



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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