

LETTERS

Compiled by Alex Hyatt

Bald Is Beautiful

One evening last July, my wife and I were driving by the Ashokan Reservoir and stopped to take a walk. We were both armed with our digital cameras, and had the great fortune to see a mature bald eagle flying over the water.



I managed to snap several photos before he flew into the water and caught a fish. The eagle then landed in a tree, too far away to get a good picture. Shortly thereafter, the bird retraced its flight right back past us with a fish in its talons.

Tom Richichi
Greenville, Greene County

You've sent us an incredible photo! Carrying a camera on your outdoor excursions is a great habit. In this case, you snapped shots of an event that many people may never have the opportunity to experience—even though the bald eagle is making a comeback in New York State (see Conservationist, December 2005). Our readers are always welcome to submit photos and questions for this section. To find out how, visit us online at www.TheConservationist.org

—Alex Hyatt, Assistant Editor

Mystery Mass

I need your expertise. I was kayaking on a small lake between Warrensburg and Chestertown and I came upon this strange-looking solid mass near an outlet. It was in about 18-24 inches of water. I won't swim in this lake again until I hear from you! P.S. I enjoy the magazine!

Dorothy Hughes
Ballston Lake, Saratoga County



You have found a bryozoan colony. Most occur in salt water but one group occurs in fresh water. They are filter feeders, not unlike coral animals, feeding

on tiny creatures they extract from the water. They are fairly common in ponds, streams and bogs, and are usually attached to twigs and submerged plants. Since they are of no danger to people you can safely resume swimming.

—Frank Knight,
Environmental Educator, Albany

High Peaks Query

Our trio was hiking in the High Peaks area of the Adirondacks last October, and upon reaching the summit of Lower Wolf Jaw we noticed this interesting growth on this spruce. We were wondering if you could help explain this phenomenon?



Larry Thomas
Saratoga Springs,
Saratoga County

Thank you for your interesting question and photo. First of all, your tree is a balsam fir and not a spruce. Spruce cones hang down and fir cones point up like candles. What you photographed are last year's cones that had shed all their bracts except those at the tip. We keyed in balsam fir cones on a web search engine and got many photos as a result—including one very much like the one you sent us.

—Frank Knight,
Environmental Educator, Albany

Write to us at: Conservationist Letters, NYSDEC,
625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-4502
or e-mail us at: magazine@gw.dec.state.ny.us

White Crow

In June, I photographed this white crow in Rochester at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery. I thought you would like to see it.



Ron Sauter
Rochester

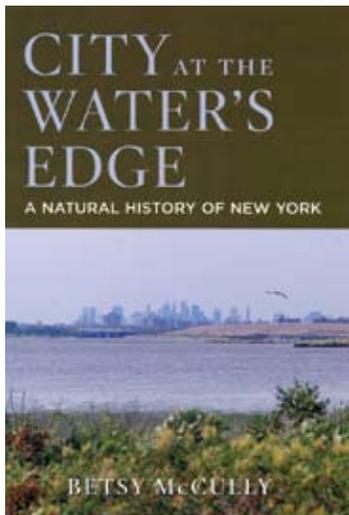
I shared your photo with Dr. Kevin McGowan of Cornell's Lab of Ornithology, who has extensively researched and written on crows and jays. He appreciated the photo and described it as "an unusual individual...that appears to be a complete albino." He has never seen one alive, but does have a specimen that looks identical to it. For more information on crows, and white crows specifically, I recommend visiting Kevin McGowan's pages on the Lab of Ornithology's website, www.birds.cornell.edu/crows/index.html and www.birds.cornell.edu/crows/whitecrows.htm

—Scott Stoner,
DEC Research Scientist, Albany

REVIEWS

City at the Water's Edge A Natural History of New York

By Betsy McCully
185 pages, hardcover \$24.95
Rutgers University Press
<http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu>
Review by Angie Eddy



In Betsy McCully's *City at the Water's Edge* you'll find enough information about the Big Apple to last your lifetime. I was able to gain an appreciation of New York City's natural history, a history that is often overshadowed by the city's legacy as one of our world's greatest metropolitan hubs. It is very easy to pass the day by in New

York City gazing up at skyscrapers, peering into store windows, and tantalizing your taste buds with the plethora of ethnic food the city offers. It is no wonder that people tend to connect more with this man-made infrastructure rather than see themselves as part of the natural landscape. This book reminds us that the city did not always look as it does now, and that many different people have called it home.

McCully reviews how both the Lenapes and the incoming colonists managed the land in order to provide for their people and discusses the way in which they perceived property (private vs. communal). This alone is an interesting ponderance, and raises questions of its own.

The book also enables a reader to see that there were times of great environmental degradation in New York City. Far from negligent in taking an honest look at this issue, the book sheds light on the ways man has recognized his errors. It contends that general public awareness has been capable of taking these environmental problems and turning them around for the better.

City at The Water's Edge can seem like an overwhelming read due to the huge amount of information it contains—but the author does a great job providing the reader with interesting information, personal anecdotes, and supporting maps and photographs. McCully also provides the reader with examples of where to see evidence of past glacial episodes and seismic activity, where to spot the annual mating of the horseshoe crabs, and much more.

City at The Water's Edge certainly provides the reader with enough information to aid in an understanding of the natural history of the region. I'd recommend the book to anyone interested in learning more about one of the greatest cities on Earth.

Angie Eddy is a DEC environmental education assistant in New York City.