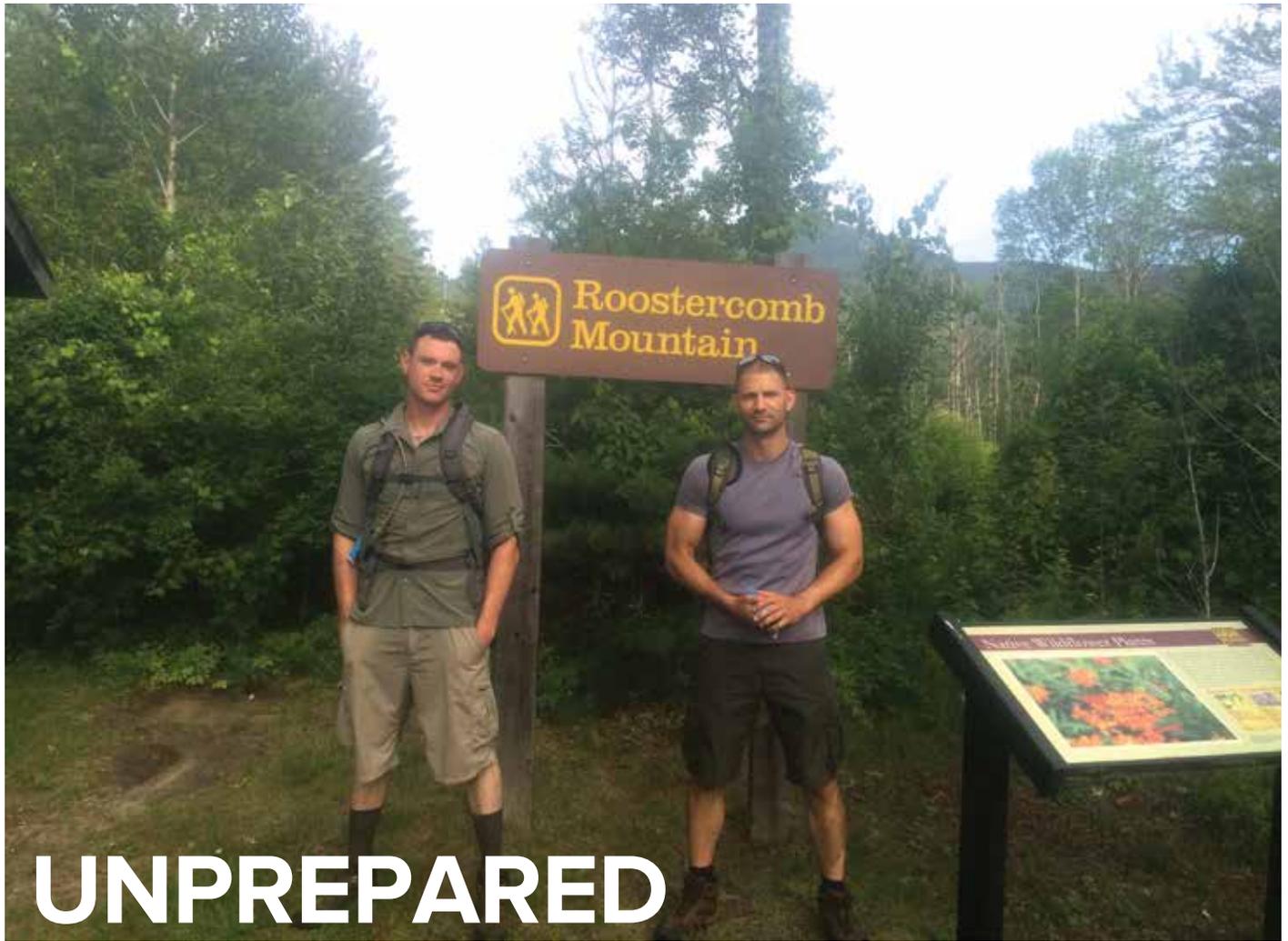
It takes a special person to be a successful Marine Patrol Officer. All of the current officers possess impressive credentials across a wide range of professional disciplines. Officers are recruited to provide the Marine Patrol with expertise in disciplines as diverse as law enforcement, search & rescue, firefighting, education, and commercial vessel operation. As certified peace officers, all Marine Patrol Officers are required to successfully complete a basic law enforcement training course approved by the NYS Division of Criminal Justice Services, Bureau of Municipal Police. To supplement this, yearly “in-service” schools are conducted to review subjects of particular interest and importance, such as law changes, basic first aid, report writing, defensive tactics, etc. Several officers are also certified as Boater Safety Instructors, continuing a long tradition of providing boater safety training and certification to the general public.

In 2013, these Marine Patrol Officers documented more than 450 assists to boaters and campers (including rescues, first aid, searches, fire suppression and vessel tows), 600 vessel safety inspections, 240 appearance tickets, 130 complaint calls, 32 regatta patrols, 10 accident investigations, and more than 1,000 warnings for minor violations. Even though it has been more than 50 years since the Marine Patrol’s inception, its primary mission is still the same: to promote the safe and enjoyable use of Lake George, primarily by protecting and educating the public.

ECO Captain **Tom Caifa** is a regular contributor to *Conservationist*.



Joel and Travis Muhlnickel pose before embarking on their “insane” plan to hike the Adirondack Great Range Traverse.



# UNPREPARED

## —Lost on the Great Range Traverse

By Travis Muhlnickel

Photos provided by author

My brother, Joel, and I were looking for an adventure. At 28 and 35, we’re both pretty fit. We decided to tackle the Adirondack Great Range Traverse. There are several versions of the hike, but we opted to create our own insane version, adding three additional peaks, and attempting to complete it all in a single day. It would entail 11 peaks, starting with Keene Valley’s Rooster Comb Mountain and ending at Mount Marcy, New York’s highest peak.

In all, we would climb more than 17,000 feet of elevation and traverse approximately 25 miles of trail. We thought our youth and strength would be all we’d need. After all, it was late June: day length was at its maximum and it was summer. What could possibly go wrong? Little did we know how unprepared we were. We had bitten off far more than we could chew, and when the unexpected happened, it nearly cost our lives.



Travis enjoys the view from one of the peaks encountered on his hike.



**Forest Ranger Safety Tip: Preparation is key. Don't overextend yourself. Make a reasonable plan, and be sure to share it with someone.**

Travis's tale:

The day had gone relatively smoothly; we were on the final ascent, but didn't have much time to reach the Marcy summit. We knew sunset would come at 20:43. Halfway up the trail, Joel reached his breaking point. Nauseous and disoriented, he determined he couldn't go on. Since he had recently climbed Marcy, I thought I'd finish the climb myself while Joel rested. I decided to shed gear and go as light as possible, so I handed Joel my pack containing my supplies (headlamp, space blanket, food, etc.) and told him that I would hurry to the top, snap a few pictures, and be back well before sunset.

**Forest Ranger Safety Tip: Hike with a partner, and always stay with your gear.**

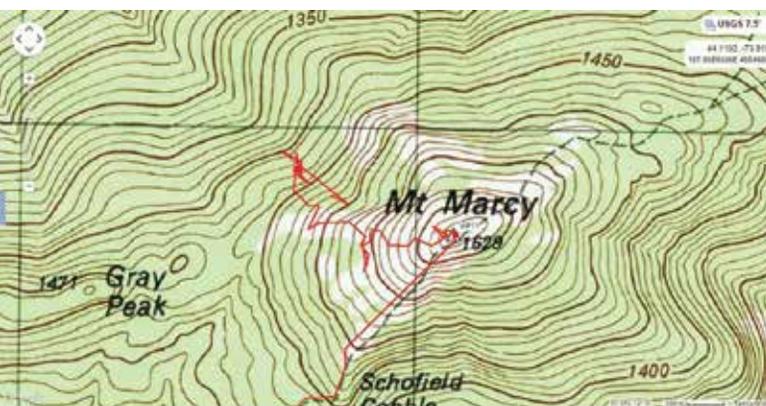
I set off and made quick time to the rock face of Mt Marcy. Both my legs were now beyond fatigue and began to fully cramp up. I laid down and rubbed them until the cramps subsided, then pressed on. The pain was intense, so I crawled the final 500' to the top. Once there, my excitement overtook me as I pulled out the camera and took a quick video and some selfies.

The winds were powerful enough to knock a grown man off balance; visibility was terrible. In my haste to celebrate my achievement, I failed to keep track of the trail. I was literally in a cloud, as was the top 300' of the mountain. I couldn't locate the yellow, painted-arrow trail markers. A sinking feeling came over me. I knew I didn't have much time to find the trail.

**Forest Ranger Safety Tip: Bring a light source with you: a flashlight, or a headlamp (which keeps your hands free), or both. Some ball caps have built-in lights as well.**

Earlier we had passed dozens of hikers, but we hadn't seen a soul since we left the base of Mount Haystack around 1600 hours. I knew that any experienced day-hiker had cleared the trails hours earlier, and that overnight hikers would have picked a different night to camp, given the weather forecast, which was calling for rain. It was getting colder, and sunset was fast approaching. I was wearing only a t-shirt and shorts, which I thought appropriate for a June day hike.

**Forest Ranger Safety Tip: Bring extra clothing, including fleece or wool, a hat, and an outer layer to stop the wind and shed moisture, even in summer.**



After wandering for 30 minutes, I decided it was time to forget finding the trail and focus on making the best survival decisions I could. I knew I needed to get off this exposed mountain top. With about 30 minutes of light left, I bushwhacked down the mountain approximately 500-800' until I felt I was far enough down to ride out the night. I was cut and bruised from the rough foliage, but knew with fewer than 15 minutes of light remaining, I needed to build a shelter (the space blanket in my pack would have been nice—why did I leave it behind?). I decided to use birch bark and fir branches, first laying bark on the ground, and then the evergreens underneath and on top of me.

Despite the situation, my spirits were still high, but my thoughts turned to Joel. I worried that he might have left the trail to find me, so I pulled out my iPhone and sent him a text to reassure him that I had shelter and would be fine. I hoped the text would go through.

My plan was to re-climb Marcy in the morning, find the trail, and reunite with Joel. I was still feeling good until it began to rain and the temperature steadily dropped. The wind also picked up. By 23:30, my makeshift shelter was fully infiltrated by the now heavy rain; I was completely soaked and shivering heavily. To add to my discomfort, my legs cramped every time I shifted. It was literally the worst night of my life.

At 04:45 the next morning, I stood up to make the final trip up Marcy, but when I surveyed the sky and mountain face, I realized that visibility would almost certainly be worse than the previous day. My mind was fuzzy—hypothermia had set in, and I could barely move my limbs. I realized I needed help. I pulled out my phone and called 911. Cell phone coverage is spotty in the Adirondack wilderness, so it took several attempts to reach a 911 operator. I told her I was a hiker lost on Mount Marcy and that I knew I was hypothermic. My voice wavered and cut out from the shivering. The 911 operator patched me through to the local DEC dispatch. Since my battery was low, they established a text line which would help conserve battery life.

The operator asked if I had a GPS. I did, but the battery had died. Dispatch assured me they had my GPS coordinates from the phone call and they would send someone ASAP. I was told to remain in the immediate area. I knew it was a mistake to wander when lost, so I complied. I was freezing; every minute felt like an eternity. I was baffled...it was late June! I then received a text telling me to call 911 again so they could get my coordinates a second time. I did, and they assured me rangers were being sent. To keep warm, I tried to keep moving in place, but my core temperature was dropping. The rain and wind intensified and were now pelting me painfully.

After about 30 minutes, I received a text saying they would let me know when rangers were close so I could start making noise. When that text came, I began shouting, then I listened for 20-30 seconds and yelled again. The wind and rain were so loud, I was



Travis constructed a make-shift, overnight shelter from birch-bark and fir branches to protect him from cold temperatures, but high winds and cramps made for a difficult night.



convinced my voice wasn't carrying far enough. An hour later, I began to lose hope, and started thinking I was in real danger of not making it. I sent a garbled text stating I was too cold and didn't think I could last much longer. They responded: stay strong, stay put, and the rangers would arrive soon.

Not long after that, I broke the cardinal rule: I decided to move. Staying put wasn't working; I needed to take action. Despite the weather and slope, I started to ascend Mt. Marcy to locate the trail. I tried to send a text to DEC outlining my plan, but my phone died. The wind on top of Marcy nearly blew me over—I slowly retreated off the peak.

**Forest Ranger Safety Tip: Bring an extra cell phone battery, charge stick, or means of recharging your phone.**

At this point, I was spent. The adrenaline had worn off and the exhaustion hit me like a ton of bricks. I hadn't eaten anything since the day before. Stumbling down the mountain, dehydrated and delirious, I spotted a puddle and promptly sat down and drank as much as I could. I was confused and unsure of what to do next. Watching the flowing water produced by the rain, I



Trying to gain strength to keep going, Travis ate plants he thought were edible, but the Indian poke he ingested proved to be toxic.

decided to follow it, thinking it would lead me to people. It gave me a sense of “direction.” I kept falling down every few minutes, collecting many scrapes and bruises.

The stream led me to what appeared to be a huge swamp. I stood there for a moment, wanting to scream, cry, or just lie down. It occurred to me that if the rangers were still looking for me, they could be looking somewhere else. I was beginning to think this was the end, but as I stood there, I resolved to keep fighting. I knew I needed food, so I chose a plant that looked edible and pulled it up by the roots. It tasted delicious, and I proceeded to eat at least 10-12 stalks.

**Forest Ranger Safety Tip: Bring extra, high-energy food in case you get lost or stranded. Never eat something you aren't absolutely sure is safe.**

I stumbled toward the left side of the swamp when something caught my eye. It was a manmade board, and just beyond it was a trail marker. For the first time since the rain began, I found hope again. I trudged up the trail and came to an intersection. I decided to follow the trail to Panther Gorge, where Joel and I had come from, and a little further on I came upon a group of DEC Forest Rangers. One of them yelled “Travis?” I didn't have the strength to answer. They grabbed me, sat me down and ripped off my soaked shorts and t-shirt. I had been shivering uncontrollably at this point for 14 hours. While they dressed me and shoved a tube of glucose in my mouth, I suddenly became nauseous and my throat began to close. They were asking me questions, but I could barely mumble answers.

Suddenly I got violently ill. They asked “What did you eat?!” in a very serious tone. When I told them about the plants, they became deeply concerned. It turns out I had eaten Indian poke, a toxic plant that can cause death. Fortunately my body reacted vehemently to the toxins, emptying the plant from my stomach. However, I had shortness of breath and vertigo symptoms for the next two hours. I was extremely lucky. If the roots had stayed in my system, I may have died of poisoning.

The rangers led me another mile or so to the Panther lean-to where I was given two bags of saline with something to ease nausea. I asked the rangers about Joel and they assured me he was alright. What a relief.

The bad weather prohibited both a helicopter rescue or litter extraction, so we had to make the 3.7 mile hike out. It was dark as we embarked. Via foot, boat, tractor, truck and ambulance, I arrived at the Elizabethtown Hospital emergency room. At this point, I was overcome with emotion; thankful to be alive and grateful Joel was okay. When Joel showed up, we hugged for a solid minute straight. “I'm just happy you didn't leave the trail,” I told him.

It wasn't until the ride home that I heard the details about the ordeal Joel endured.

### In Joel's own words:

Three-quarters of the way up Marcy, I knew I couldn't go any farther. I was dehydrated, tired, cramping, delirious, and I needed to rest for safety. But Travis desperately wanted to finish the third-hardest day hike in America, so we agreed it was alright for him to go on. He dropped his pack near me and took only what he wore, his iPhone, the GPS, and my camera.

The temperature was dropping, so I unrolled my sleeves, pulled out the space blanket, and took a short nap. Two hours later, Travis still wasn't back and I became concerned. I could see the summit: it was engulfed in clouds. I tried to send Travis a text, but it failed to go through. The nap made me feel a little better, so I grabbed my headlamp and headed up the trail hoping to find Travis coming down.

At the trail intersection, I began yelling his name. No response. I tried to call and text him. Still no service. I thought “Maybe we missed each other,” so I returned to the place where we separated. It started raining. I tried to call 911 several times, but got nothing.

**Forest Ranger Safety Tip: Cell phone service is spotty in the Adirondack wilderness. Don't rely on a cell phone; plan for alternate means of communication, like a whistle, mobile radio, or satellite phone.**

The rain intensified. I hadn't eaten in a while, but I was able to drink rainwater and stay hydrated. I walked a little farther and encountered a thin, but strong rushing river about 15-20 feet across. I decided to stop and rest; it was getting dark. I pulled out the reflective space blanket and curled up into a ball; the blanket didn't quite cover me. All I could think of was Travis and the fact that I had all the gear.

I tossed and turned until about 5 AM, then got up, crossed the river and headed up the Marcy trail. I was running on empty, but I couldn't keep anything down. My main focus was finding Travis and staying hydrated. I kept stopping to try my phone, but everything was soaked and I couldn't get it to work.

The entire trail was a stream of water. Winds made yelling worthless, so I headed back down the trail. I'd never felt so defeated. I had to get help—Travis was out there. I kept heading down the trail. About 50 meters up Elk Lake path I saw a lean-to, and there was someone sleeping in it! My movements woke her. Seeing the shape I was in, she immediately gave me dry clothes and her sleeping bag. I shivered for hours and briefed her on the situation while she made me hot cups of Gatorade and fed me Snickers bars.

Before long, some DEC rangers showed up and asked if we knew Travis. "That's my brother!" I said, and told them about Travis' last known direction of travel. The rangers urged me to stay put and warm up. They headed out, while my new friend Nicole and I ate and made plans to hike out on our own. When a second pair of rangers came by, we briefed them on our planned route, and everyone agreed that would be okay as long as Nicole stayed with me.

The hike out was difficult. If Nicole wasn't there motivating me, I don't know if I would have made it. Along the way we met another ranger who was looking for us. She led us to another lean-to where I was given dry clothes and got in a sleeping bag. She radioed in, "I have subject's brother." The ranger fed me the most delicious ham in a tortilla and a cup of hot Gatorade. I felt revived.



Joel poses with his "savior," Nicole, who provided food, water, dry clothes and the motivation he needed to keep going.

While we were together, the ranger's radio crackled: Travis was located—alive! I was so relieved, I could barely talk. The pending eight-mile hike out no longer seemed ominous. Upon reaching Johns Brook Lodge, we heard that there was also a huge manhunt for two murderers who had escaped from prison. We were very fortunate rangers had been made available to search for us. (*Editor's note: In all, the search for the author and his brother took several hundred staff-hours that included 14 Forest Rangers, 1 Asst. Forest Ranger, the Lake Colden Interior Caretaker, 1 Critical Care EMT from the Keene Valley Fire Department, several staff from the Ausable Club, and a NY State Police Aviation unit.*)

We hiked three miles to the DEC outpost cabin where I feasted on spaghetti with ham. The radio allowed us to track Travis's progress. The next morning I put on my dry, but dirty and smelly clothes. Nicole wanted to stay in the woods, so we snapped a quick picture and I said goodbye to my savior.

Once out of the woods, I got cell service and I listened to a voicemail from Travis. He sounded weak. I immediately called him at the hospital. We started talking and were practically crying over our traumatic experience.

The ranger dropped me off at my car and I headed to the hospital. When I got there, Travis looked like he had crawled out of a collapsed building. I helped him stand and we hugged for a long minute.

On the ride home, we discussed what went wrong. We know we are fortunate to have made it out alive. We made so many mistakes, and are so grateful to the 911 operator, DEC dispatch, DEC rangers, and Nicole for all their help. If it wasn't for them, this story could have had a much different ending.

**Travis Muhlnickel** is an amateur Adirondack hiker/outdoor enthusiast. He resides in Cato, NY with his wife and children.



# On Patrol

Carl Heilman II

## Real stories from Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers in the field



### Poached Pike Repossessed—Fulton County

ECO Shane Manns received a complaint from some avid fishermen about an individual who had taken a large northern pike from Sacandaga Lake two days before the season opened. After a brief investigation, Officer Manns got the name and address of the poacher. During an interview, the subject admitted to the violation and produced a trophy-sized fish, about 40 inches long. He had intended to have the fish mounted, but Officer Manns seized the pike and ticketed the subject.

### Expensive Turkey Dinner—Columbia County

ECO James Davey, assisted by the Columbia County Sheriff's Department, investigated and successfully prosecuted a turkey poaching case. A landowner had witnessed a man shoot a turkey near his house, grab the bird, and run to his vehicle nearby. Evidence collected in the case included DNA from the turkey, blood and feather samples, scene measurements, and a statement made by the landowner. During an interview, the suspect voluntarily wrote and signed a confession attesting to the illegal activity. He was charged with discharging a firearm within 500 feet of a dwelling, failure to tag

the carcass, trespassing, and illegal taking of wildlife. The defendant pled guilty and paid \$875 in fines and surcharges.

### Fall at the Falls—Washington County

Washington County 911 contacted DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch about an injured male at Shelving Rock Falls. The man had slipped and fallen 50 feet from the top of the waterfall, hitting a rock on his way down into the water. Responding Forest Ranger Jamie Laczko, on scene with fire, EMS and aviation resources from Washington County, advised that the subject was treated by a physician and an EMT. Ranger Laczko then coordinated setup for low-angle rope extrication. Following a successful rescue of the man, he was transported by ATV to a waiting West Fort Ann ambulance and then to Life Flight for transport to Albany Medical Center. His injuries included head trauma, lacerations, and leg injuries.

### Injured Hiker—Essex County

DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch received a call from Essex County 911 reporting an injured male hiker in the AuSable River at the Wilmington Flume, conscious but unable to exit the water. The hiker had been taking photos when he leaned around a tree, slipped, and fell into the river. Within 15 minutes, Forest Ranger Jim Giglinto responded with the Wilmington Fire Department and EMS personnel. The hiker had gotten out of the water by then, but was on a ledge approximately 40 feet downstream and couldn't make it to the shoreline. Ranger Giglinto directed setup of a belay line and rescue of the subject, who was then taken to Adirondack Medical Center in Lake Placid for evaluation less than an hour after the 911 call had been received.

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

### Shell on Earth—New York County

During a random, routine compliance check at a Manhattan pet store, ECOs Jeff Krueger and Anthony Rigoli seized 620 baby red-eared sliders, a regulated species of turtle. The business was issued tickets for failure to post salmonella warnings and for offering for sale turtles with carapaces less than four inches long. The turtles were transferred to the care of a wildlife rehabilitator.



### Ask the ECO

**Q:** Can I fish for bass before the season opens?

**A:** Generally, yes, but you may not keep the bass. In many locations, catch-and-release fishing for bass is allowed, but you may only use artificial lures. Consult your fishing regulations guide or regional DEC office for more information.



# Sharing the Tradition

## — Introducing beginners to the sport of fishing

By Joelle Ernst  
Photos provided by author

When I think back to my childhood, a host of great memories come to mind. One of my favorites is going fishing with my dad. I remember our first outing. I donned my Punky Brewster (for those of you who remember that TV show) sneakers and the coolest outfit I could find (which in retrospect looked pretty funny), and my dad, my grandfather, and I headed up north to my dad’s all-time favorite place to fish: Lake Champlain. It’s where he first learned to fish, so it only seemed fitting that’s where he wanted to take me.

Like many young anglers, I had one of those kid-sized poles adorned with cartoon characters. In my case, it was Snoopy. I’ll never forget the feeling of a fish “hitting” my line and the fight it put up as I used all my strength to reel it in. Several smallmouth bass later, I hooked one that was large enough to snap my pole in half. Needless to say, I was officially done fishing for the day.

Looking back, that experience was what would shape my love of fishing. And as the years went by, it became less

about “the catching” and more about the time I got to spend with my dad. When I got older, I decided to pursue a career in fisheries—guided that way, no doubt, by my fishing experiences with my father.

I have two children of my own now and although they’re still pretty young, I haven’t wasted any time getting a fishing rod in their hands. I love seeing their faces light up when they catch a fish. And it doesn’t seem to matter how big the fish is—they are just so excited and proud when reeling in their catch.

I'm fortunate that my job lets me share that same sense of excitement with hundreds of Capital Region residents each year when I teach at free fishing clinics. Getting people interested in fishing is something I'm pretty passionate about, and it's always rewarding when I see the joy on participants' faces as they learn to cast and then successfully hook and reel in their first fish.

One key thing I've learned when introducing people to the sport of fishing: you need to relax and make it fun. It's important to remember that it doesn't take much to make it an unforgettable experience. For some, it's catching fish, but for others, it's hanging out with friends or family and casting a line into the water. The trick is to leave them wanting to go fishing again and again.

## No Water? No Problem.

Learning how to cast is one of the fundamentals of fishing, but you don't need to be near water to master that skill. Practice "plugs" can be purchased from just about anywhere you can purchase fishing equipment and are perfect for "fishing in the backyard." Instead of tying on a hook, you simply use a practice plug instead. As long as there's plenty of open



Kids can learn to cast by using plugs and casting in their yard.

space, it's a great opportunity for kids to practice casting and lets them imagine reeling in "the big one."

## Getting Started

Attitude is everything, so to be a fishing "mentor" it's crucial that you exude enthusiasm, patience and positivity. Creating an environment conducive to learning will provide encouragement and allow the "newbie" angler to gain some confidence. Enthusiasm is contagious—if you're excited about something, it tends to rub off on others.

Using a bobber-and-worm rig is one of the simplest forms of fishing, but it can require a lot of patience as you wait for that bobber to dunk under the water. And let's face it, sometimes the fish aren't biting, so teaching patience and being patient are key. But if it gets too hot, or too buggy, and the fish aren't biting, stop fishing and instead focus on other things, like the turtle basking in the hot sun, the frogs hiding amongst the lily pads, or the dragonflies and birds flying around the water's edge. As I mentioned before, and it's something I always preach when doing clinics—it's not always about catching fish. It's about the experience you have while you're outside trying to catch fish.



## Helpful Hints

Kids are more responsive when you offer them choices. Giving them a couple of options on where to set up your fishing spot will make them feel included and get them engaged in the activity right from the start.

When fishing with small hooks, many times fish will "inhale" the bait and the hook may become embedded. If you plan on releasing your catch, clip the line close to the eye of the hook to avoid harming the fish.

You can also use barbless hooks, or crimp the barb on your hooks to make them barbless. You may lose some fish, but crimping or removing a barb makes it easier to take a fish off the hook.

## Basic Equipment

Most beginner anglers start out with a spin-casting (push-button) rod and reel set-up. These set-ups are easy to use and can be relatively inexpensive. A handful of bobbers (not the huge ones), some small hooks, and worms round out the rest of what you'll need to get started.

Worms can be purchased at most local convenience stores and gas stations, but if you're feeling ambitious, you can dig

some up yourself; check under damp surfaces. Some kids (and adults) can be squeamish about using worms, but there are plenty of alternatives, including artificial baits made from natural ingredients. These baits don't require any special care, are biodegradable, stay on the hook, and come in a variety of shapes and styles such as worms, nuggets, maggots and twister tails. Many anglers feel they catch fish almost as well as live bait.

It's also good to bring needle-nose pliers for removing the hook from the fish's mouth, and nail clippers to cut the line. If you're fishing from a boat, make sure each person has a personal flotation device (PFD). When choosing fishing equipment, keep in mind that fish aren't picky when it comes to how much money you spend.

While not essential, there are a few additional items you should consider bringing, including a bucket (to put your catch in or to sit on), hat, sunscreen, bug spray, water and snacks. Bringing these extras can make or break a beginner's first fishing trip.

## Where To Go

If there's one thing New York doesn't have a shortage of, it's places to go fishing. No matter where you live in the state, you won't need to travel far to have a rewarding fishing experience.

When taking kids out, it's a good idea to pick a fishing spot that's within a reasonably short walk of the car, offers some shade, and, if possible, has amenities such as bathrooms, or even a playground if they want to take a break from fishing. If possible, do some research before choosing a destination. Generally, kids don't care if they catch a lunker bass or a small sunfish, as long as they're catching something. And since kids can get easily bored, try to choose a lake or pond with a good population of panfish (sunfish, perch, and bullhead), which are usually more eager to bite than other species.



The author teaching fish identification at a fishing clinic.

Largemouth and smallmouth bass are also relatively easy to catch. Fishing streams and rivers with swift currents can be frustrating to any angler, so ponds and lakes tend to be better suited for beginners. Choosing the right time of day is also important—fish are usually more apt to bite around sunrise and sunset.

Check out DEC's website ([www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7749.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7749.html)) for hundreds of good places to go fishing.

## Know the Rules

There are rules and regulations when it comes to fishing, so be sure to check the current freshwater fishing regulations (available online at [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/fishing.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/fishing.html)) to find out when you can fish for a species, what the size limits are, and how many you can harvest if you plan on keeping your catch. Another good thing about fishing for sunfish, like pumpkinseed and bluegill, is that you can fish for them year-round in many waters.

While children don't need a fishing license, anyone 16 years of age or older must have one. Even if you're helping a child fish, you need to have a fishing license. Licenses are now valid for 365

days from the date of purchase, and can be bought online from DEC's website and then printed at home for immediate use. Fishing licenses are also available at most sporting goods stores, town clerk offices, or by calling 1-866-933-2257. Lifetime licenses make a great gift for children. They pay for themselves over time and never have to be renewed.

DEC has a host of helpful resources to guide you on your fishing adventure. The agency recently developed a comprehensive manual that covers everything from identifying your catch and managing fisheries populations, to basic fishing tackle and techniques. To download your copy of the I FISH NY Beginner's Guide to Freshwater Fishing, visit [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov).

Few things in life compare to seeing the world through a child's eyes, especially when it comes to nature. I'm sure my dad will never forget that day on Lake Champlain. I know I haven't.

Joelle Ernst is a fisheries biologist in DEC's Albany office.



# Becoming an Outdoors-Woman

By Bernadette LaManna

Photos by DEC

*“These workshops have really changed my life. I participated in so many activities that I never would have tried otherwise....and the education I got here gave me the start I needed to get going and continue enjoying these activities.”*

*“I came here feeling a little out of place and intimidated and am leaving feeling very comfortable and excited about trying some of my new-found fishing and hiking skills.”*

*“I wanted to learn skills that my husband, brother and father never had a chance to teach me. And to challenge myself without the guys around.”*

These are just a tiny sampling of the hundreds of testimonials from participants in New York’s Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) program.

Sponsored by DEC and supported by dozens of partners, BOW workshops provide information, encouragement and hands-on instruction in activities such as fishing, shooting, archery, hunting, trapping, outdoor photography, map and compass, survival, camping, canoeing and outdoor cooking. A woman can even earn her NYS Hunter Education Certificate or Trapper Education Certificate by taking specific workshop classes and completing required home study.

Workshops are open to anyone age 18 and older; past participants have ranged from their late teens to their mid-eighties!

## One Woman’s Experience...and Recommendation

Thanks to BOW classes, I learned—among other things—how to construct a shelter with materials found in the woods, the correct way to use a bow and arrow, and the types of tinder in the wild that can help make a fire. Confidence builder? You bet, but until I finally master using a map and compass (or even a GPS), I won’t be hanging out my shingle as a wilderness guide anytime soon!

BOW offers a supportive environment for women who:

- Have always wanted to learn certain outdoor activities usually associated with men
- Are beginners who want to improve their outdoor skills
- Want to spend time with other like-minded women
- Would like to become more self-sufficient

## Beyond BOW Workshops

In addition to traditional BOW workshops, there are Beyond BOW workshops, ranging from particular topics that last several hours to guided tours that last several days. Examples include turkey hunting (from choosing equipment to clothing to safety); kayaking (including refining strokes and maneuvers, and safety); and a day-long wilderness first aid certification program.

For further information on the BOW or Beyond BOW programs (including contact information), see below.

**Bernadette LaManna** is a writer and editor in DEC’s Albany office.

## How To Participate

If you’d like to attend a future BOW workshop, check out DEC’s website at [www.dec.ny.gov/education/68.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/68.html). To get an idea of the types of courses offered at a workshop, simply download a pdf of last year’s workshop booklet.

This year’s workshop will be held September 16-18, 2016 at Greek Peak Mountain Resort near Cortland, NY. If you have questions, please call (518) 402-8862, e-mail us at [fw.information@dec.ny.gov](mailto:fw.information@dec.ny.gov) (put “BOW Workshop” in the subject line), or write to: NYS Outdoors-Woman, 625 Broadway, 5th Floor, Albany, NY 12233-4754.



# PLOVER DISCOVERED!

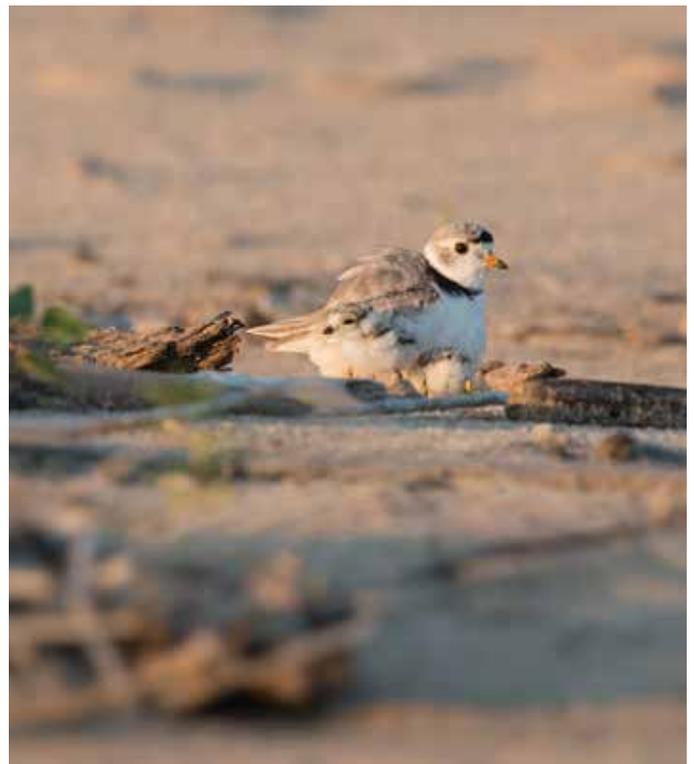
—Photographer finds nesting endangered species on Lake Ontario shore  
By Sue Phillips

At first, they were mere dots on a distant sand-spit. I spotted them from my kayak as we approached the Lake Ontario outlet. My binoculars revealed them to be plovers, but as we got closer it was my friend Diana Whiting who identified them as piping plovers (*Charadrius melodus*), an endangered species that hadn't been seen nesting on New York's Lake Ontario shores in 31 years.

Both of us are avid birders and wildlife photographers, so we were thrilled to have found a mated pair of these rare and beautiful shorebirds. Trying to steady our cameras was challenging as we fought the waves bouncing our kayaks around, but we didn't want to go ashore and risk scaring the birds away. We also hoped to get the numbers from the bands on their legs, which might shed light on their history.

We were later able to determine the band numbers from our photos, and Diana reported them along with our discovery to DEC. The information gleaned from the bands showed that these two piping plovers were originally banded hundreds of miles west, on Lake Huron's shores, back when they were chicks.

A few days later, a small crew of wildlife staff from DEC found the nest nearby, camouflaged among sticks and vegetation on this beautiful stretch of shoreline north of Sandy Pond. They cordoned off the area to protect the nest from unknowing beach-



Although covered in down when hatched, plover chicks will still take refuge under a parent for warmth and security.



At two days old, these plover chicks are fully capable of running along the beach, using their oversized feet to keep from sinking into the soft sand.

goers and their dogs, and later piled sand bags to prevent flash flooding from carrying the nest away. Finally, and to our great delight, two chicks hatched on July 25, 2015—the first known piping plovers to hatch in this part of New York State in more than 30 years!



A plover chick vocalizing

The female parent took off shortly after the hatching to begin her southward migration, leaving the male to raise the chicks. Or “chick” as it soon became; sadly, one of them later met its demise, a fact I discovered upon arriving at the beach early one morning and finding only one. But the remaining chick turned out to be “the little piping plover that could.”

At first the nest enclosure prevented us from getting good pictures, even with our telephoto lenses. Within a few days, however, both the parent and chick started venturing outside of it. Having recently retired, I returned to the area several times and often camped at a nearby state park. I would wake at 4:00 AM so I could paddle out to the plover’s roosting area at sunrise when the waters were calm, as this stretch of shore is reachable only by boat and the waters nearby can get quite rough. In fact, I had to give up and turn back on more than one occasion.

My patience and persistence were eventually rewarded. One morning, after going ashore and quietly sitting a good distance away so I wouldn’t disturb the plovers as they foraged up and down the beach and nearby mudflats, the chick hopped right up to me to pose for some close-ups. By then it was two weeks old and ready to show off its plumage for the camera. This happened



At three weeks old, the plover chick has lost its downy appearance and has grown its flight feathers, as shown in this wing display.

a few more times as both adult and chick became accustomed to my presence and grew less shy. Their main concern was avoiding becoming breakfast to one of the many predators lurking both overhead and on land. They would crouch low in the sand whenever certain birds or mammals approached. They were adept at camouflage, becoming virtually invisible unless they



Plovers are continually on the move, foraging up and down the beach for prey like worms, insect larvae, and small crustaceans.

were moving or making their peeping calls. One time I thought the worst had happened when I arrived to find a bald eagle standing on the shore, licking its chops with no plovers in sight. But once the eagle flew off, I heard their little peeping and knew all was well.

Three weeks after hatching, the chick had mastered the art of flying and had graduated to the status of fledgling. By the fourth week, both adult and junior were ready to embark upon their journey south—to join the female at their winter home, likely along the southern Atlantic or Gulf coasts. We hope that someday, someone will spot them and report the band numbers so we can learn how they fared.

Today, there are only a few thousand piping plovers left on the planet, so I was happy to have witnessed the propagation of one more member of this delightful species.

*Update: Just prior to the magazine going to press, the author learned that the chick (now nearly a year old) was spotted near Cape Hatteras, NC in May.*

**Sue Phillips** is a wildlife photographer enthusiast and retired software developer. She enjoys birdwatching, kayaking and hiking.

# Meet the Piping Plover (*Charadrius melodus*)

New York Status: Endangered  
Federal Status: Endangered  
(NYS Atlantic coast population is listed as Threatened)

The piping plover is a pale shorebird (the color of dry beach sand) with orange legs and a yellowish bill with a black tip. Measuring 5 ½" long, it sports a single black neck band and a narrow black band across its forehead during the spring and summer. Piping plovers are seen singly or in small flocks.

Piping plovers are the first of the shorebirds to arrive on the breeding grounds, starting from early to mid-March. Nests, which are shallow scrapes, are made during courtship and are sometimes lined with pebbles and/or shells. They are usually placed well above the high-water mark on open, grassless sand beaches or dredged spoil areas. During May and June, one egg is laid every other day until the average clutch of four eggs is complete. On the Atlantic coast, piping plovers often nest with a colony of least terns.

Young plovers leave the nest shortly after hatching, and fledge in about 28-35 days. By early September, all but a few stragglers have departed for their wintering areas.

Piping plovers forage on beaches, dunes and in tidal wrack, primarily eating worms, insect larvae, beetles, crustaceans, mollusks and other small invertebrates and their eggs.

## Distribution and Habitat

Piping plovers occur along the Atlantic coast from southwestern Newfoundland and southeastern Quebec south to North Carolina, and on inland



beaches from eastern Alberta and Nebraska to Lake Ontario. Three populations currently exist: one along the east coast, another on the upper Great Lakes, and a third on the major river systems and wetlands of the northern Great Plains.

Within New York, this species breeds on Long Island's sandy beaches, from Queens to the Hamptons, and in the eastern bays and harbors of northern Suffolk County. A single pair was also recorded in 1984 at Sandy Pond, Lake Ontario in Oswego County. Piping plovers spend winters along the coast from Texas to North Carolina, and infrequently as far south as the Bahamas and Greater Antilles.

## Status

This species was driven to near extinction around the turn of the twentieth century by extensive shooting. Protection since 1918 by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act allowed piping plovers to make a recovery by the mid-1920s. The population peaked in the 1940s, but declined once again due to development and recreation following World War II.

Continued human pressures such as coastal development, recreational activities, and disturbance by off-road vehicles have reduced the available suitable breeding habitat for these birds. No population increases were recorded from the 1970s to the 1980s. However, recent surveys have estimated the Atlantic coast population slightly higher at approximately 800 breeding pairs, about 200 of which nest in New York.

## Management

Each year, survey groups from DEC, The Nature Conservancy, National Audubon Society and a network of concerned volunteers conduct a census of the Long Island breeding colonies. With landowner cooperation, fencing and signs prohibiting entry are erected to protect nesting colonies from disturbance. Tern/plover stewards actively patrol and monitor nest sites to increase success and alert the public to the vulnerability of these species to human disturbance.

*Adapted from DEC's website [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov).*



## *A Trip to the “Magic Kingdom”* —Riding the Brookfield horse trail system in Madison County

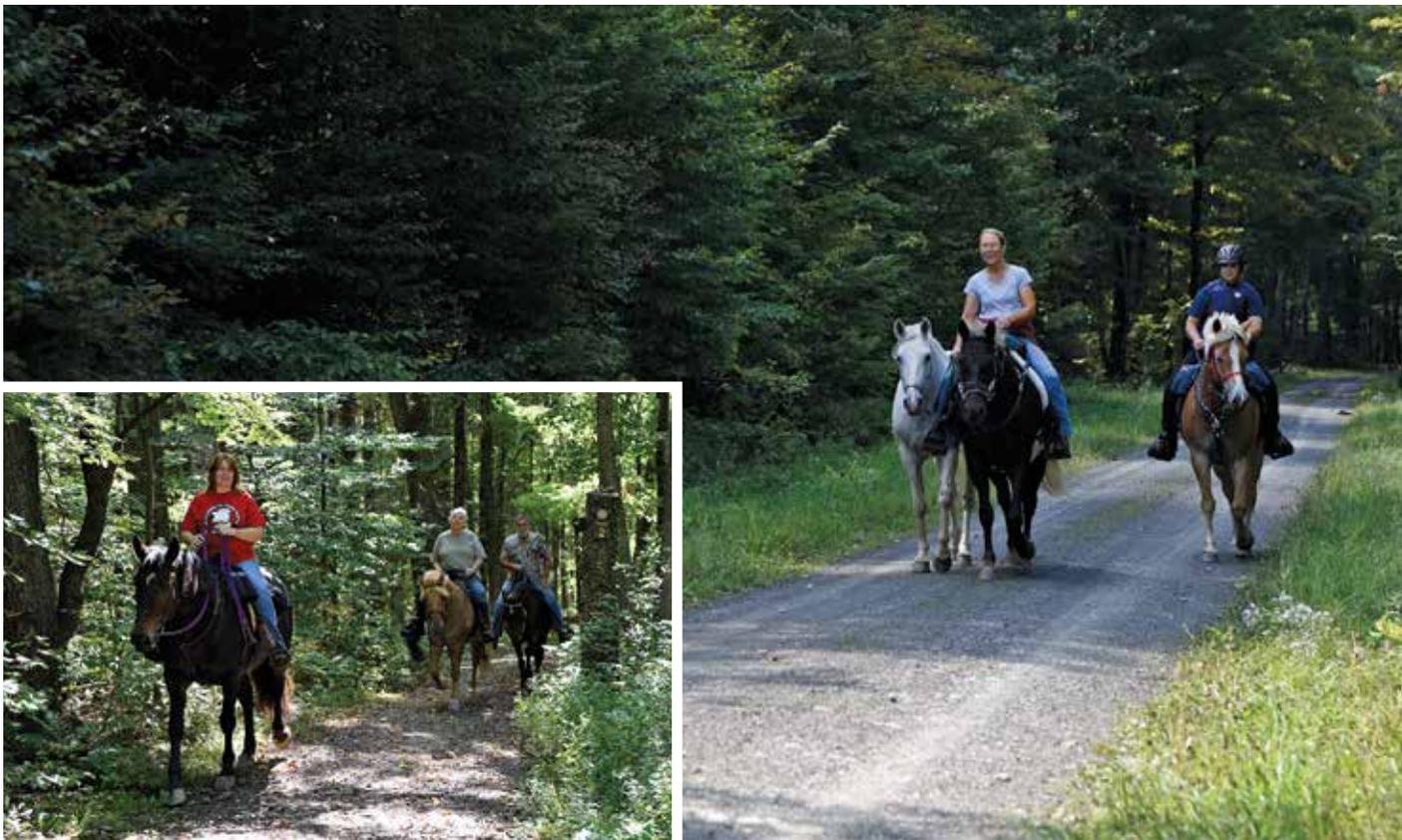
By Robert E. Off

As you approach the rural landscape of the Town of Brookfield in southeast Madison County, your eyes are drawn to the tapestry of light and dark forests that seem to roll endlessly from hilltop to hilltop. A unique feature in Central New York’s mixed rural landscape, this patchwork of native hardwood forests and historic conifer plantations dominates thousands of acres of state reforestation lands. Former land managers and foresters at DEC’s Sherburne office nicknamed the area the “Magic Kingdom” because of the peaceful feeling they got when visiting this land.

A great place to explore, the area has become a popular place for horseback riding. Equestrians travel from far and wide to ride on the highly acclaimed, 130-mile Brookfield horse and snowmobile trail system. This trail network meanders throughout three separate reforestation areas—Charles E. Baker, Brookfield Railroad, and Beaver Creek State Forests—that occupy approximately 14,000 acres in all.

The main tract of the Brookfield Trail System is the Charles E. Baker State Forest. At just under 10,000 acres, it is one of

Equestrian riders enjoying the trails on one of several organized fall trail-ride weekends.



Jim Clayton



Jim Clayton

the largest blocks of consolidated public lands outside of the Adirondack and Catskill forest preserves. Here, a person can enjoy seemingly endless woods and trails as he/she traverses just about every kind of landscape a forest has to offer. A number of trails are wide, making it easy to enjoy a leisurely ride with friends.

The concept and design for a large network of equestrian riding trails took root in the late 1960s. In a cooperative effort between the Empire State Horseman’s Association and the then NYS Conservation Department, Conservation staff began laying out three distinct riding loops in 1967. The actual trail clearing and construction began shortly thereafter and continued for several years, eventually totaling 130 miles. The central starting point of the trail system is at the old Civilian Conservation Corps site located on Moscow Hill Road just south of Quaker Hill Road. This site was the location of Camp S-131. Originally con-

Jim Clayton



structed in 1935, the camp had barracks, a mess hall, and a recreation hall, and housed the young men of company 3202 who were assigned to the many conservation projects that eventually shaped the public lands we see today.

Moscow Hill is also the location of two distinct camping facilities geared towards equestrian use during the trail-riding season from May through October. Riders will find camping sites, covered tie stalls, water pumps, portable bathroom facilities, and direct access to the trail system at both the Moscow Hill Camping and Assembly areas. From here, they can venture onto the trail network through a series of public forest access roads (a.k.a. truck trails), town roads, and off-road trails for miles and miles of riding pleasure.

Visitors may encounter white-tailed deer, fisher, beaver, fox, coyotes, bald eagles, woodland hawks, and countless other bird

While hiking and camping are probably what most people think of when considering summer activities on state land, horseback riding is another great outdoor activity you can enjoy, and NYS has hundreds of miles of trails to explore.

Check out DEC’s website at [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/101037.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/101037.html) for more information on New York State horse trails.

species on their travels. Riders also travel through a number of protected areas that contain unique features such as climax forests with large or old trees, valuable wetlands, large rock outcrops, waterfalls, and riparian stream corridors with deep, dark hemlock forests. Occasional scenic vistas delight trail users.

Adding to the uniqueness of the area is the fact that a large portion remains a working forest. While riders travel through various forest stands, they can see examples of historic and recent timber practices conducted through DEC's timber products sales program. Via the use of regulated tree harvesting, much of the accessible forest is managed for production of a variety of wood products. Hardwood logs are used for furniture, baseball bats and flooring, as well as for local firewood. Conifers are used for log cabin stock, utility poles, dimensional lumber, hop poles, fence posts, and pulpwood for paper products. It is a great example of how recreation and industry can peacefully co-exist on the same property.

For more information on the Brookfield Trail System or the forest lands under the Brookfield Unit Management Plan, please contact the Sherburne DEC office at 607-674-4017 Monday through Friday during regular business hours.

Robert Oft



A regulated harvest of larch trees on Beaver Creek State Forest. The trees will be used for hop and fence posts.

**Robert E. Off** is a senior forester in DEC's Sherburne office.

Wells Horton



Autumn splendor as seen from Morrow Road in the heart of the Brookfield Trail System.



## A Legacy of Stewardship

The Brookfield state lands are managed by DEC in perpetuity for “timber, wildlife, recreation and water quality.” The majority of these state lands were purchased during and shortly after the Great Depression Era of the 1930s as part of the movement to bring idle lands back into productivity. That monumental effort of property acquisition and planting conifer trees by the millions was done under the direct supervision of Charles E. Baker, one of the first District Foresters with the Conservation Department. This work laid the foundation for DEC to continue the stewardship of the area’s natural resources for multiple uses and the good of the public.

Currently, these and the rest of New York State’s reforestation lands are dually certified under the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and the Sustainable Forestry Initiative (SFI) programs as forests managed for long-term ecological, social and economic health. This independent, third-party certification is representative of a growing number of working forest lands in New York that are managed to protect habitat, cultural resources, water, recreation and economic values now and for future generations.

These towering red pines along Truck Trail 13 on Charles E. Baker State Forest were planted during the 1930s



## ECO and Forest Ranger Training has Begun for 51 Recruits

The 20th Basic School for Uniformed Officers—a 27-week training academy that prepares recruits for careers as environmental conservation officers (ECOs) and forest rangers—has begun. Recruits are trained in firearms, swift-water rescue, wildland fire suppression, and emergency vehicle operation. In addition, they receive extensive training in New York’s Environmental Conservation Law and proper enforcement techniques. Upon graduation, the new ECOs and forest rangers, who are equivalent to NYS Police, will be assigned patrol areas typically consisting of one or two counties.

## Atlantic Sturgeon Show Signs of Population Recovery

A joint federal and state 2015 Juvenile Atlantic Sturgeon Survey shows the highest number of Atlantic sturgeon in the Hudson River in the survey’s 10-year history and increasing abundance of juvenile sturgeon.

Commercial fishing rates for Atlantic sturgeon exceeded the fish’s ability to replenish themselves in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Consequently, New York established a harvest moratorium for Atlantic sturgeon in 1996. In 1998, an amendment to the Atlantic States Marine Fisheries Commission Fishery Management Plan resulted in a 40-year, coast-wide moratorium on Atlantic sturgeon harvest to protect two generations of females in each spawning stock.

Because sturgeon are a long-lived species, with Hudson River fish beginning to spawn at 10 to 20 years old and living as long as 60 years, signs of recovery were expected to come slowly. This slow pace contributed to the National Marine Fisheries

Service (NMFS) listing Hudson River Atlantic sturgeon as Endangered in 2012. Biologists are now seeing a steady increase in the number of Atlantic sturgeon in the Hudson River as the first protected fish are coming into their prime breeding years.

## Tree Farms Celebrate 75 Years

The American Forest Foundation (AFF) is celebrating the 75th anniversary of the American Tree Farm System (ATFS), the largest and oldest sustainable forestry program for family forest owners. As part of the celebration, AFF and ATFS leaders have committed to growing the program’s impact on some of the most critical issues facing society: providing clean water and addressing wildfire threats, especially in the west; enhancing wildlife habitat and biodiversity; and ensuring sustainable wood supplies for forest products.

Taking a regional approach, AFF conducted assessments and surveyed partners and ATFS leaders to identify opportunities where family forest owners could have an increased impact. In the Northeast, 70 percent identified wildlife habitat as the top opportunity where forest owners could make a difference, noting the majority of wildlife habitat in the region falls on family and individual properties.

The AFF works on the ground with families, teachers and elected officials to promote stewardship and protect our nation’s forest heritage. A commitment to the next generation unites our nationwide network of forest owners and teachers working to keep forests healthy and our children well prepared for the future.

For more information, visit [www.forestfoundation.org/75-anniversary](http://www.forestfoundation.org/75-anniversary).





## Historic Land Deal

A new chapter will be added to the Adirondacks' storied history after the state acquired the final parcel of 65,000 acres of former Finch, Pruyn Paper Company lands, completing the largest addition to the Adirondack Park Forest Preserve in more than a century.

On May 10, Governor Cuomo announced the state purchase of the 20,758-acre Boreas Ponds Tract south of the High Peaks Wilderness Area. These lands and waters will expand opportunities for recreation, including hunting, fishing, hiking, paddling and wildlife viewing. DEC will begin to manage the area for public recreation access this summer, pending formal classification of these lands.



## DEC's Media Corner

DEC's Facebook post with the most views for April included photos of a visit to a black bear den in Allegany State Park. DEC biologists visit bear dens to collect data on New York's bear population. This was one of three den visits highlighted on social media in April. More than 127,000 people saw the post, which featured a bear cub... with killer claws!

If you have an interesting story, photo or video relating to DEC that can be shared on our Facebook or Twitter pages, please send it to [socialmedia@dec.ny.gov](mailto:socialmedia@dec.ny.gov).



## A Special Discovery

We found this turtle crossing the road in the southern Adirondacks. It was about 12” long, measured nose to tail, and the shell was about 8”. It had a beautiful pattern on its shell. What kind of turtle is this?

Cathy Woodlock



*Good find, Cathy! Your picture is of a male wood turtle—a species of special concern in New York State. For more information about this species and other turtles, see the August 2002 Conservationist, or visit: [www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/104996.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/104996.html) —Bill Hoffman, DEC Fish & Wildlife Technician*

## Sinking Feeling

I came upon this heron at Astor Cove and was shocked to see fishing line and a large sinker hanging from its mouth. When it flew, it stayed low. I am not sure how or where the line/hook is attached to the great blue.

Kathryn Zvokel Stewart  
Rhinecliff



*Unfortunately, we do get reports like this from time to time. It's possible that this incident occurred when a fish broke the line, and when the heron ate the fish, it became entangled. That sinker won't significantly affect the heron's ability to fly, but the hook or attached line may affect its ability to eat. This bird's plight reminds us to be good environmental stewards. We can't always prevent a snagged lure or a broken line, but we can clean up after ourselves when we enjoy the outdoors and reduce the likelihood that discarded fishing line or other plastics will unintentionally harm wildlife.*

## Stocking Pays Off

I just wanted to share yesterday's catch with you folks. It's a testament to the success of DEC's hard work and effort. We launched from Mexico in Oswego County and were trolling near the power plant when this 16-lb. brown trout slammed a small black/silver spoon. The fish was 30” long and had a 19” girth. I thought you'd appreciate seeing such a fish. Thanks for what you guys do!

Michael Breed



*Every May DEC stocks brown trout into Lake Ontario and many other water bodies. The benefit of DEC's stocking efforts to both the community and the Lake Ontario fishery is evidenced by this great photo.*



## Backyard Bobcat

I took this photo of a bobcat around our house in beautiful western New York. We wouldn't want to live anywhere else!

Rob Yates

Avoca, Steuben County

*How lucky you were to see a bobcat. They are usually secretive and elusive by nature.*

—Mike Clark, DEC Wildlife Biologist

## Crazy Caterpillar

My two sons and I found this very peculiar-looking creature in our backyard. It appears to be a caterpillar in some stage of development, but I have never seen one like it. It has what appear to be a head and a face, almost like a developing amphibian! We're hoping you can identify it for us.

Todd Rogers

Merrick, Nassau County

*Cool picture! That is a spicebush swallowtail (Papilio troilus) in the last days of its caterpillar stage. The strange markings on the caterpillar's thorax help it avoid predation. Up close, they look somewhat like a small snake, and some predators will be*

*thus discouraged from attacking. This species actually uses mimicry in three different ways during its various life stages.*

—Jessica Cancelliere and Jerry Carlson, DEC Research Scientists



## Ask the Biologist

**Q:** After looking for years, I finally spotted and photographed the unique bird's-nest fungus. Can you tell me a little about it?  
—Laurie Dirkx



**A:** These are indeed a species of bird's-nest fungi—*Crucibulum laeve* or a closely related species that can only be distinguished microscopically. These fungi are actually fairly common (though often overlooked) on wood chips and decaying twigs. I often find them on my garden mulch. Note the flattish, white “eggs” inside the brown-sided cup or “nest.” If you find these and use a hand lens, you may see that each egg is attached to the inside of the cup with a tiny thread, called a funiculus. When it rains, the eggs are splashed out of the cups (hence another name, splash cups), breaking the funiculus, which is carried along on the ride. The funiculus has a sticky end that may attach to some object, like a grass blade, twig, or decomposing leaf. The eggs are like mini-puffballs—inside they contain a mass of spores which will be released when the egg wall decays. Some may even be eaten and pass through the gut of a small mammal on their way to being dispersed. This is no ordinary mushroom!

—Steven Daniel, Naturalist and Botanist

(Founder & Past President, Rochester Mycological Association)

## Contact us!

E-mail us at: [magazine@dec.ny.gov](mailto:magazine@dec.ny.gov)

Write to us at: Conservationist Letters  
NYSDEC, 625 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12233-4502

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



# Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

## Jump On In

by Jan Dunlap

As an author and speaker, my year has been filled with great moments: learning that my girl-meets-dog memoir hit best-seller status, presenting a keynote address to an audience of 300 in Chicago, being a featured speaker at one of the World Birding Centers in Texas, and getting a coveted review for my newest book.

But the moment that delighted me most occurred during my training to become a volunteer naturalist.

I waded calf-deep into a gentle stream... and caught a northern leopard frog in a small mesh scoop net.

You would have thought I'd won the lottery.

"I got a frog!" I shouted to my wading partner, a grin plastered on my face. "I caught a frog!"

I cupped my hand over the top of the little net and carried my treasure to my classmate, who held a small specimen tank. We levered the frog into the tank so everyone in the class could admire and study "my frog" up close. I know it sounds crazy, but I found myself inordinately proud of my little amphibian contribution to the day's activity of exploring a local stream and its surroundings.

You see, I'd never caught a frog before, nor had I ever had the desire to do so. Frogs were things my kids liked to chase through the grass when they were growing up; being the parent-in-charge, my task was to make sure the kids had on sunscreen and that they released the frog right after catching it so they didn't accidentally

squish it to death, leaving me to clean up slippery frog remains and very gooey little hands. Frogs were not on my radar as subjects of wonder or co-inhabitants of my earthly plot. Pursuing a relationship with them was definitely not on my to-do list.

Until I reconnected with nature as a reluctant dog walker.

Reluctant, because the dog in question was supposed to be my daughter's. You can probably guess how that turned out; the dog bonded with me instead of my daughter, and proceeded to literally drag me outside... and right into an unexpected love affair with all things Nature. Thanks to the dog, I had to take daily long walks, and it was those walks that reconnected me to the outdoors.

It was also those walks that shamed me into acknowledging how ignorant I was in my own backyard. I knew we had maple and oak trees, but the others, I couldn't name. The motion of the beautiful tall grasses that swayed on the hill I passed was as elegantly choreographed as any ballet, but I had no idea who the dancers were. And when I paused near a creek for the dog to take a dip, the chirps that filled the air went silent, and I wondered whose realm we had disturbed.

I was the trespassing stranger, unfamiliar with the life teeming around me, and I could think of only one way to make myself welcome.

I became a naturalist.

I like to think that I'm a reclaimed naturalist, since the great outdoors was my



Jandunlap.com

playground as a child (though I never wanted to touch a frog, I admit—they really are slimy critters, you know). Like so many in my generation, I kept myself occupied exploring the woods, rolling down grassy slopes, collecting seashells or rocks, picking wildflowers. Nature was a balm and playmate for me, and I'm thrilled to be knee-deep back in it. And while being a naturalist deepens my relationship with the earth, I'm also encouraging my friends and family to make their own rediscoveries of nature as I share my experiences with them.

"Jump on in," I tell them. "The water's fine."

With any luck, maybe we'll even catch some frogs together.

**Jan Dunlap** is the author of the best-selling memoir *Saved by Gracie*. You can find her works, including her *Birder Murder Mystery* series at [jandunlap.com](http://jandunlap.com) or through your favorite bookseller.



# FREE FISHING WEEKEND

## June 25-26

Susan L. Shafer

**Each year, the last full weekend in June is designated as Free Fishing Weekend in New York State.**

During those two days, anyone can fish the freshwaters of New York without a license and the marine and coastal district without enrolling in the Recreational Marine Fishing Registry. Free Fishing weekend allows everyone the opportunity to sample the incredible fishing New York has to offer. Panfish, bass, walleye, pike, salmon, trout, musky, bluefish and summer flounder are just a few of the many fish species that you can fish for during New York's Free Fishing Days. Free Fishing Weekend is the perfect time to introduce a friend or relative to the sport.

[www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)



Department of  
Environmental  
Conservation



Jim Clayton

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