

Lake George | New Green Ways | Wild Backyards

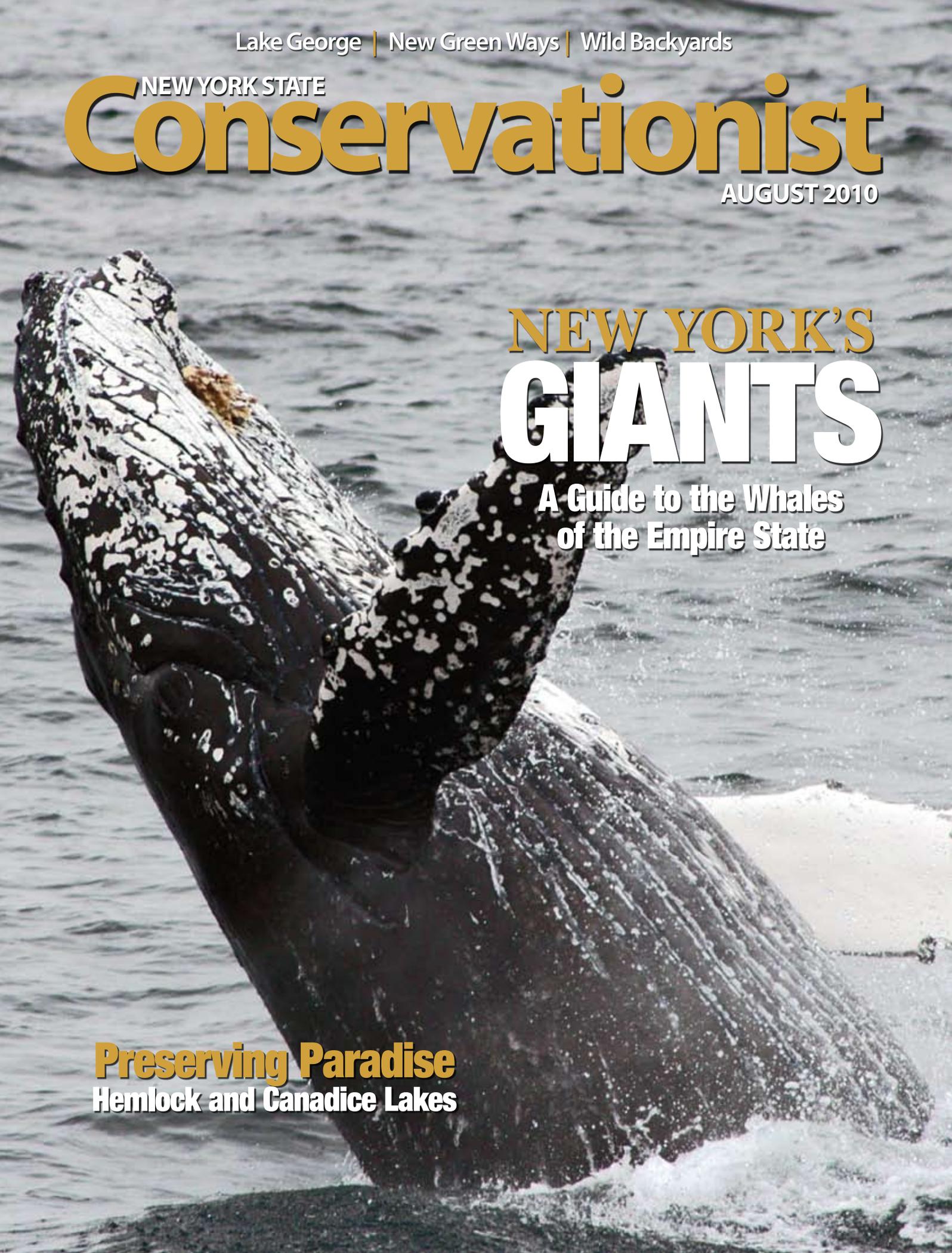
NEW YORK STATE
Conservationist

AUGUST 2010

NEW YORK'S
GIANTS

**A Guide to the Whales
of the Empire State**

Preserving Paradise
Hemlock and Canadice Lakes





Dear Reader,

When I was a kid, my friends and I would spend hours exploring outside. In the summer, we'd set off in the morning and wouldn't be seen again until dinner. I learned a lot of things trudging down trails, scrambling over rocks, stumbling upon snakes, salamanders, snapping turtles and who knows what else.

Boy, have things changed. According to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation report, over the last five years the amount of time American children and teens spend watching TV, playing video games or surfing the Internet has increased by 1 hour 17 minutes to 7 hours 38 minutes every day. That's roughly 53 hours a week spent plugged in and tuned out from nature.

There isn't an online experience that remotely compares to being in nature. Whether it's casting a line in a rushing stream, steering a canoe around a tricky bend or hiking to a quiet swimming hole, getting outside creates indelible memories and a lifetime appreciation for the natural world. Best of all, it's a great way for kids to stay active and healthy.

This summer, I hope you'll make time to get outside with your children or grandchildren. DEC's 52 Adirondack and Catskill campgrounds are a great option. They offer spectacular landscapes and a wide variety of experiences, including island and tent and trailer camping, hiking trails and beaches.

Whether you enjoy camping, hiking, fishing, or just a game of catch or a bike-ride in the park, summer is the perfect time to unplug the electronics and plug in to nature.

Sincerely,

Commissioner Pete Grannis

David Paterson, Governor of New York State

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Carl Heilman II

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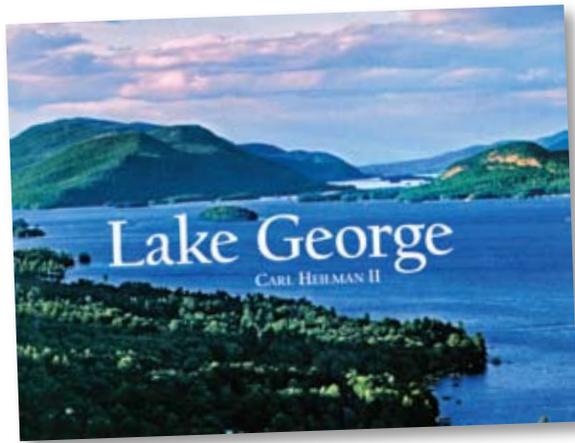
Front cover: Humpback whale breaching by Barbara LaCorte Back cover: Carolina spring beauty by Carl Heilman II



LAKE G



Fireworks over Bolton Landing



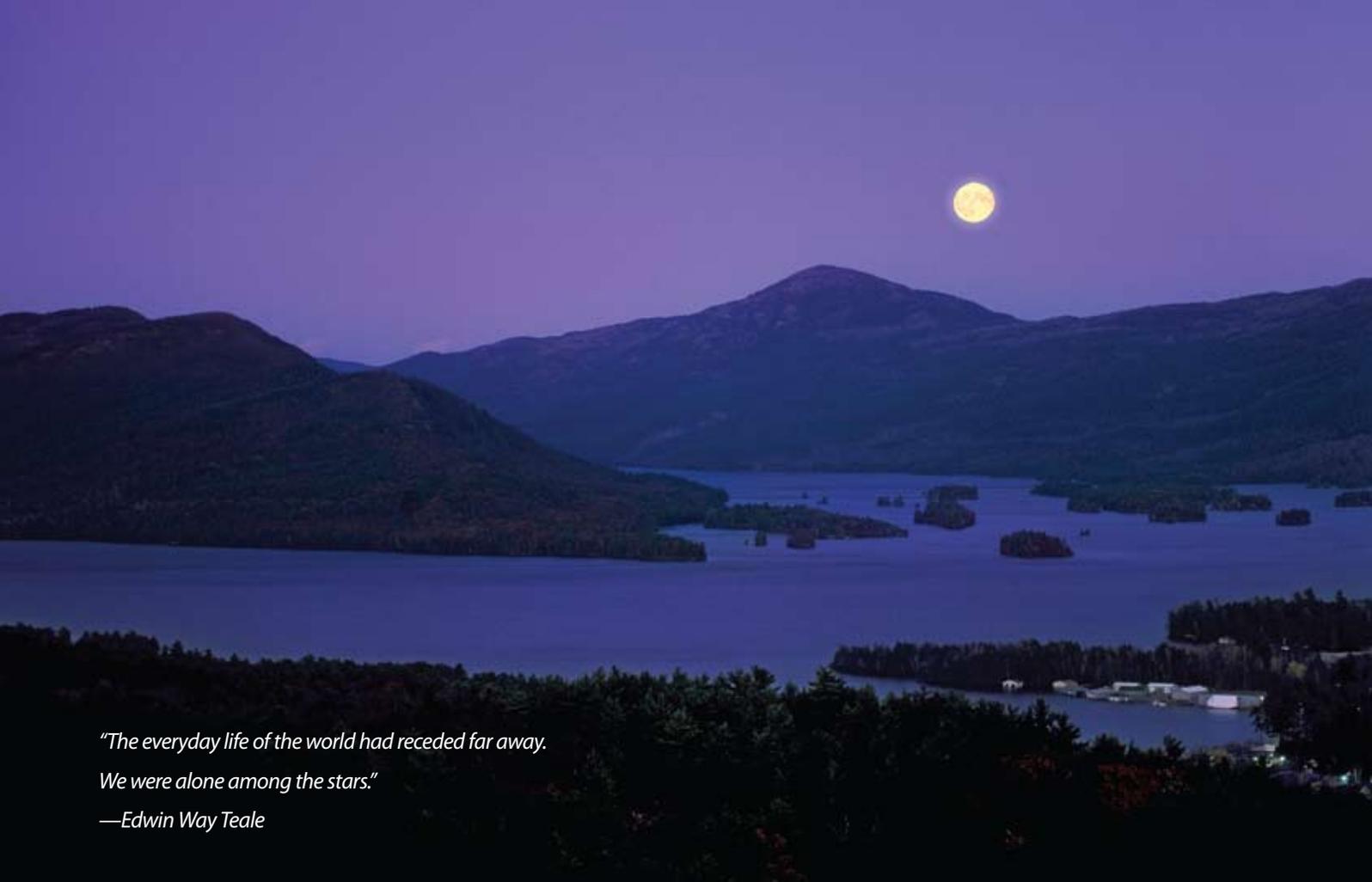
The photos presented here can be found in Carl Heilman's book *Lake George*.



Tour boat Minne-ha-ha

EOERGE

Carl Heilman II



*"The everyday life of the world had receded far away.
We were alone among the stars."
—Edwin Way Teale*



Looking north to Black Mountain from Mingo Island



Full moon rising over Bolton Landing



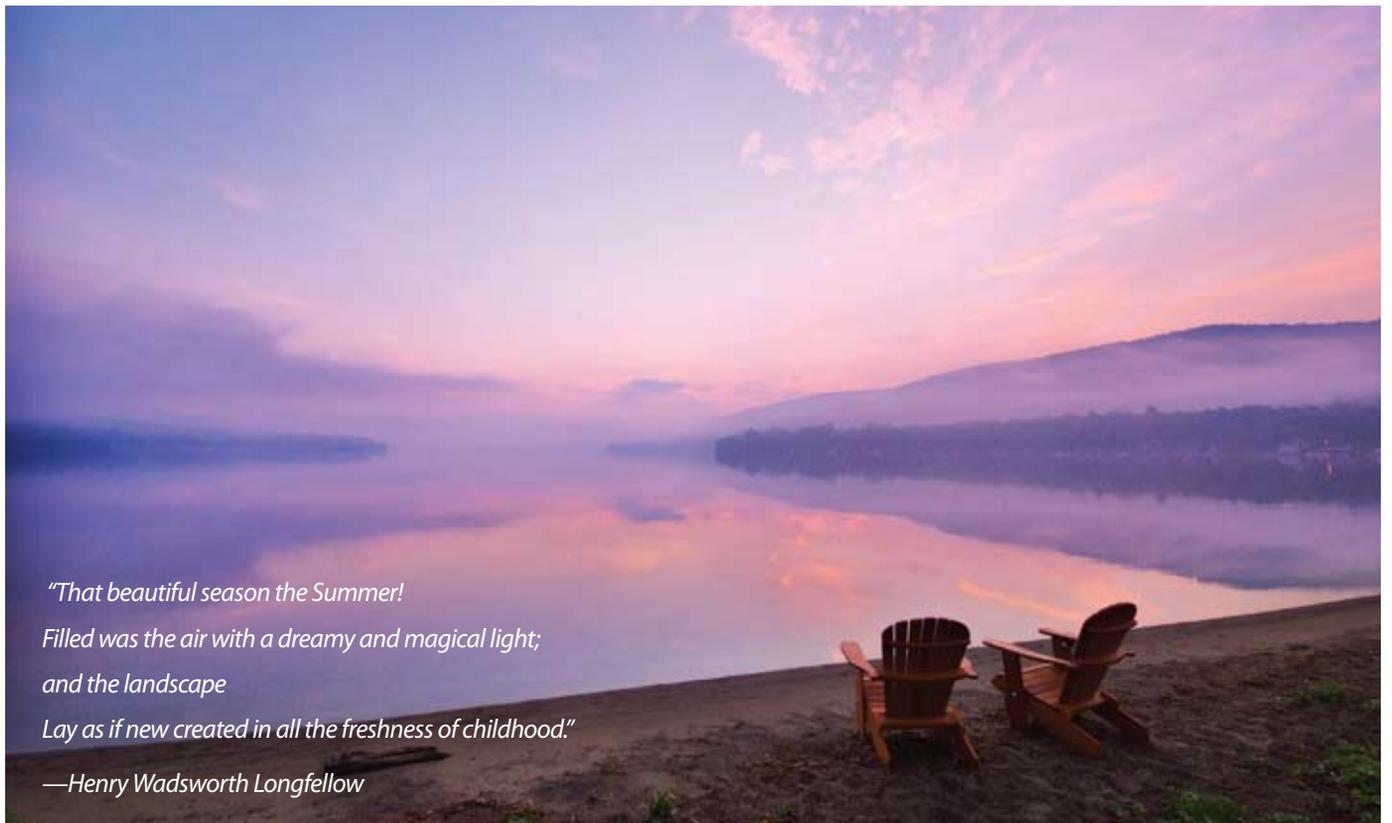
*"Summer afternoon—summer afternoon; to me those have always been
the two most beautiful words in the English language."*

—Henry James

Cliff-jumping at the Calf Pen



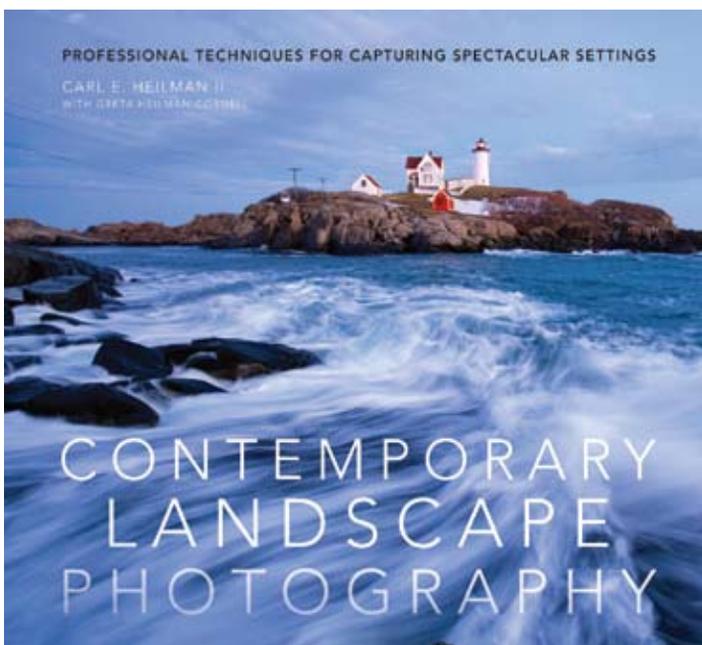
*"To see the Summer Sky
Is Poetry, though never in a Book it lie
True Poems flee."
—Emily Dickinson*



*"That beautiful season the Summer!
Filled was the air with a dreamy and magical light;
and the landscape
Lay as if new created in all the freshness of childhood."
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow*



Looking up Lake George toward the Tongue Mountain Range



Contemporary Landscape Photography is **Carl Heilman's** first instructional photography book. In it, he shares his 35 years of experience with other photographers, expert to beginner, who would like to create stunning landscapes.

With 300 beautiful color photos, this approachable, illustrated guide is a complete course in taking professional photographs in any landscape, natural or urban.

Contemporary Landscape Photography offers extensive information on digital cameras, lenses and working with tools such as the internet and integrating a GPS. The book also covers composition, lighting, creative effects and post-processing techniques.

The book is published by Amphoto Books and is available now at your favorite bookstore.



Turning over a New Leaf

*Municipalities use **green infrastructure** to ease
flooding and pollution.*



Nicole Reed; Groundswell: Field Reports from the Food Revolution
<http://groundswellblog.wordpress.com/>



NYSDEC/Karen Williamson

By Elaine Bloom and Karin Verschoor

It's happened to every camper: you've cleared your schedule, packed all the right equipment, ditched your cell phone, found the perfect campsite. Ahhhh...Paradise!

So, of course it rains. As you wrestle with your dripping tent, you notice that the leaves overhead soften the rainfall to a shower rather than a deluge. You look down: where the ground is compacted from cars and heavy use, the water is forming puddles, but every-

In today's cities and developing suburbs, the ground's surface is largely sealed with impervious surfaces on streets, sidewalks, parking lots and rooftops, keeping water from sinking in. Asphalt and concrete are necessary on busy roadways, but not all paved areas need it. Low-traffic driveways, walkways and overflow parking areas can be converted to strong and attractive surfaces that draw rain into the soil below.

Besides absorbing rain, a rooftop garden bestows other benefits: lower heating and cooling bills, increased fire resistance, and protection from the elements...

where else the rain is soaking gently through the deep layer of dead leaves and into the soil.

Now recall the last time you were caught in the city during a downpour. The driving rain hammered roofs and roads, then, because it couldn't soak through the pavement, it funneled furiously into storm drains, swirling with pet waste, trash and grease washed from the streets. The polluted runoff flooded streets and basements, eventually finding its way to local streams and lakes.

Cities and suburbs have spent billions on "grey infrastructure" like huge concrete holding tanks and underground drains to alleviate these flooding and pollution problems. Now, some communities are turning over a new leaf, using "green infrastructure" to solve an array of urban environmental problems. In the case of storm runoff, the aim is to handle it the way Mother Nature does: with plantings, natural landscaping and materials that allow rainwater and melting snow to filter into the ground and recharge groundwater aquifers.

The Albany Pine Bush Discovery Center, which has a "gold" rating from the U.S. Green Building Council, recently ripped out 750 tons of asphalt from unneeded parking lots and replaced it with native landscape beds. School buses now pull up in front of the Center on a surface of permeable paving blocks. Visitors make their way to the trailhead via a walkway of red brick pavers. These and other types of permeable paving allow water to seep into the ground.

The Center's trails and service roads, which need a firm surface for wheelchairs and trucks, are made of crushed stone mixed with limestone powder, topped with a layer of sand. This provides support for vehicles while remaining porous. Director Michael Venuti reports that the Center's green infrastructure has been very successful in reducing runoff.

It's not just roads and parking lots that contribute to runoff. Conventional rooftops shed water like a duck's back—but not the roof at the Golden

Arrow Lakeside Resort in Lake Placid. Called a “green roof,” it blooms into a riot of lavender, yellow, white and pink in the summer. Roofs like this one are sponging up rain across the state: from a prison outside of Syracuse to a 6,000-square-foot commercial vegetable farm atop a Brooklyn warehouse.

The rooftop vegetation and soil capture rainwater, reducing the amount of runoff flowing from the roof. The typical green roof consists of a waterproof covering to protect the building and roof structure, followed by an absorbent material to hold water, and then topped with a layer of soil. Plants selected for a green roof need to be able to tolerate harsh rooftop conditions and shallow rooting depths.

The Golden Arrow chose hens-and-chicks, coral carpet, and herbs used in the hotel’s restaurant: chives, mints and basil. “It goes along with our whole philosophy of living sustainably and gently,” said Jenn Holderied, one of the hotel’s owners. The resort—the only one in the U.S. to have earned the Audubon Society’s “Five Leaf” environmental status—boasts a long list of green programs, starting with the roof and ending with a carpool incentive program for employees.

Besides absorbing rain, a rooftop garden offers other benefits: lower heating and cooling bills, increased fire resistance, and protection from the elements, which can extend the life of a roof up to 20 years. For Holderied, there’s another benefit that can’t be calculated in dollars: the educational value of this community conversation piece. “It’s opened up a dialogue with guests and neighbors about finding a balance between comfort and sustainability.”

Ground-level gardens are soaking up storm water and generating a buzz, too. At the Albany Shaker National Historic Site in the town of Colonie, what looks like an ordinary ornamental garden nestled in a shallow dip actually filters and absorbs runoff from nearby rooftops and a parking lot.

The runoff flows downslope into the garden, where it temporarily ponds—some of it seeping through mulch into the soil and a layer of gravel. The rest is taken up by the garden’s native plants, eventually released through their leaves, and evaporates into the atmosphere. The garden is one of five installed by Albany County and its partners: Cooperative Extension Master Gardeners, the county Conservation District, the Stormwater Coalition of Albany County, and the city of Albany. “A lot of visitors are curious about our ‘rain garden,’” said Starlyn D’Angelo, the site’s director. “It’s an opportunity to talk about land use and a ‘green’ lifestyle, which is wonderfully in keeping with Shaker philosophy.”

It was the same way downstate when the Bronx River Alliance received part of the settlement from a pollution case to conduct a green infrastructure project. Volunteers, staff and other organizations joined in when the Alliance chose “rain-water harvesting systems”—a fancy name that includes rain barrels and cisterns.

The Alliance team installed rain barrels with a combined capacity of nearly

Photo courtesy of Bronx River Alliance



Rain barrels, like the one being installed here, are a great way to collect rain for later use.

1,500 gallons throughout the Bronx River watershed, on sites that include a public housing site, community centers and a private residence. The systems collect and hold the rain that falls on rooftops, preventing it from adding to the torrent rushing into sewers during a storm. Most of the water is then used

Susan Shafer



The green roof at the Golden Arrow Lakeside Resort in Lake Placid absorbs rain and reduces energy costs.

Going Green to Protect Onondaga Lake

Onondaga County Executive Joanne M. Mahoney has launched an innovative green infrastructure program to protect Onondaga Lake and its tributaries that engages the community through education, grants, and new design standards for building projects from homes to highways.

Instead of building several expensive, large-capacity wastewater treatment plants, the county is developing a new storm water management system that relies on vegetated roadside basins, green roofs, tree plantings and rain gardens to infiltrate and clean polluted runoff from roads and sewer overflows. These new techniques will not only absorb and process storm water in ways that mimic nature, but will also beautify and revitalize neighborhoods throughout the City of Syracuse.

Onondaga County's nationally recognized initiative grew out of an extraordinary partnership between DEC, Onondaga County, the City of Syracuse and the Onondaga Indian Nation. As part of this effort, the County has developed "Save the Rain," a unique community-wide campaign to employ natural solutions to capturing rainfall. The campaign uses a website (www.ongov.net/savetherain), traditional media and neighborhood outreach to promote the use of rain barrels, roof-gutter collection cisterns, reforestation and vegetation planting in



Photo courtesy of SUNY-ESF

Green roof on Walter Hall at the SUNY ESF campus in Syracuse.

home and business properties. For example, one program for property owners offers free rain barrels to those who attend community workshops to learn about green improvements for homes.

The county is also working with the City of Syracuse and other partners to incorporate green technologies in a variety of projects improving streetscapes, parking lots, sidewalks, and building roof tops to capture more storm water and improve the water quality of Onondaga Lake and its tributaries. This year the county established a green infrastructure fund to provide financial assistance to businesses and not-for-profit agencies to encourage them to incorporate green infrastructure on their properties.

"All the residents of Onondaga County can be proud that we have changed the course of the Onondaga

Lake cleanup," said County Executive Mahoney, "and now have a tremendous opportunity to combine lake protection with neighborhood restoration—a great solution for our community."



www.ongov.net/savetherain



Photo courtesy of NRCES

A rain garden can help absorb rainwater that would otherwise run into storm drains.

to irrigate gardens on the sites, reducing the demand on the city water supply and lowering water bills.

The public is intrigued with the rain barrels, reports the Alliance's executive director, Linda Cox. One of the Alliance's goals for the project is to "prime the pump," as Cox likes to say, sharing the concept and simple technology with others. In the heavily developed Bronx, a few rain barrels don't make that much difference, but Cox envisions an eventual neighborhood full of rain barrels and other green infrastructure. It will take a community-wide effort and incentives for property owners to install rain barrels, rain gardens, and other innovative ways to capture runoff before it goes to waste down the drain, she says.

Far to the north and west, the city of Syracuse is becoming a center for green infrastructure research and development (see page 11). The impetus is Onondaga Lake, a 3,000-acre waterbody just outside the city limits. Once known as the most polluted lake in the nation, the city has made tremendous progress addressing both toxic waste beds in the lake and polluted overflows from the city's combined storm and wastewater systems. Green infrastructure is an important part of the community's solution.

The city is using a DEC urban forestry grant to plant more trees and train professionals to install green infrastructure. The city also boasts multiple examples of all varieties of green infrastructure, as does the campus of the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry. The college offers an extensive curriculum on green infrastructure.

Experts caution that these human-built slices of nature work best in conjunction with the real deal: natural green infrastructure. So, right alongside the effort to imitate nature, proponents push for development that preserves existing forests, wetlands, parks and streamside greenbelts within our communities.

Green infrastructure is taking root across New York State. The payoff will be better flood control, plentiful groundwater, cleaner water and air, and cooler urban settings. Can we have it all? Green infrastructure advocates say yes. All we have to do—to co-opt a classic Joni Mitchell song—is unpave paradise and "green up" the parking lot.

Elaine Bloom is a contributing editor to *Conservationist*. **Karin Verschoor** works for DEC's Division of Lands and Forests.



Greening Your Home

Since many green solutions are comparatively low-tech and inexpensive, you can have the satisfaction of making your own individual contribution to green infrastructure in your community.

- **Catch that rain and use it to water your garden!** Rain barrels are widely available and easy to hook up.

- **Stop the runoff!** Many attractive porous pavement alternatives work as well as conventional pavement on home driveways and walks, yet let rainwater soak gently into the ground instead of flooding off the surface.

- **Green your home with plants!** Shading walls with a vine-covered trellis keeps buildings cool and adds beauty. Use wall trellises for climbing vegetables, or try modular green wall panels for salad greens. For a green roof, consult a licensed engineer or architect.

- **Send that rain underground!** Instead of letting the water run into the storm drain, divert it to a low area so it can slowly sink into the soil. Build a rain garden underlain by gravel to rapidly absorb water, and plant moisture loving plants that take up water quickly. Or, direct your downspout to a mini-rain garden in a planter. Placing it on the lawn or soil will ensure any water not taken up by the plants is absorbed into the ground.

For more information about green infrastructure explore DEC's website at

www.dec.ny.gov





Milkweed

(Asclepias syriaca)

By Barbara Nuffer

Barbara Nuffer

Next to the dandelion, few plants engender as much childhood enthusiasm as the milkweed. The features that draw kids' attention to the ordinary-looking milkweed plant are the silky seeds that take flight on the wind when the seed pods split open in the fall.

North America is home to more than 100 species in this family, known for having "milky" sap in all parts. Common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*) plants grace fields and roadsides across New York State.

Monarch butterfly larvae (caterpillars) feed exclusively on milkweed. The ingested milkweed contains cardiac glycosides. These compounds concentrate in the wings and exoskeletons of the emerging Monarch butterflies, making them not only distasteful but potentially toxic to most predators. It is a very successful survival strategy for the monarchs!

Milkweed's purple-pink flower clusters droop downwards and have a strong fragrance. Native Americans used milkweed flowers to make a sweet jam, and after careful preparation, they ate the young shoots. The inner bark of the plant and the silk from the seed pods

were used to make fiber and cordage. The milkweed genus was named after Asclepius, the Greek god of healing. A tea, prepared from the root, was once used to treat respiratory ailments and

Native Americans used milkweed flowers to make a sweet jam, and after careful preparation, they ate the young shoots.

kidney stones. And while compounds found in the sap may cause skin irritation, it was also used to treat warts and poison ivy.

The flowers are fertilized by many different nectar-gathering insects. However, they may pay a high price for gathering this sweet prize as a potentially lethal trap is hidden deep within the flower. The flower's complex structure features upward facing hoods. Y-shaped pollen sacs, located at the bottom of the flower hoods, can trap smaller insects. Some insects even sacrifice a leg to free themselves.

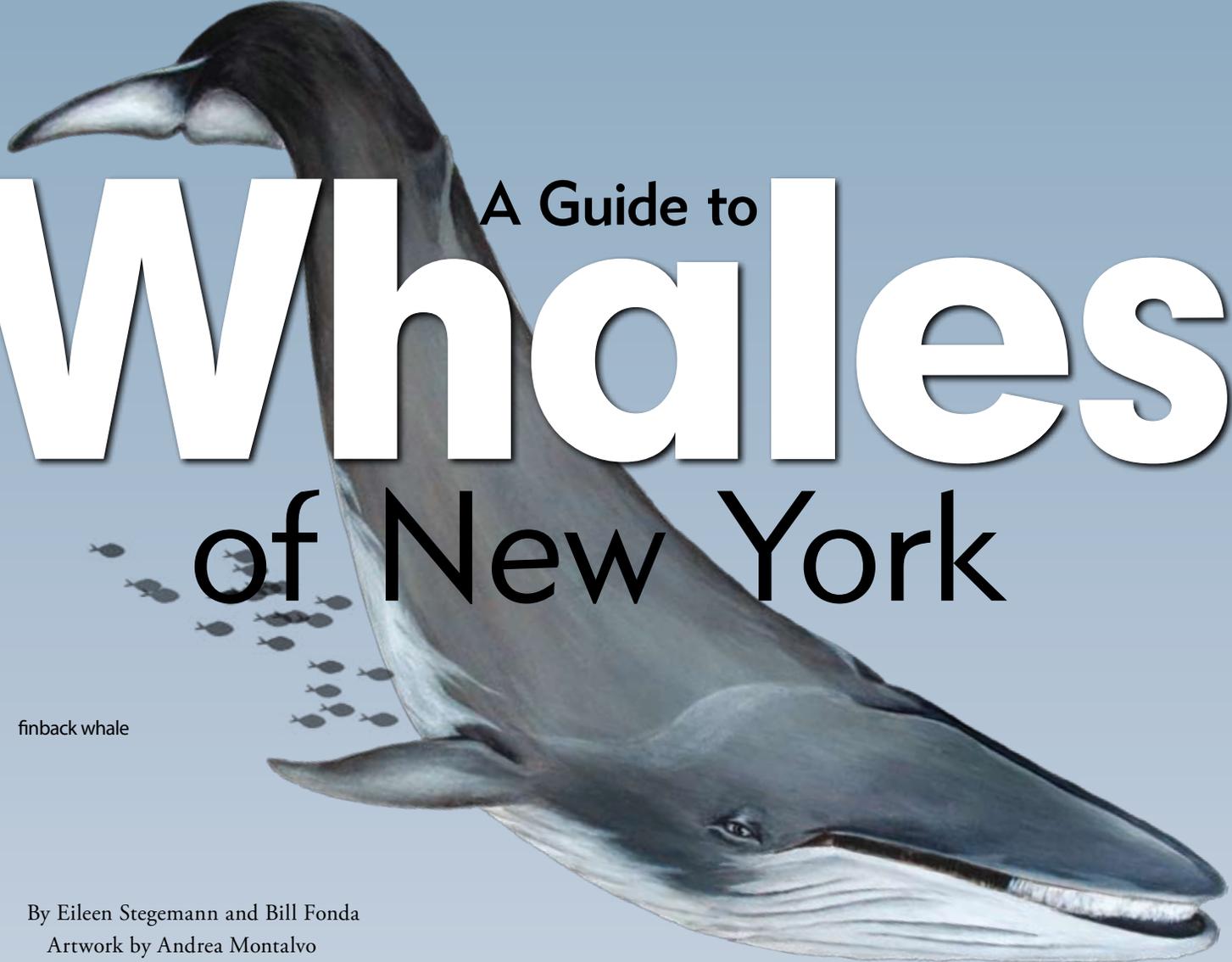
During World War II, the shortage of natural rubber resulted in unsuccessful experiments to turn milkweed's latex into a rubber-like substitute. The U.S. government also encouraged children to collect milkweed pods and used the lightweight, buoyant floss to stuff life vests and flight suits.

You can enjoy milkweed plants in three seasons: search for monarch caterpillars feeding on the foliage in the spring; smell the sweet scent of the lavender flowers in the summer; and admire the golden-colored pods and silky parachutes carrying seeds on the crisp winds of autumn.

Barbara Nuffer works for DEC's Division of Air Resources in Albany.



Barbara Nuffer



A Guide to Whales of New York

finback whale

By Eileen Stegemann and Bill Fonda
Artwork by Andrea Montalvo

Huge, elusive and highly intelligent, whales are fascinating and mysterious creatures. Anyone who's ever watched a whale on the open ocean can't help but be drawn in by the sheer power and inquisitive nature of these magnificent beasts. As they surface nearby, shooting a water spout into the air, or waving their flipper or slapping their tail, you find yourself mesmerized by these mysterious and seemingly gentle giants of the sea. And surprisingly, a number of whale species can be spotted off New York.

Belonging to the group of mammals called cetaceans—which also include dolphins and porpoises—whales are separated into two groups: toothed and baleen. As the name implies, toothed whales have teeth which they use to catch their slippery marine prey.

Toothed whales also have a single blow hole. Dolphins, porpoises, killer whales and sperm whales are all members of this group.

Most of the whales that visit New York's waters are baleen whales. They are generally larger than toothed whales and have two blowholes. Rather than teeth, they have large plates of keratin that act as a giant sieve or strainer. To feed, they take in a mouthful of sea water that contains huge numbers of small food—krill, plankton and small fish—and then use their tongue to push out all of the water through the baleen, trapping the food inside.

While not an exhaustive list, here is detailed information on a number of whale species found off New York's waters.

Finback Whale

(Balaenoptera physalus)

Finbacks, or fin whales, live in all the world's oceans, but prefer those of higher latitudes and cold currents. They are some of the largest baleen whales to visit New York's waters (second only to blues), and can reach approximately 70 feet in length and weigh up to 70 tons. Finbacks can be recognized by their rather pointed head, prominent back and pronounced dorsal fin. They eat large numbers of krill and small fish. Along with blues, finbacks have the deepest voices on earth.

Finbacks are some of the fastest of the large whales, capable of swimming 35 mph for a short time. In autumn, they migrate several thousand miles to equatorial waters. During winter, they fast almost completely, living off their fat reserves.

Mating takes place during winter, and calves are born a year later, usually between December and April. Newborn calves are 20 feet long.

Finbacks have suffered from decades of hunting. The pre-hunting population has been estimated at 30,000-50,000 in the North Atlantic Ocean. By 1977, those numbers had dropped to only 7,200 in the waters off Newfoundland and Nova Scotia. Along with humpbacks, fin whales are commonly seen on whale watches.

Minke Whale

(Balaenoptera acutorostrata)

(see photo below; not pictured on pages 16 and 17)

Minkes are the smallest baleen whales in North American waters. They have sleek, streamlined bodies that average 30 feet long and weigh approximately 10 tons. Their narrow, triangular upper jaw, and fairly prominent dorsal fin are good identifying features. Outside of the Antarctic, minkes have a noticeable white band on their flippers.

Minke whales live in all the world's oceans, but seem to prefer icy waters. They are generally solitary animals, traveling individually or in small groups. However, they form groups of up to 400 at some of the productive feeding grounds in higher latitudes. Krill, small schooling fish, and to a lesser extent, plankton, make up the bulk of their diet, which they eat by side-lunging or gulping large amounts of water. Minkes breed during the summer months in the northern hemisphere. Calves measure 10 feet at birth and weigh half a ton.

Because of their smaller size, minkes were not hunted regularly until the world stocks of larger whale species became depleted. Since the late 1960s and 1970s, several countries that still whale have turned their focus on minkes. Scientists are studying the effect of this harvest on the population. Currently, minke whales are the most abundant baleen whale in the world; their population is believed to be more than a million animals. Despite this, people rarely see minkes because they spend relatively little time at the surface, and their blow is barely visible.

Sei Whale

(Balaenoptera borealis)

Sei whales are found in the Atlantic, Indian and Pacific Oceans. They resemble blue and finback whales, but have a smaller, more curved dorsal fin. Adult seis commonly reach 30-50 feet in length and 40 tons in weight. Light-colored patches on the upper body are indicative of Pacific and Antarctic populations of seis, whereas the upper bodies of Atlantic seis are more evenly dark.

Sei whales usually travel alone or in small groups. They are thought to be the fastest of the large baleen whales, cruising at 16 mph, but able to go up to 40 mph for a short distance. They feed while swimming in the open ocean, scooping up plankton—their preferred food—as well as krill, shrimp and small fish.

Biologists believe that mating takes place during the winter. Calves are born the following winter and average 15 feet long and weigh half a ton. They are weaned after only 4-6 months.

Historic whaling took its toll on the sei population. In 1982, the Cetacean and

minke whale





Turtle Assessment Program estimated that only a few thousand sei whales were left in U.S. Atlantic waters.

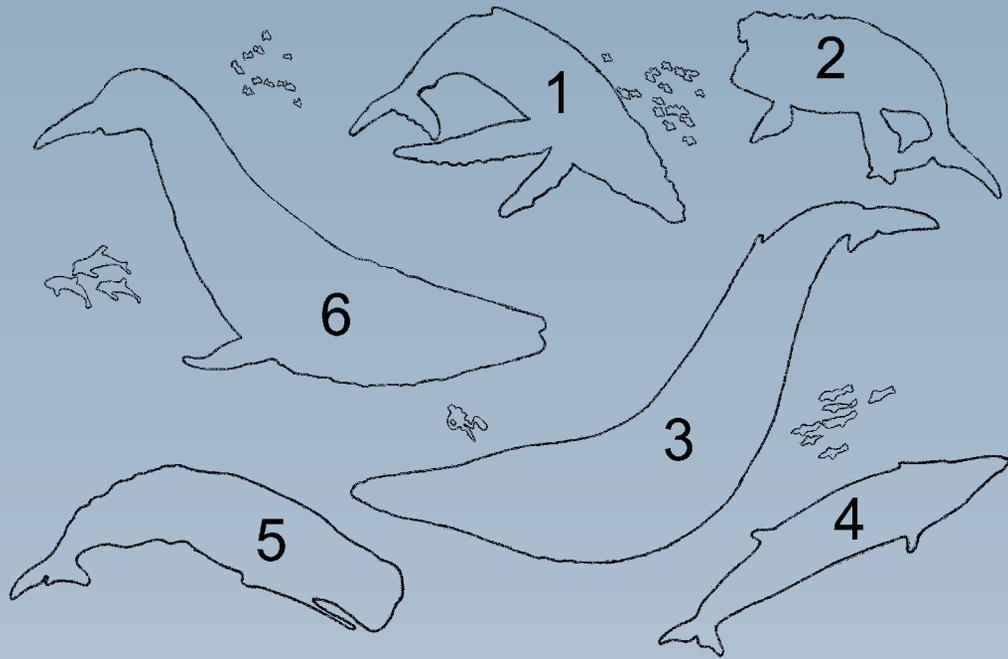
Humpback Whale

(Megaptera novaeangliae)

A favorite of whale-watching groups, humpbacks often entertain people with their acrobatic antics, including breaching, tail slapping and waving the flippers. They are known for their complex courtship songs, which can last up to 40 minutes. Their name derives from their appearance immediately before taking a deep dive.

Humpbacks are large baleen whales, reaching 30-60 feet in length, and weighing 30-40 tons. They have chunky bodies, very long white flippers, and knob-like bumps (each having one stiff hair) on their head and snout. Although they are uncommon in the Arctic, they are found in all the world's oceans. During the summer, humpbacks migrate to higher latitudes to feed. Humpbacks work as a group to capture large schools of herring. Called bubble-net or lunge feeding, some whales blow bubbles around the herring to keep them together, while others vocalize and/or herd the fish to the surface where all the whales then lunge upwards and gulp as many herring as they can.

From January through March, humpbacks in the Atlantic spend their time on breeding grounds in the West Indies. Calves are born a year after breeding and



- 1—Humpback whale
- 2—Right whale
- 3—Blue whale
- 4—Sei whale
- 5—Sperm whale
- 6—Fin whale

Note the comparative size of these whales to the scuba diver (center), dolphins (left) and various schools of fish.

measure 15 feet long. Come spring, they follow their mothers up to the northern feeding areas. They will nurse for a year.

Humpbacks are among the most endangered of the large whales, and population estimates indicate that only about 2,000-4,000 individuals remain in the western North Atlantic. Despite this, humpbacks are one of the most commonly seen on whale watches in New York.

North Atlantic Right Whale

(Eubalaena glacialis)

The world's most endangered large whale, the North Atlantic right whale is rarely seen. Its population is estimated to only number approximately 600, which is a far less stable number than the populations of the closely related North Pacific and South Atlantic right whales.

North Atlantic right whales reach approximately 50 feet in length and up to 70 tons in weight. A distinguishing trait among the three kinds of right whales is their unique appearance. They have very large heads with prominent wart-like growths called callosities. Their strongly arching mouths house huge baleen plates—up to seven feet in length—which they use to strain plankton. Unlike other baleen whales, the two blowholes on right whales are widely separated, causing their spouts to be seen as two distinct sprays. Right whales have an unusual habit of holding their flukes above the water to catch the wind and sail along.

Much of the North Atlantic right whale population spends the spring and summer off the coast of New England. They travel



right whale



Did You Know?

- **Whales are the world's largest mammals.** They are warm-blooded, have body hair, give birth to live young and nurse their young with milk. Like all mammals, they breathe air, coming up to the water's surface at regular intervals to take a breath via the blowholes located on the top of their heads.

- **When breathing, whales remain mostly submerged and simply expel excess water from the blowhole before inhaling air into the lungs.** Since the shape of the water spout formed from the exhale differs among species, it can help identify the species of whale.

- **Whales have large flippers and enormous tails called flukes.** They use their flukes to propel their bodies through the water. Other than the tail vertebrae, the flukes do not contain bones, but are made up of muscles and dense fibrous tissue.

- **Whales communicate with each other via sound.** Some, like the humpback, use melodic sounds called songs. These can be extremely loud, and heard for miles. Other species, such as the sperm whale, only make clicks.

- **No one knows for sure how long whales live, but lifespans vary with species.** Humpbacks are thought to live as long as 75 years.

- **Large-scale whaling practiced during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries caused most species of large whales to be endangered.** Of New York's whales, all but the minke are state and federally endangered.



south to warmer climates in the winter and calves are generally born between December and March, averaging 15 feet long and nursing for approximately 9 months.

A favorite of whalers, and so named as the "right" whale to catch for their oil and baleen, populations were decimated by the 18th century. Right whales have been protected by the International Whaling Commission since the early 1930s, and the South Atlantic population has shown signs of a slow recovery. The North Atlantic and North Pacific populations, however, have not significantly recovered. Primary threats include collision with and disturbance by ships, habitat degradation, and entanglement in fishing gear. There are currently recovery plans in effect for North Atlantic right whales and North Pacific right whales.

Blue Whale

(Balaenoptera musculus)

Blue whales are the largest animals in the world. They can reach 100 feet in length and weigh 150 tons, although most adults average 70 feet long and weigh 100 tons; the tongue alone weighs approximately 2 tons.

Blues are found in open oceans from the icy waters of the extreme Southern Hemisphere to the Aleutian Islands in the north. Baleen whales, they remain

in polar waters during summer to feed on the abundance of krill found there. Come winter, blues will migrate several thousand miles to tropical and subtropical areas to breed and give birth. During this time, they do not eat. Newborn calves measure 25 feet long, weigh approximately 2 tons, and require more than 100 gallons of milk every day.

Blues get their name from the mottled blue-gray color of their upper bodies. When they come to the surface to breathe, they can shoot water up to 20 feet in the air. Along with finbacks, blues have the deepest voices on earth.

Blue whales are some of the world's most endangered whales. Once estimated to number 300,000 worldwide, hunting brought their numbers to a record low of approximately 1,000 in the mid-1900s. Hunting ceased in 1967, and stocks in the Southern Hemisphere and North Pacific are currently recovering. Today, there are an estimated 15,000 blue whales swimming in our oceans.

Sperm Whale

(Physeter catodon)

One of the most well-known whale species, sperm whales are the largest of the toothed whales. They are dark blue to slate gray, though lighter underneath. Their most distinctive feature is their large, blunt heads, which contains

blue whale

Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies

Keep Your Distance

To minimize human disturbance, don't approach whales too closely. The federal government maintains whale watch approach guidelines and laws regarding approaching right whales (www.nero.noaa.gov/prot_res/mmv/regs.html). Entanglements are of great concern for all whale species, and all mariners are urged to report entanglement sightings immediately to 1-800-900-3622 or 1-866-755-NOAA.

Scott Landry, Marine Animal Entanglement Response, Provincetown Center for Coastal Studies

Eileen Stegemann is the *Conservationist's* assistant editor, and **Bill Fonda** is a citizen participation specialist in DEC's Stony Brook office.

Andrea Montalvo received her undergraduate degree in Studio Art and minored in Biology at SUNY at Stony Brook, where she also received her Masters. Andrea currently teaches AP Biology, Honors Biology and Forensics at West Babylon High School.

spermaceti, a substance once used for ointments and candles. Instead of a dorsal fin, sperm whales have a large hump with a series of bumps behind it. Male sperm whales can grow to 70 feet and weigh as much as 59 tons, and females up to 38 feet and 15 tons.

Sperm whales travel in harems consisting of a bull male and several adult females and their young. In early spring, male sperm whales compete with each other for control of a group of mature females. The successful male mates with these females, and after a 15-month gestation period, calves are born, measuring 12 to 14 feet at birth. The young nurse for about two years. Females reproduce only once every four years.

Squid is a sperm whale's primary food source, but it will also eat other fish and octopi. The whales are found in all the world's oceans except the Arctic region, and tend to prefer deep waters, staying along the edge of continental shelves. An estimated one million sperm whales were killed in the past two centuries. Today hunting is no longer a threat to the species and current studies reveal between 20,000 and 100,000 sperm whales remain.

For more information on all whale species, visit DEC's website, or www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/mammals.

Denis Glennon

Whale Watching Off Long Island



If you want to see whales in the wild, take a whale watching tour. A number of organizations run tours off Long Island, including:

Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island at Dowling College

150 Idle Hour Blvd.
Oakdale, NY 11769-1999
www.cresli.org

Viking Fleet

462 West Lake Drive, Montauk, NY 11954
(631) 668-5700
www.vikingfleet.com

Riverhead Foundation for Marine Research and Preservation

428 East Main Street, Riverhead, NY 11901
Phone: 631-369-9840
www.riverheadfoundation.org

Whale Sighting Program

One of New York's leading organizations in the protection of marine mammals and sea turtles is the Riverhead Foundation for Marine Research and Preservation (RFMRP).

In 1980, The New York State Marine Mammal and Sea Turtle Rescue Program was established to respond to any whale, porpoise, dolphin, seal or sea turtle stranding on the beaches and in estuarine waters of New York State. Operated by the RFMRP, the program has handled over 4,000 animals. In addition to assisting distressed animals, the foundation also monitors the presence and distribution of marine mammals and sea turtles in New York's nearshore waters. This information is used to guide important management decisions and to prioritize conservation efforts.

Funding for the foundation's rescue program comes from the New York State Return a Gift to Wildlife Program (a state income tax check-off program), from private donations, and from federal grants.

In conjunction with the Northeast Fisheries Science Center, the foundation received federal funds in 2005 to perform aerial surveys of the New York Bight, an area at the mouth of the Hudson River between Long Island and New Jersey. During this project, approximately 190 hours of flight time were spent surveying nearly 30,000 nautical miles. Scientists observed 94 whales during this survey, including 1 North Atlantic right whale, 38 fin whales, 26 minke whales, 24 humpback whales, 3 sperm whales, and 2 sei whales.

RFMRP maintains a 24-hour hotline for reporting sick or injured marine mammals or sea turtles, (631) 369-9829. Individuals spotting healthy animals can call the dedicated sighting line number, (631) 369-9840 ext. 15, or e-mail RFMRP at: **sightings@riverheadfoundation.org**. Since the aerial project ended in 2005, six sightings of North Atlantic right whales within one mile of New York's shorelines have been confirmed through these media.

More information on RFMRP is available at **www.riverheadfoundation.org**

Backyard Biology

By Dave Nelson



Susan Shafer



Bill Banaszewski



Susan Shafer

The young boy's week always ended on a high note. Schoolwork completed, Sunday night meant it was time to watch Mutual of Omaha's *Wild Kingdom*. Village life presented the lad many opportunities, but arctic expeditions in search of caribou, wrestling man-eating pythons and darting elephants from an open Land Rover weren't among them.

Once, a din of cawing crows caught his attention. Picking slowly, carefully through the tangled mat of tree roots that served as jungle, he craned his neck to peer up the trunk of a tall willow tree. High up in the tree, hunched against its trunk for protection, stood a beautiful, blinking great horned owl. Stunned as much by the bright daylight as by the

state where you can see wildlife, descriptions of popular wildlife species, and a listing of wildlife watching events by calendar month. You'll also get quick tips on how better to see and photograph wildlife, and what to do to avoid disturbing them. You can also subscribe to an electronic newsletter which will give you periodic updates on watchable wildlife events.

...every overturned rock exposed a hidden treasure trove of tiny critters to examine.

With rapt attention, he soaked up information about nature like a black hole consumes electrons.

And then there was the creek.

The creek. A cool, verdant oasis to which a young boy could escape, and once there, create his own safari. A safari in which piranhas were replaced by stoneys and chubs, pythons were foot-long garter snakes, and every overturned rock exposed a hidden treasure trove of tiny critters to examine. Out the back door, across the backyard, and down the ladder; he was transported from suburban lad to nature nerd.

raucous harassment it was receiving from the crows, the owl peered down at the boy below. It was the first owl the boy had ever seen in the wild, and one he would never forget...

But you needn't be a kid living on a creek to watch wildlife. You can experience nature in your own backyard, or at a site known for its wildlife viewing opportunities.

Not sure where to start? Visit DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov and click on the watchable wildlife button. There you'll find quick links to locations around the

Whether you'd rather watch spawning walleye in Conesus Inlet, view the spectacle of 85,000 Canada geese stopping over at Montezuma Refuge on their northward migration, or see a grazing white-tailed deer in a summer meadow, New York is blessed with a plethora of places to see wildlife, and plentiful wildlife to watch. Whatever piques your nature interest, you can find it in New York. The *Conservationist* and DEC's watchable wildlife web pages stand ready to help.

Watchable Wildlife

www.dec.ny.gov

On Patrol

Real stories from Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers in the field

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

Carl Heilman II

Lucky Dolphin—Richmond County

In early May, the Riverhead Foundation contacted ECOs Gregory Maneeley and Matthew Krug with information that an injured dolphin



had stranded on the shore of Staten Island. After a short search of Ocean Breeze Pier, the ECOs found the injured dolphin in the rocks alongside a bulkhead. The officers contacted the Riverhead Foundation and requested the foundation commence a rescue operation. ECOs Maneeley and Krug secured the area and kept onlookers

away so the dolphin wouldn't become agitated and further injure itself. The ECOs assisted the foundation's staff in loading the dolphin onto a stretcher and carrying it across the beach. There, it was secured in a truck and transported to the Riverhead Foundation for treatment. The dolphin made a full recovery and was released into the ocean a few days later.

Runaway Boat—Nassau County

ECOs Erik Dalecki and Christopher Lagree were on boat patrol at the Jones Beach Air Show near Zach's Bay when they were informed that two elderly men had fallen out of their boat. To make matters worse, the people still onboard were unable to operate the vessel, which had begun to crash into other boats anchored in the bay. The ECOs quickly responded and rescued the two elderly men as they struggled to stay afloat. The officers then located the runaway vessel and Dalecki pulled alongside it while Lagree jumped in and got it under control. Amazingly, no one was seriously injured and the two elderly men were safely returned to their boat and sent on their way.

Loose Lips—Genesee County

Recently, a caller contacted ECO Brian Wade asking when people could start fishing on opening day. Wade advised the caller he could start fishing immediately after midnight on April 1st, which was that night. The caller then provided a tip that on opening day several people take more than the limit of trout at a small stocked stream. Wade

contacted the local ECO, Richard Rauscher, and that night the two ECOs patrolled the location in question. There, the officers watched several men fishing before midnight, and noticed one subject leave in a truck and return minutes later. When the ECOs confronted the party, the men told conflicting stories about their fish take. A ten-year-old boy indicated one man went home with several trout and returned. The man confessed when the officers revealed they saw him. ECO Wade recognized the man's voice and the man admitted he was the tipster who had called earlier. The man said he never thought the officers would be out at night when they had to be up for opening day. In all, four people were charged with taking more than the limit of trout and fishing for trout out of season.

Cooperative Rescue—Warren County

On April 15, Chestertown State Police contacted ECOs, looking for K-9 assistance in locating a missing 97-year-old man. ECO delaRosa notified Ray Brook dispatch of the request and asked forest rangers to assist. The ECO and Rangers Ovitt and Kabrehl responded to Rte. 9 where the subject was last seen, a mile or so from his residence. Ranger Ovitt located a fresh track in the sand along the shoulder of the road. At several points, the track changed direction, as if the person was wandering without purpose. Eventually Ranger Ovitt followed the track up an old logging road, but was unable to follow it across the grass and moss. ECO delaRosa's K-9 then took over and located the subject at approximately 3:45 a.m. The elderly man was barely responsive and not adequately dressed for the weather. He was evacuated from the woods and transported to Glens Falls Hospital.

ASK THE ECO

Q: Is a license now required to fish in New York's marine waters?

A: Yes. As of October 1, 2009, all anglers 16 years of age or older who wish to fish in the marine and coastal district, or in other state waters for "migratory fish from the sea" (striped bass, American shad, eels, blueback herring, alewife, etc.), must have a recreational marine fishing license. The marine and coastal district includes all waters of the Atlantic Ocean within three nautical miles of the coast, as well as all tidal waters within the state, including parts of the Hudson River. For more information on the new marine fishing license, visit www.dec.ny.gov/permits/54950.html.



Jewels of the Finger Lakes

Hemlock and Canadice Lakes are brought under the state's protection.

Your canoe glides gently across the mirrored surface of the tranquil lake. Morning sunlight flickers on the water. Ahead, you can see mile after mile of undeveloped shoreline. An unbroken band of verdant forest extends from the shore up a steep slope, and towering white pines break the canopy. A bald eagle soars in the distance, its call echoing in the silence of a calm summer morning. You're the only person in sight. This may not be an uncommon scene in some parts of New York, but what makes this scene extra special is that you're canoeing on a lake that's fewer than 30 miles from Rochester.

Of New York's 11 Finger Lakes, Hemlock and Canadice are the only two with undeveloped shorelines. And now, because of a broad partnership between state conservation groups and local communities, these two Finger Lakes are permanently protected by the State of New York.

The story of Hemlock and Canadice Lakes is an interesting bit of western New York history indeed. Rochester once obtained its drinking water from cisterns and wells. A deadly disease put an end to this practice. In 1832, a cholera outbreak swept through Rochester, following epidemics in Montreal, Quebec, other places

in New York, and throughout Europe. The epidemic hit the city again in 1834 and 1848, but by the latter, residents' views changed from merely trying to battle the disease to eliminating its sources, such as dirty tenement buildings and stagnant pools of water. Better hospital amenities were built and the city was more prepared for an 1852 outbreak. The 26 fatalities which occurred by early August, however, caused further civic action in the areas of water and drainage facility management.

Looking south, city officials identified Hemlock and Canadice Lakes as clean, reliable sources of water that could be



Scott McDonnell

By Jim Howe

delivered to the city by gravity. These pristine waters from Hemlock and Canadice Lakes were tapped, and helped Rochester prosper into one of our state's largest cities. Since 1876, the City of Rochester has used water from the lakes as its primary source of drinking water.

Shortly after the city built its conduit system, Hemlock Lake experienced a boom in cottage and hotel development along its shoreline. In the 1890s, a proposal to build a hotel and summer resort on the lake prompted the city to begin acquiring lakeshore properties to protect its investment in its drinking



Photo courtesy of the City of Rochester

The conduit carrying water to Rochester was installed in 1893.

water supply. “By the 1950s, the city had acquired nearly 7,000 acres of land in the watershed, including the shorelines of both lakes and much of the surrounding forested hillsides,” says Don Root, the city’s watershed conservationist.

In addition to their importance as sources of drinking water, the lakes are also prime fish and wildlife habitat. In the 1970s—when bald eagle populations were critically endangered in the Lower 48—the sole remaining nest in the entire state was located at Hemlock Lake. Today, two pairs of bald eagles nest in the watershed. “That’s a testament to the

quality of the water, the habitat, the lack of human disturbance, and the excellent stewardship by the City of Rochester staff at Hemlock and Canadice Lakes,” says DEC’s Endangered Species Unit leader, Peter Nye.

Hemlock and Canadice Lakes also offer outstanding recreational opportunities for the public. Every year, thousands of people visit the two lakes to fish, mountain bike, canoe, kayak, hike, bird-watch and hunt in a pristine setting. For more than 100 years, the city carefully managed these lands, allowing compatible recreational use. But considering all the economic pressures facing our municipalities today, how could this drinking water source and recreational haven be secured for posterity?

In the mid-1980s, tighter federal water standards forced the City of Rochester to build a water treatment plant at the two lakes. Some feared that, once the plant

was operational, the city might regard its holdings around the two lakes as surplus, given that the treatment plant could remove any impurities caused by development of the lakes’ shorelines or hillsides. In one sense, it was no longer necessary to prevent development of the lands surrounding the lake. Sensing this potential problem, conservation groups assembled and initiated an effort to secure permanent protection for these lands. Over the last 25 years, the State of New York and the conservation community in western New York, including The Nature Conservancy, have been working toward this goal. Under DEC’s leadership, the city and the state have now finalized the deal.

In June of this year, DEC purchased the city’s 7,000 acres around the two lakes, including their shorelines. The department intends to manage these lakes for wildlife habitat and compatible recreation, much the way the city has been

doing for the last century. “There is tremendous public support for keeping these two lakes the way they are...forever,” says DEC Commissioner Pete Grannis.

The city is also grateful to have found a buyer that will continue its legacy. “Without this purchase by the state, I’m not sure we could have continued to hold these lands much longer,” says Rochester Mayor Robert Duffy. “We’re thrilled to work with the State of New York to permanently protect these two Finger Lakes.”

For the last 15 years, The Nature Conservancy has helped facilitate the transaction, keeping officials from both the state and the city at the table through multiple administrations. Over the last few years, the Conservancy has also acquired 1,100 acres of sensitive lands in the Hemlock-Canadice watershed, augmenting the protection of these two Finger Lakes.

The protection of Hemlock and Canadice Lakes illustrates the importance



Bill Banaszewski



of dedicated state funding for conservation of New York's land and water. "Without the state's Environmental Protection Fund, these two lakes might have seen a very different fate," says Commissioner Grannis.

"In my 27 years with DEC, this is the only project that I've worked on that has 100% support from the public, local community leaders, hunters and anglers, elected officials, and environmental groups," says DEC Region 8 Director Paul D'Amato.

Jim Howe is director of The Nature Conservancy's Central and Western New York Chapter, but prefers to spend his time canoeing, fishing, and hiking at Hemlock and Canadice Lakes.

Visit Hemlock and Canadice Lakes!

If you'd like to visit Hemlock and Canadice Lakes, here are some options:

Hiking—The City of Rochester established a network of trails that DEC manages today. One of my favorites is a four-mile trail along the western shore of Canadice Lake. In 2008, The Nature Conservancy developed another trail, Rob's Trail, which enables hikers to begin at Bald Hill—the ridge between Hemlock and Canadice Lakes—and hike down to Canadice Lake.

Fishing—The lakes abound with lake, brown, and rainbow trout, pickerel, and bass. Fishing is allowed in accordance with state regulations, and ice fishing is popular.

Boating—Canoes, kayaks, and boats with small electric or outboard motors (10 horsepower or less) are permitted. There are two boat launches on Hemlock Lake and a single boat launch on Canadice Lake. Cartop boats can also be put in at a separate launch at the south end of Canadice Lake.

Biking—Trails and roads in the Hemlock-Canadice watershed offer great mountain and road biking.



Hunting—Forests that blanket the ridges around the lakes provide great hunting for white-tailed deer and black bear.

Birding—The forests around the lakes are popular places to see and hear songbirds in late spring and summer months. The lakes also provide habitat for migrating waterfowl and are regular stopovers for common loons in spring and fall.

Wildlife Watching—In addition to abundant birdlife, the deep woods are home to fisher, and otters are sometimes seen in the lakes.

For more information on these properties, visit www.dec.ny.gov/lands/66521.html. If you'd like to find out about recreational opportunities available on other state lands, check out www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/347.html.

Rock Spot Resurfaces

The invasive species didymo (*Didymosphenia geminata*), a.k.a. “rock snot,” has recently been found in the



Tim Daley, PA DEP

Kayaderoseras Creek in Saratoga County. Didymo, a single-cell algae, may produce dense mats along the bottom of waters, altering water conditions and crowding out many organisms that live there. Containing it has been problematic as it can easily spread to other water bodies by clinging to waders, boots, boats, paddles, clothing and fishing gear. Once a water body is infected with didymo, there is no known method for eradicating it. The best known defense is to prevent its spread by following the “Check, Clean and Dry” method—check items, thoroughly clean equipment, and let items dry completely before using them in another waterway. For more information, including a list of waters where didymo has been found, visit www.dec.ny.gov/animals/54244.html.

Green Your Yard

When caring for your yard this fall and next spring, consider choosing a landscape business participating in DEC’s new Be Green Organic Yards NY program. Businesses participating

in Be Green will agree not to use conventional pesticides and synthetic fertilizers when they take care of your lawn, plants and trees organically. The organic approach focuses on preventing problems before they occur, and building a sustainable landscape healthy for people, pets, plants and wildlife. Be Green services range from mulching and pruning to plant and tree selection, and soil health. For additional information on Be Green Organic Yards NY, visit www.dec.ny.gov/public/65071.html. A list of trained Be Green businesses is expected to be available at that website this fall. For tips about greening your lawn, visit DEC’s website at www.dec.ny.gov/public/44290.html.

EAB Spotted Again

DEC foresters have discovered the invasive emerald ash borer (EAB) in additional trees in the Randolph quarantine area (Cattaraugus County). The tree-killing beetle was first confirmed in New York last year. A native of Asia, EAB was discovered in Michigan in 2002 and has since spread to 13 states and two Canadian provinces. It is responsible for the destruction of 70 million trees in the U.S. Foresters and other researchers recently commenced a thorough survey of trees and will deploy a more intensive trapping effort in the surrounding area to assess the extent of the infestation. The survey’s information will help determine the response strategy, which could range from removing trees, to using pesticides selectively, to girdling ash to create “trap trees” that attract the beetles. The quarantine remains in effect and DEC reminds everyone, “Don’t Move Firewood!” If you think you have found EAB, call the EAB hotline at 1-866-640-0652. For more information, visit www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7253.html.

Met Swajkos/Aurora



Coastal Cleanup turns 25

This year marks the 25th anniversary of Ocean Conservancy’s International Coastal Cleanup—a massive event that invites individuals across the globe to remove trash from beaches and waterways. The cleanup also helps identify the sources of debris collected and encourages changes in behavior to help prevent ocean litter. Last year, nearly 400,000 volunteers removed an estimated 6.8 million pounds of trash from the world’s oceans and beaches. Though organizations and individuals participate all year, the signature event takes place on September 25. To find out how you can participate, visit www.signuptocleanup.org.

Recycling E-Waste

In May, Governor Paterson signed the New York State Electronic Equipment Recycling and Reuse Act into law, ensuring that every New Yorker will have the opportunity to recycle their electronic waste in an environmentally responsible manner. Beginning on April 1, 2011, the law will require manufacturers to offer free and convenient systems for collecting, handling and recycling or reusing electronic waste, including computers, televisions, DVD players, cameras, VCRs and other electronic equipment. For more information, visit www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/65583.html.



REVIEW by Andrew Guglielmi

This Borrowed Earth by Robert Hernan

256 pages; soft cover \$17.00

Palgrave Macmillan

<http://us.macmillan.com>; 646-307-5151

There were times while reading Robert Hernan's *This Borrowed Earth* when my jaw dropped. I simply could not believe what I was reading: dioxin's health effects on residents in Seveso, Italy—a country with a 90% Roman Catholic population—were so severe that local doctors advised pregnant women to consider having abortions; children playing in the Love Canal neighborhood threw toxic “fire rocks” that exploded when they hit other objects; when asked about the gas released in Bhopal, India, Union Carbide officials claimed it was not toxic and only an irritant, despite thousands of dead animals and people throughout the city.

This Borrowed Earth moves through 15 distinct, yet noticeably similar, environmental disasters around the world, beginning with a mercury-laden bay in 1950s Japan, and ending with the current hot topic (no pun intended) of global climate change. Some of these stories were familiar and some, as a member of Generation X, I had never heard.

It is the similarities of these stories which are the most compelling. More often than not, the companies responsible, and the government entities responding to the disasters, were in damage-control mode—at times hiding damning

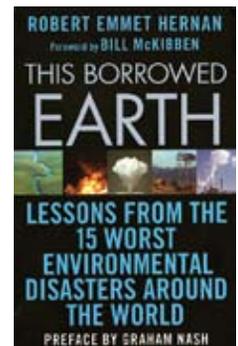
information and downplaying the gravity of situations. Another similarity is the passion, anger and even violence required of the citizens affected by these disasters before clean-up and justice were achieved.

Hernan's style is straightforward and simple. One of his best attributes is the ability to convey complex processes in an easily understandable manner; be it how dioxin forms when hexachlorophene is overheated, or how petroleum can destroy the insulation penguins need to hunt in cold waters.

This Borrowed Earth is first and foremost a compilation of environmental history. Hernan's objective is to “know the past so we don't repeat it in the future.” At a time when society is experimenting with genetically modified food, mixing chemical cocktails to develop new pharmaceuticals, and commencing off-shore oil drilling, I remain skeptical that we will avoid future environmental disasters. Hopefully, the lessons from the stories Hernan tells will help us all to respond openly and quickly to minimize the damage.

Senior Attorney **Andrew Guglielmi** works for DEC's Office of General Counsel.

Editor's note: In light of the current disaster unfolding in the Gulf of Mexico, this book makes for timely reading indeed.





Moving Day

I photographed this coyote while I was hiking along the north rim of the Zoar Valley Gorge this past April. She appeared to be moving her young from one den to another.

Marty Reid
Gowanda, Cattaraugus County



What a great shot of a coyote moving her pup. Coyotes frequently move their pups from one den to another, especially when disturbed. They may also move to another den to help keep the pups free of parasites. In New York, many coyotes give birth to 4-6 pups in March and April, following a two-month gestation period. Active rearing occurs from spring through early summer. Coyotes are found across New York State, except for Long Island, and DEC has several research projects underway to better understand their ecology.

—Gordon Batcheller, DEC Wildlife Biologist

Bad Shell Day

While kayaking in Lamoka Lake in Schuyler County, I captured this picture. I thought this shedding process might be of interest to other readers.

Roger Bailey
Finger Lakes



Like most reptiles, as turtles grow, they need to make room for increased size and mass. Turtles shed the keratinous plates (called scutes) that make up the outer layer of their shell. As turtles grow, new scutes develop, pushing off the older, possibly damaged and parasite-inhabited scutes. Shedding varies with species. Some shed entire scutes, while others shed a few cell clusters at a time, much like dandruff. Aquatic turtles, like the painted turtle you photographed, can harbor heavier parasite loads than semi-aquatic or terrestrial species, and so likely shed more often.

—William Hoffman, DEC Fish and Wildlife Technician

Mind Your Paddle

While boating on Lake George, we spotted this rattlesnake in the water. Our guess is it was at least five feet long. We have never seen a rattlesnake this big, and had no idea they would swim across the lake. It seems like a once-in-a-lifetime thing!

Michael C. Shaw
Washington County



How fortunate you were to photograph a timber rattlesnake, especially one swimming across Lake George. This rattler's tail has been painted, showing that it is part of a research project. These snakes live in the mountains surrounding the lake, and as spring progresses they emerge from hibernacula in search of a mate and food. Like all snakes, they are capable of swimming—even across bodies of water as large as Lake George. Rattlesnake encounters within and around the waters of Lake George are reported annually, so keep an eye out, and remember to enjoy them from a distance.

—William Hoffman, DEC Fish and Wildlife Technician

Free Snack

While canoeing in a pond, I spotted a large mass of frog eggs with odd dark shapes within it. Upon closer inspection, I realized there were leeches that appeared to be eating the eggs, and so took this picture. Do leeches eat frog eggs?

Will Gallup
St. Lawrence County

You have captured a rarely seen sight. We did some research and found that leeches are actually a major predator of frog embryos. Frog egg masses have a gelatinous outer matrix that serves as an anti-predator mechanism; it is not easily grasped by potential predators. Leeches, however, are able to anchor their back end to some sort



of substrate, such as aquatic vegetation, and probe their head into the egg mass. Using their circular row of teeth, the leeches attach to an egg and suck the developing embryo from the casing.
—Conservationist staff

All Rosy

I saw this moth in my backyard this morning. Can you tell me what kind it is?

Ronald Stannard
Rensselaer County



Thanks for the great photo of a rosy maple moth. This beautiful pink and cream-colored moth occurs in much of eastern North America, preferring deciduous forests that contain maple trees. The moth is related to the giant silk worm moths, and like silk moths, they do not eat as adults.
—Conservationist staff

Send Us Your Pics

If you have any interesting pictures of wild flora or fauna, send them to the *Conservationist* at NYSDEC, 625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-4502 or e-mail them to magazine@gw.dec.state.ny.us. Your pictures might be featured in the “Letters” section of the magazine, on our web page, or they might even be chosen as “image of the month” on the watchable wildlife web pages. Remember to include your name and location so we can attribute the photos correctly.

Ask the Biologist

Q: As kids, we put out corn and other food to feed and watch wildlife in our yard. Turkeys, raccoons, foxes, deer and even bear would sometimes visit. I’ve been told that feeding wildlife is bad—is that true, and if so, why?



A: The natural distribution of wild foods helps maintain a natural spacing of wildlife. This is important to keep animals healthy. When people feed wildlife, it disrupts this natural balance, so DEC strongly recommends against feeding animals. Providing a concentration of artificial food causes an artificial concentration (i.e. higher numbers) of wildlife. This can harm wildlife in a number of ways—diseases can spread more easily; conflicts can arise over food; and animals may forgo seeking natural foods that are healthiest for them and grab an easy meal instead.

Feeding animals may also increase the chances that they will damage property. For example, if someone places cracked corn in their backyard and attracts squirrels, the squirrels may eventually seek shelter nearby—namely in the nearest available home or outbuilding.

Instead of feeding animals, try planting shrubs and trees that provide natural food sources. Learn to recognize wildlife sign. When you find it, sit back and patiently wait. You may soon be rewarded with seeing wildlife acting in a completely wild manner.

—Gordon Batcheller, DEC Wildlife Biologist



Write to us

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Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

Labor of Love by Joseph Hefta

And still they keep coming.

Like frost-heaved rocks, do-it-yourself “projects” sprout all over our five-acre patch of soggy mountainside in eastern Rensselaer County. They flaunt their ability to regenerate, year after year, yielding an impossible variety of obligation.

After years of rural life, we should know better than to take on even one more thing. But no, the projects come; they find us. No matter where we are, how cautiously we plan or how secretly we hide; no matter how we swear that, this year, we will take it easy, travel, and relax; no matter how often we surrender or declare ourselves unequal to the task, some rogue project always sneaks up, hits us over the head, and drags us back to its cluttered den.

We have no one but ourselves to blame. We have failed to appreciate the homestead’s abiding lesson: take on too much at your own peril. Our home is a project. The pasture is a project, and so is the woodlot. The outbuildings? Projects. The amount of work they require is endless. In addition to all the chores thrust on us by the land and the seasons, we cannot seem to say no to extracurriculars. In our time here, we have fostered retired seeing-eye dogs, rescued cats, sheared sheep, plucked chickens and strung fence. We have landscaped, remodeled, painted, plumbed, wired and framed. We have raised vegetables, canned pickles, brewed beer and built chicken coops. We have planted flowers, dug trenches, stacked hay, and managed to pick, clean, pack and sell thousands of eggs.

I should hasten to mention that we do almost all of these things really quite poorly. We have day jobs, and it shows. Here I will excuse my wife Stacey, whose formal education in animal science has actually proven helpful in caring for our critters. Though, I suspect she missed class the day they mentioned that, if your barn doesn’t have running water, you must carry it from the house...in buckets...all winter. (Did I know that three large, adult sheep require about seven gallons of water a day, every day? I do now.)

Projects take on different shapes in different places. When we worked in The City and lived in its leafy suburbs, we feared projects. A typical city undertaking for us was negotiating with third parties—plumbers, landscapers, painters—to accomplish



our projects. A typical project for us now is mucking out the sheep barn. As Stacey likes to say, “Why pay someone to live our life for us?”

Our neighbors are the blessed anti-project. They are easy and good. They welcomed us warmly, and they continue to make us feel like we belong. They stop by to chat about the weather, the sighting of a bear, the ongoing speculation over who dumped the heap of garbage up the road, or who’s running for highway department supervisor this year. They drop off homemade preserves in exchange for eggs. They dig our post-holes and split our firewood because they have tools we don’t, and because they are truly decent people.

Perhaps the nicest thing they do is spare us their pity. They hide it well. But after a neighborly visit, as our fellow mountainsiders drive around the road’s last bend, I often wonder if I can see a furrowed brow, a faint look of concern on their faces.

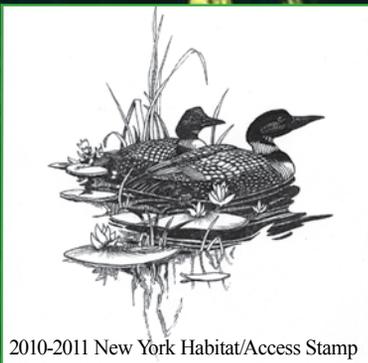
I have no doubt, though, about what they see as they consider us in the rear-view mirror. They see puzzlement; they see struggle; they see exhaustion.

Most importantly, though, they see bliss. They don’t even need to look that hard.

Joseph Hefta is a development officer for Emma Willard School in Troy.

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