



After the Burn

Robert J. Kent sent us these photos of a burned forest in the Pine Barrens in Manorville, Suffolk County. The top photo was taken right after the fire; the next photo was taken a couple of months later. We can't help but notice that they show an excellent example of forest regeneration. Does anyone else have any photos like this they'd like to share? If so, mail them to us!

In-flight Snack

I wanted to share this photo of an osprey carrying a brown trout. Enjoy!

Mandy Applin
Rochester, Monroe County

Great picture! In New York, ospreys live mainly on Long Island, in the Adirondacks, and along major river systems and large lakes. They feed primarily on fish, which they catch with their long talons. Once listed as endangered, osprey have made a strong comeback since the insecticides responsible for their decline were banned. For more information about osprey, check out DEC's osprey fact sheet at www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7088.html.

—Conservationist staff

Smart Shedding

I took this photo at our camp in Harriman State Park. The decorative band that was around this basket had been eaten by mice, leaving a one-inch wide space. Apparently a snake found this to be the ideal spot to shed its skin because next spring we found his calling card woven right around the ribs of the basket—head and all!

Tom Moberg
Lisle, Broome County



*It looks like the shed snake skin in your photo belongs to either an eastern ratsnake (*Pantherophis alleghanensis*) or a black racer (*Coluber constrictor*). It's hard to tell which one. The woven basket offered enough resistance for the snake to pull off the old, worn, ill-fitting skin to expose a new, shiny dermal layer. Snakes prefer to occupy dryer, warmer sites for the purpose of shedding. Typically, the direction of the tail is the direction the snake was heading while shedding; it appears this snake may have used its own body weight to shed as it dropped from the basket when the shed was complete.*

—William Hoffman, DEC Fish & Wildlife Technician



✉ LETTERS

Resting Eagles

I thought your readers might like to see this photo I took while on Lake Ontario.

Everet D. Regal

Phoenix, Oswego County



A great photo! Bald eagles mate for life and construct nests in tall pine trees like this one. Some nests can grow to weigh hundreds of pounds and can be more than eight feet deep!

—Conservationist staff

Leek Look-alike

We had two readers advise us that they had bad experiences eating false hellebore (a poisonous plant) which they mistook for wild leeks (profiled in April 2012 *Conservationist*). ALWAYS positively identify any wild plant before ingesting it.

Ask the Biologist

Q: I found a turtle in my yard and was wondering if there is a way I can determine its age?



A: Unfortunately, there is no known reliable method of aging a turtle.

There have been studies to determine the accuracy of aging a turtle by counting the growth rings (called annuli) on the scutes (individual scales) of turtle shells, similar to how foresters determine the age of trees. However, this method is unreliable. During winter and inactive periods when feeding halts, a turtle's metabolism slows and growth is no longer evident. These gaps in growth and development can appear as rings on the turtle's shell. This is mostly seen in juvenile turtles when they are rapidly growing. At this time, counting annuli may give you a general idea of the turtle's age. But once turtles reach sexual maturity, their growth rate decreases and annuli development is less notable. Also, not all turtle species have countable scutes; some have smooth shells.

For older turtles, biologists sometimes examine the wear on the turtles' scutes to estimate age. For instance, wood turtles may deposit countable annuli for up to 20 years, but then growth slows and the scutes show signs of wear.

So, unless you know when and where a turtle hatched and then permanently marked it to identify it in the future, for now a turtle's true age is anyone's guess.

—William Hoffman, DEC Fish & Wildlife Technician



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What Is It?

If you guessed it's a close-up of an eastern coyote's fur, then you guessed correctly. Robert Cook of Hamilton sent us this photo of a coyote appearing to pose for the camera. Eastern coyotes live throughout upstate New York. They are highly adaptable and can live near people; some have even been sighted in New York City. Their diet ranges from deer, rabbits and mice, to berries, pet food and even pets themselves. Coyotes are organized in "family units," and though comprised of just a few members, the units can be very noisy! Visit DEC's eastern coyote page at www.dec.ny.gov/animals/9359.html for more information.

