

New York State *Conservationist*

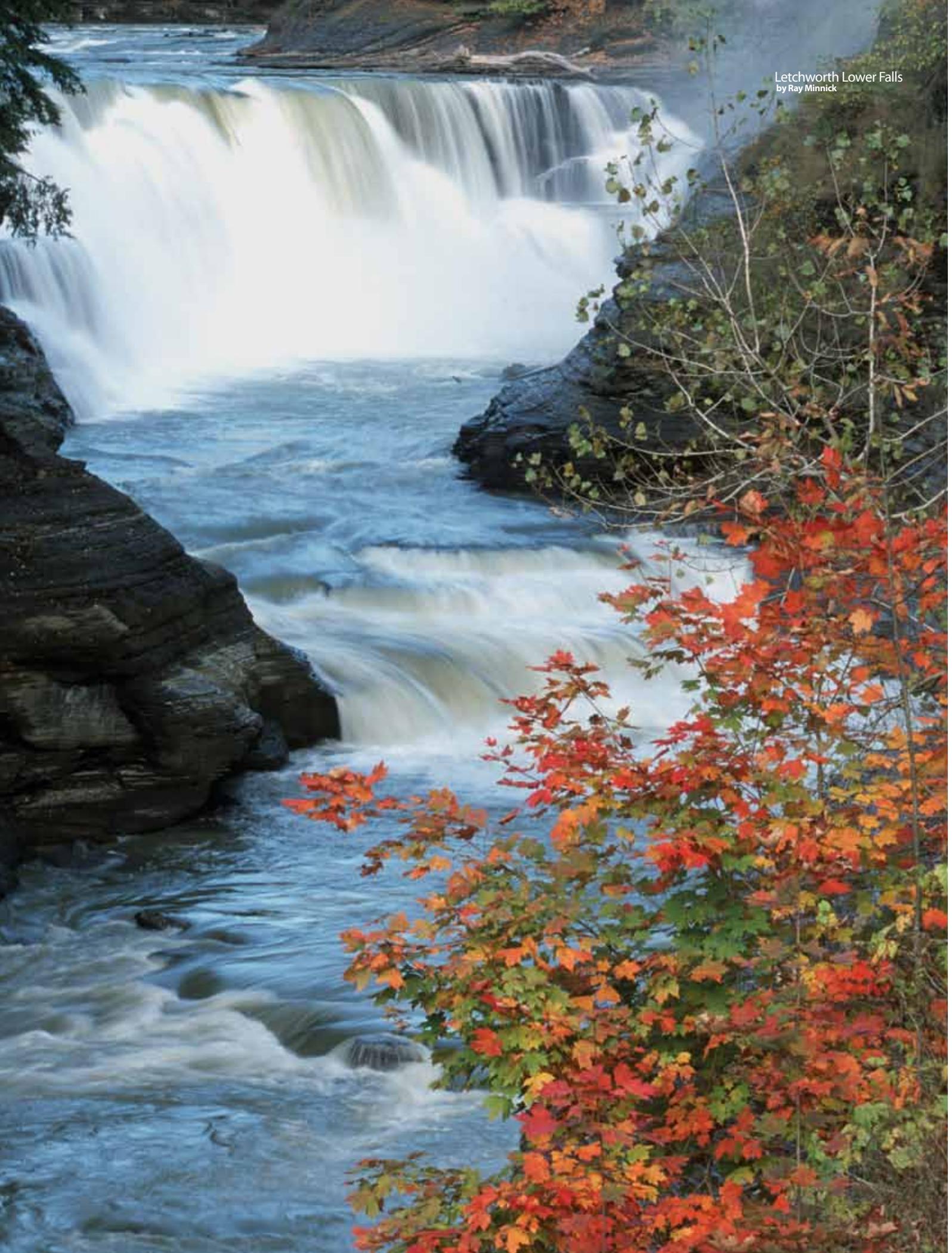


**Celebrating 75 Years of Sport Fish
and Wildlife Restoration**

NYS DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

October-November 2012

Letchworth Lower Falls
by Ray Minnick





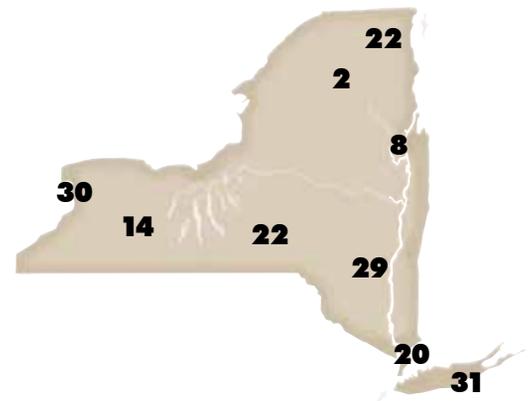
Mark Bowie

See page 2

October 2012 Volume 67, Number 2

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Special Insert:
Conservationist



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Front cover: Muskie egg collecting, circa 1938. [Our October 2012 retro cover reflects the design of the magazine's first five issues (August '46 - April '47).]

Inside Front Cover: Letchworth Lower Falls by Ray Minnick | **Back cover:** Kayaker in autumn reflections on Chapel Pond by Mark Bowie

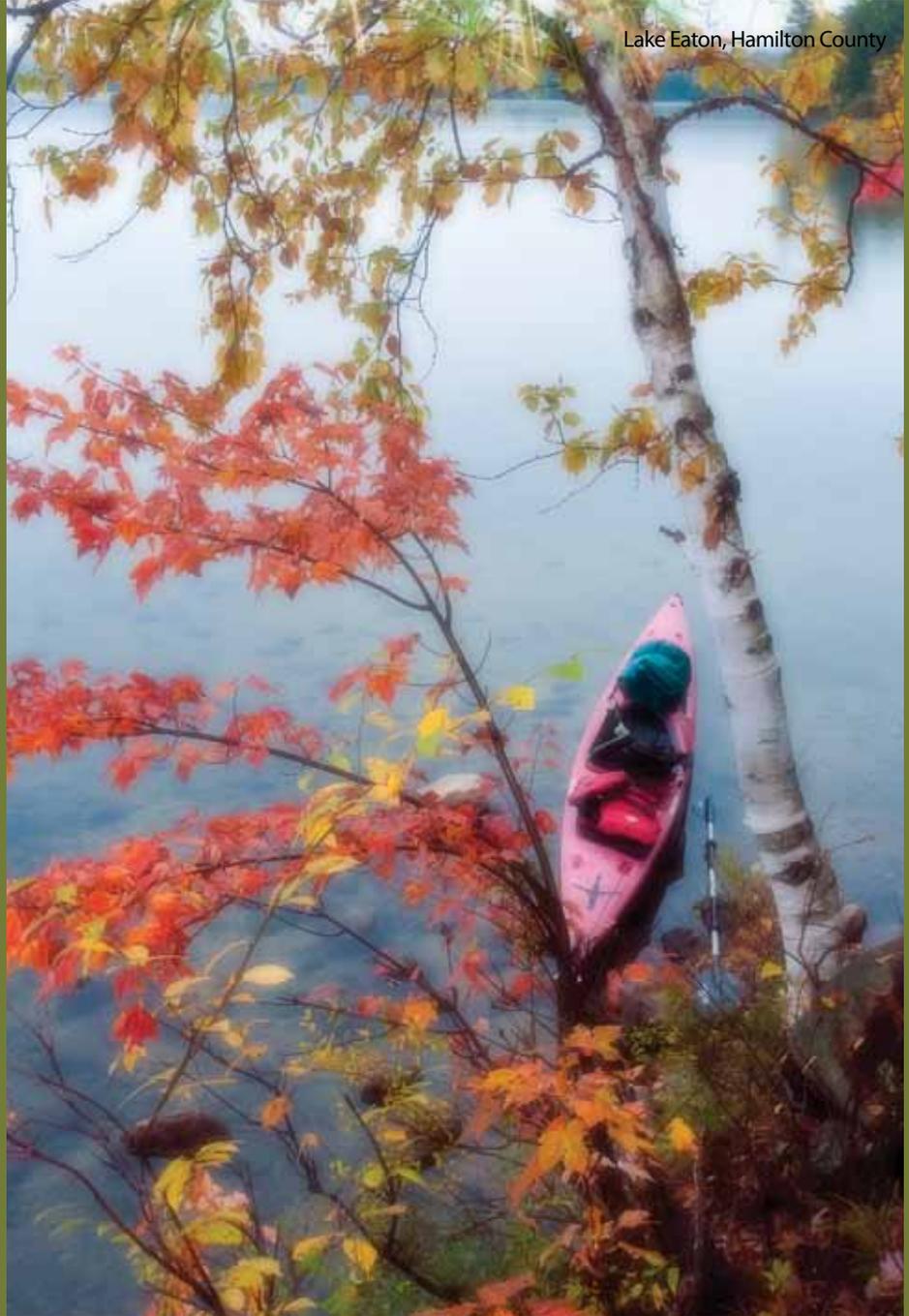
Fall in New

Eagle Cliff Falls, Schuyler County



by Mark Bowie

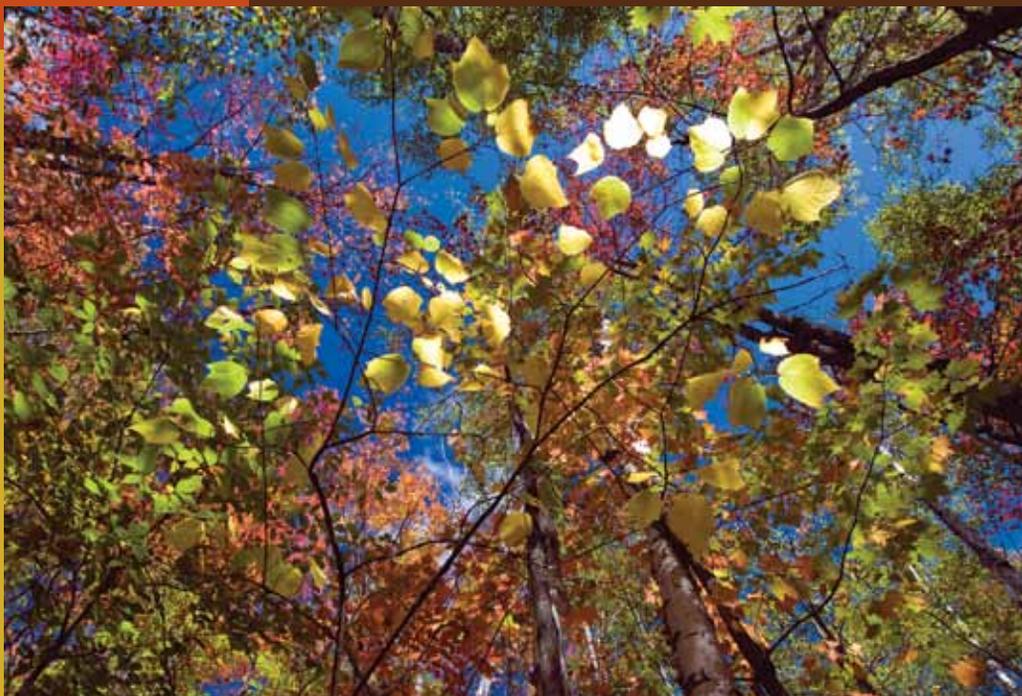
York



Mile after mile, the woods seem intensely alive, bursting with energy. I walk as if I were in a museum gallery, each composition a natural masterpiece.



The Adirondacks exhibit a special beauty, unique in character and spirit; a timeless terrain of rugged mountains covered with rich northern forests...a feast for the senses.





Bear Brook, Hamilton County



Eighth Lake, Hamilton County

Autumn redecorates the mountains, woods and waters with fresh colors and patterns. There is something reassuring in the knowledge that forces much larger than us are in control, providing such wealth.



The distinctly Adirondack mix of deciduous and evergreen forests at peak color is absolutely breathtaking in clear daylight, blurring to pastel colors on misty mornings.

Marshes typically flare with the first bold colors; maples and vines blaze red; tamaracks glow lime-yellow. As air temperatures cool, forest colors change, sweeping from north to south, down from higher elevations and up from cool, fog-shrouded valleys. Every niche of the landscape is awash with color.

Nicks Lake State Campground, Herkimer County



Eighth Lake, Hamilton County



Text adapted from *The Adirondacks, In Celebration of the Seasons* by Mark Bowie

Available from North Country Books www.northcountrybooks.com



Bill Banaszewski

LONG WAY FROM HOME

—wild western cougar travels through New York

By Jenna Kerwin

Shortly before 1 a.m. on June 11, 2011, a mist began to speckle Connecticut State Trooper Tamia Tucker’s windshield. The air was cool; the sky: dark. Except for a few other cars rushing by on the Wilbur Cross Parkway, it was quiet.

Trooper Tucker was on the shoulder of the road, standing at the scene of a single-car accident. Some aspects of this

scene were routine. A car, at night, hit and killed an animal. The young, female driver wasn’t hurt. But what neither the driver nor the officer could understand was how a cougar (*yes, a cougar*) came to be crossing Route 15 in Milford, Connecticut.

*Mountain lion, catamount, puma, panther...*To those living in the eastern



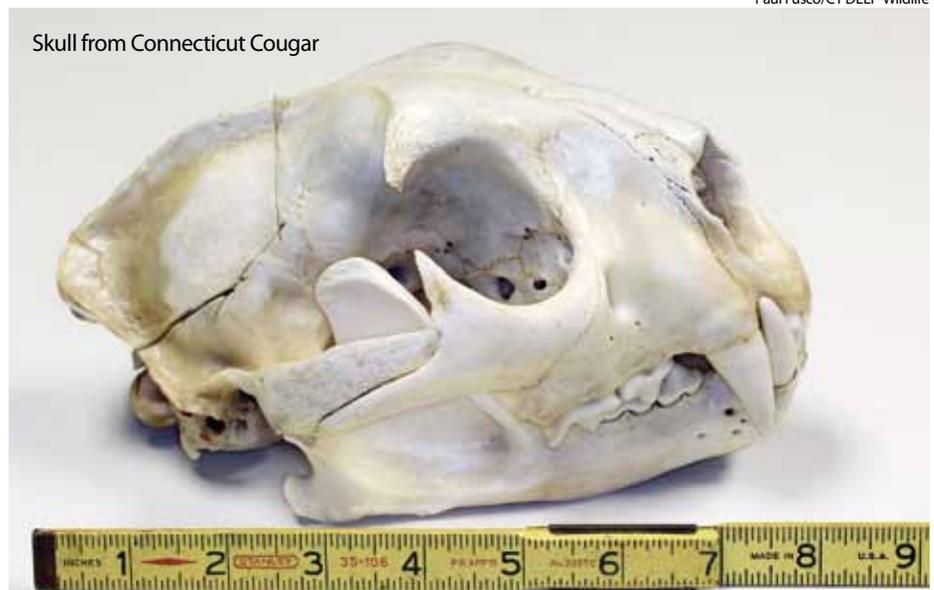
Connecticut State Police

half of the United States, cougars are the stuff of legend. The big cats once roamed the eastern U.S., but near the beginning of the twentieth century, cougars were extirpated from New York, as well as the rest of the northeastern and midwestern states. Except for a population that exists in a few protected areas in Florida, cougars are usually only found west of the Mississippi River, from southern Canada down through Latin America to Patagonia.

Many people, however, believe that maybe, just maybe, the elusive puma isn't really gone from the east. Reports of cougar sightings regularly pop up from the woods of Maine to as far down as the swamps of Louisiana. Often people mistake other animals like coyotes, dogs, bobcats and even housecats for cougars—especially from a distance. When so many people claim to see cougars, popular belief becomes that there must be a self-sustaining population of the wild cat somewhere in the area. Yet consistently there seems to be little actual evidence to back up these sightings.

As DEC Environmental Conservation Officer (ECO) Louis Gerrain and DEC Biologist Kevin Hynes both explain, without definitive evidence, such as scat, blood, hair, tracks, or roadkills, there just isn't enough proof to say there are cougars in New York, or anywhere else in the northeast. In fact, the last confirmed mountain lion sighting in New York was a 7.5-pound kitten shot in Saratoga County in December of 1993. A hunter mistook the animal for a bobcat. However, even this wasn't a wild cougar. Lesions on the animal's footpads suggested captivity on a rough, concrete surface, and DNA analysis determined that it shared genes with a South American subspecies; all indicating that it was most likely an escaped or released captive.

Having responded to similar cases of mistaken identity, Paul Rego was certainly



surprised when he learned of a wild cougar killed in Milford. A wildlife biologist with the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), Rego recalled, "That sort of thing takes a while to really sink in."

To learn about the animal's health and origins, a necropsy (animal autopsy) was performed on the Connecticut Cougar at DEEP's Sessions Woods Wildlife Management Area in Burlington. Performed by Veterinary Pathologist Tabitha Viner from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the procedure revealed the

cougar was a two- to four-year-old, 140-pound male with an empty stomach. The animal showed none of the usual evidence of captivity: wear from a collar, being declawed, neutered, or having a microchip; instead, all signs pointed to the animal being wild.

But how could it be? Surely there wasn't a breeding population of cougars in the eastern United States, or was there? If there was, biologists would have seen scat, hair, tracks, roadkills, or obvious attacks on other animals; not to mention a trail cam would have picked up an image along

the way. So where did this solitary young male cougar come from?

As the story made headlines across the northeast, Kevin Hynes, ECO Gerrain and retired DEC Colonel Dave Eggleston took a collective breath. Just six months earlier, they and other DEC employees had been involved in an investigation of a cougar sighting in Lake George. In this case, it was actually Colonel Eggleston's wife that had spotted the large cat. It had been passing through their backyard while she washed dishes on the evening of December 16, 2010.

At that time, ECO Gerrain (a self-proclaimed cougar skeptic) was used to getting reports of cougar sightings in his Adirondack region. Most of these sightings turned out to be cases of mistaken identity; others just didn't have enough concrete evidence to make a specific identification. So when Eggleston called to report a cougar in his backyard, Gerrain was more than a little shocked. It was especially shocking because ECO Gerrain lived nearby!

When Colonel Eggleston and ECO Gerrain looked around the yard the next morning, they were astounded to find near-perfect cougar tracks in the compacted snow. ECO Gerrain remembers thinking, "It would be really nice to find a hair or something like that." Sure enough, as they followed the tracks, they discovered an area where the cat had bedded the previous night—only 75 yards from Eggleston's home.

The two took several photographs of the tracks and collected hairs from the area and sent them to Hynes in DEC's Wildlife Pathology Unit. The evidence was, by all accounts, the most definitive he had ever received. With the hairs under the microscope, Hynes could tell they were definitely from a cat but he could not definitively determine the species. So Hynes initially sent the hairs to the Arizona School of Natural



Resources for DNA analysis to determine species and later, after the cougar was hit in Connecticut, to the U.S. Forest Service's Rocky Mountain Research Station in Missoula, Montana where they were confirmed as being from a cougar.

Thinking back on this event, Hynes, Gerrain and Eggleston speculated: Was it possible this was the same cat hit by

the car six months later in Connecticut? The timing certainly seemed possible. But if the Lake George cougar wasn't an escaped captive, where did it live before it was seen in Lake George? And how could a mountain lion pass through New York virtually unseen except by Mrs. Eggleston?

Photo courtesy of Leu and Krystal Vang



Trail cam photo of cougar, Clark County, WI

Meanwhile, halfway across the U.S. in Wisconsin, Mammalian Ecologist Adrian Wydeven is familiar with cougar sightings. Though rare, cougars occasionally do make their way into Wisconsin from nearby South Dakota, two states west. So it wasn't surprising when Wydeven was called to investigate cougar tracks in several counties in January and February, 2010.

In Dunn County, a fawn was killed by a cougar in a farmer's cornfield in December 2009. Trail camera images captured the cat feeding on its kill. In total, via trail cam pictures, tracks and samples, Wydeven and others had tracked an unknown cougar's movements through several counties, including Saint Croix where the cougar got its moniker in Wisconsin: the Saint Croix Cougar. On February 15th, in Cable, the trail went cold as the cougar tracks mixed with a heavily trodden deer yard, but tracks picked up again on February 27th in the same location. Two trail cameras also captured images of what looked to be the same cat in Clark County in mid-January 2010. Hairs and scat collected from locations in Minnesota and Wisconsin were examined at the lab in Missoula.

DNA results from the lab linked the cougar to one that had been seen months earlier in Champlin, Minnesota by police on December 5, 2009. Further DNA tests revealed the Saint Croix Cougar hailed

from a population in the Black Hills of western South Dakota—an expansive area of mountainous terrain of grasslands, forests, canyons and lakes stretching 125 miles long and 65 miles wide across South Dakota and Wyoming. Cougars from the Black Hills have been known to travel into nearby states; since 2008, Wisconsin has had six individual male cougars visit the state.

When tissue samples from the Connecticut Cougar matched the same DNA structure of the Black Hills cougar population, things got interesting. The lab continued to compare the Connecticut Cougar's DNA with samples from scat, blood and hair collected at locations in Minnesota and Wisconsin where their cougar was tracked. The results? Samples exactly matched the cougar that passed through Lake George, and the one that was killed on the Wilbur Cross Parkway that early June morning. They were all the same animal.

This means that the cougar first spotted in Champlin, Minnesota, traveled a distance of more than 1,055 miles to Milford—a new straight-line record for observed cougar movement. Considering it originated from a cougar population in the Black Hills, this cougar likely traveled a distance of nearly 1,800 miles!

As the investigation continued, DNA analysis also confirmed that a scat sample collected in Greenwich, CT in early June belonged to a mountain lion, but the sample was too degraded to make an exact match with the dead cougar. Given the location and timing, however, it is certainly quite likely that these two incidents involved the same animal.

When Wydeven heard of the connection between the cat that had disappeared from Wisconsin earlier and the one killed in Connecticut some months later, he couldn't believe it. "I didn't in my wildest dreams think the cougar got all the way to Connecticut," he said. Indeed: few

imagined it could make that journey.

What could possess a perfectly healthy, 140-pound male cougar to travel more than a thousand miles?

Most likely it's as simple as biology. Young male cougars often travel long distances in search of mates, but they rarely travel more than a few hundred miles. This young male was probably doing just that. Interesting to note is that female cougars travel much shorter distances than do males.

So if the Connecticut Cougar traveled all the way from the Black Hills, does that mean it's possible cougars could return east? Well, maybe.

Most cougars rarely travel a fraction of the distance the Connecticut Cougar did. Paul Rego reiterated that most wandering cougars are males. Since you'd need both male and female cougars, Rego adds, "I believe it will be a long time for a breeding population to reach the Mississippi River, and even longer before cougars spread east from there." Adrian Wydeven agrees. As he put it, local cougar habitat would have to be saturated before female cougars would begin to travel very far.

The Connecticut Cougar's journey through the Midwest and Lake George has rekindled northeasterners' fascination with this almost mythical beast. Sightings of cougars in New York and New England will be reported as they have been for decades; biologists will continue to follow these leads and look for evidence. In the end, cougars will have the last word on their future in the east.

Jenna Kerwin is the staff writer for *Conservationist*.

Editor's note: To learn more about cougars in New York, see "Big Cat Tales" in the February 2008 issue of *Conservationist*.



NOTHING TO SNEEZE AT

—Why you simply must go birding with your kids

By Eli J. Knapp

“But Daaaad, I wanna go birding, too!”

“Ezra, wouldn’t you rather stay home and play with your Legos®?”

“No. I wanna go birding!”

I was poised by the door, binoculars and camera in my bag, ready for a brief blitz on a nearby lake to see hooded mergansers that only show up in my corner of New York right now—in the fall—on

migration. This was my only chance to see them. But here was my four-year-old son begging to come along. I looked hard at my skinny, blond-haired boy, who was imploring me like a prosecutor whose life depended on this one case.

“Do you really want to come?” I asked.

“Yeah, I wanna be with you,” Ezra replied in the sincere tone known only

to small children. Ouch. My guilty conscience grew heavier by the second.

If I went alone, I’d have the chance of seeing mergansers. If Ez tagged along, I’d exchange the shy mergansers for father/son time. With Ezra’s larynx on board, we’d be lucky to see a mallard. It is the ultimate dilemma of young parents who love birding and other outdoor pursuits

that require patience, stealth and quiet. Perhaps there was still a way out.

“Why don’t you check with Mom?” I said, hoping to high heaven his mother had other plans for him, like a bath perhaps. Ezra disappeared into the living room. He was back instantly.

“Mom said I can go,” he said, clapping his hands. “And I’ve already got my shoes on!”

My heart sank. While I love time with my kids, I also cherish solitude. This obviously would not be one of those solo moments.

“Okay, Ez, but when we get to the pond, you have to promise not to make a sound. We’re going to see some really shy birds.” While I knew we wouldn’t see the birds, I still had to try.

“I promise, Dada.”

We had a great drive to the lake, chatting about all things from Hot Wheels® to telephone poles. But upon arrival at the well-wooded lake, I admonished Ezra again about the need for quiet. Solemnly, he nodded understanding.

I scanned the waters from across the lake and saw a flock of likely mergansers at the far edge. We’d have to approach stealthily through the woods.

“Ready, Ez?”

“I’m ready, Dada.”

“Okay, let’s go. Remember, don’t make a sound.”

We entered a thick stand of conifers and slowly picked our way to the other side of the lake, being careful not to step on loud twigs and leaves. Ezra mimicked every footstep I took and never said a word.

“We’re almost there,” I whispered. “Great job.” Ezra smiled back and flashed me a “thumbs-up.”

We crouched low behind a log and slowly lifted our heads. There they were. Right in front of us, two doting male mergansers paddled alongside half a dozen earth-tone females. The afternoon sun’s slanting rays lit up the males’ white head



crests like flags of surrender. Wanting to remember the scene, I pulled out my camera and snapped a few shots. Euphoric, I glanced at Ezra to see if he was enjoying it too.

He wasn’t. His smile was gone. His eyes were pinched shut, his cheeks were red, and he had both hands covering his mouth. Uh-oh.

The decision to bird or spend time with Ezra needn’t be an either/or. I’ve learned it’s a both/and.

“Ez, are you okay?” He nodded his head feebly but wouldn’t open his eyes or pull his hands away from his mouth. Confused, I picked him up and crashed back out through the woods, this time oblivious to the sound we made. When we reached the roadside, I set him down.

“AAAAHHHH-CHOO!” Ezra’s head shot forward like a released bowstring. Then for the next 30 seconds he hacked, sputtered and wheezed. As for me, I started laughing uncontrollably. In between laughter, I turned to Ezra.

“Why did you wait so long to sneeze?!”

“You said not to make a sound!” he retorted accurately.

“Well done, Ez! Did you see those beautiful mergansers?”

“What mergansers?” he replied matter-of-factly. I doubled over again.

The setting October sun lit up the orange-red trees like flames as we drove home. With his colossal sneeze now behind him, Ezra quickly made up for lost time, filling the air with a string of

questions and non sequitur proclamations typical of a four-year-old. It’s a time I’ll treasure someday when he’s an uncommunicative and self-conscious teenager.

The decision to bird or spend time with Ezra needn’t be an either/or. I’ve learned it’s a both/and. We had time together, made a priceless memory, and I even saw my birds.

Now if only Ezra could see them, too.

Eli J. Knapp is a professor of biology at Houghton College. He enjoys birding with his son near their home in Fillmore, New York.

Letchworth State Park



Located in the Genesee River Gorge in Western New York — Size: 14,500 acres

A premier watchable wildlife site



Ray Minnick

This “Grand Canyon of the East” is one of the most scenic areas in the eastern U.S. The Genesee River roars through a deep gorge and over three major waterfalls between 550-foot cliffs surrounded by lush forests. With open water drawing thousands of waterfowl, forests sheltering high concentrations of migratory birds, and several great blue heron rookeries, it’s no surprise that Letchworth is both a state Bird Conservation Area, and an Audubon Important Bird Area.

Letchworth is critically important for a number of individual bird species, particularly those designated “of special concern” or “at risk.” Birds associated



Bill Baraszewski



with forest, river and shrub habitats find safety and sustenance in this natural fortress. The gorge is particularly important for raptors as they glide on cliff-face updrafts in search of food.

Upland forests of hardwoods and conifers make up a large portion of the park and are the preferred nesting areas for more than 60 species of migratory songbirds, many of them warblers. Shrub and grasslands are home to several species of ground-nesting birds. Waterfowl and wading birds are found in wooded swamps and river habitats.

Many species of mammals can also be found in the park's diverse habitats.

Wildlife to Watch

Bald eagles use the park year-round, as do many turkey vultures, which may not be revered national symbols but are equally impressive in size. Winter roosts of up to 20 vultures have been seen, and as many as 200 of these large raptors have been observed soaring in the gorge on a single summer day.

Several great blue heron rookeries have been observed in the park's wetlands, and more than 100 nests have been counted. Open water below the Mt. Morris dam may attract in excess of 2,000 Canada geese in winter. Common mergansers and wood



Site Features

Visitors will find parking, a visitors center/museum, an inn, a conference center, restrooms, lodge and cabin rentals, trails, tent/trailer campsites, picnic tables/pavilions, playgrounds, playing fields and a swimming pool.

Trails: The William Pryor Letchworth Museum provides an excellent introduction to the park. Hikers can choose among 66 miles of hiking trails. Trails are also available for horseback riding, biking, snowmobiling and cross-country skiing. Overlooks provide spectacular views of the three waterfalls. Footpaths and auto roads parallel the river and pass the historic Glen Iris Inn and Seneca Indian sites.

Accessibility: This site has many accessible features, including trails, recreation programs, picnic areas, campsites, a swimming pool, cabins and showers.

Site Notes: The park is open daily from 6:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m. year-round. There is a per-vehicle entrance fee. Dates, times and fees for amenities vary—contact the park for details. Visitors can also enjoy canoeing and kayaking, performing arts, nature programs and tours. Hunting and fishing are allowed in season.

Directions: Visitors can access the park via exit 46 of the NYS Thruway/I-90. Entrances to the park are located in Mt. Morris and Portage off of I-390 in Livingston County.

Contact: 585-493-3600,
1 Letchworth State Park, Castile,
NY 14427, <http://nysparks.com/parks/79/details.aspx>





Joe LeFevre

ducks are the most abundant of several species of ducks visible on the river.

Bird species listed as “at risk” or “of special concern” that can be seen here include sharp-shinned hawk, Cooper’s hawk, northern goshawk, red-shouldered hawk, red-headed woodpecker, golden-winged warbler, cerulean warbler, vesper sparrow, grasshopper sparrow, American

woodcock, willow flycatcher, wood thrush, blue-winged warbler, Canada warbler, yellow-breasted chat and rusty blackbird. Letchworth’s grasslands are important as historical nesting sites for northern harriers, upland sandpipers and Henslow’s sparrows.

Mammals that may be encountered include white-tailed deer, red fox, coyote,

cottontail rabbits and woodchucks in woods, shrub and grasslands, and beaver in wetlands.

A visit to Letchworth is worthy in any season. Go to <http://nysparks.com/parks/79/details.aspx> for more information.



Joe LeFevre



Tom Lindsay

On Patrol

Carl Heilman II

Real stories from Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers in the field

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

Smash and Grabbers Grabbed—Greene County

Forest Ranger Christine Nelson, ECO Sean Dewey, the Hunter Police Department and the New York State Police were working a detail to catch “smash-and-grab” perpetrators who would smash windows of parked cars and grab things from inside. Numerous such break-ins had occurred in the Town of Hunter. Ranger Nelson was patrolling the Dog Hole Parking Lot when she noticed two subjects looking in vehicle windows. When people passed by, however, the subjects left the area. Later that day, while on their way to court, Ranger Nelson and ECO Dewey saw the subjects again, this time at the Molly Smith Parking Lot. As ECO Dewey continued to court, Ranger Nelson joined Police Officer Ryan Schrader, who dropped her off to circle back to the lot. Seeing the subjects drive past and spotting a vehicle in the lot with a broken window, Nelson notified Schrader, who found and arrested the subjects after they admitted to robbing the vehicle. One subject was charged with multiple offenses and remanded to the Greene County Jail; the other subject was charged with one offense and then released.

Boating While Intoxicated—Monroe County

While on boat patrol in Irondequoit Bay, Lt. Thomas Stoner and ECOs Bruce Hummel and Paul Blanton were startled by a 35-foot cabin cruiser speeding past within 15 feet of their vessel. It was so close that the ensuing wake washed over the side of the patrol boat. After a short pursuit, ECO Hummel boarded the cruiser and spoke with the driver. The driver’s breath reeked of alcohol, and his eyes were bloodshot and watery. After a few simple questions, the officers transported the driver to shore and administered a chemical breath test. He had a blood alcohol content of .15 percent—well above the legal limit of .08 percent—and he was issued appearance tickets for reckless operation of a vessel and boating while intoxicated.



young monitor lizard

Leapin’ Lizards!—Orange County

ECO Nick Desotelle responded to a request for assistance from NY Park Police at Knox’s Headquarters in the Town of New Windsor. The park manager had found a three-foot-long lizard on park property and showed Officer Desotelle where it had climbed into the cracks of an old stone wall. After removing a few rocks, ECO Desotelle found himself face to face with a large Savannah monitor lizard, a native of Africa that is sold in the U.S. as an exotic pet. With assistance from park officers, he forced the reptile into a large metal cage for transport to the Bear Mountain Zoo. The identity of the person who released the lizard remains unknown.

ASK the ECO

Q: I lost my hunting license and carcass tags while afield. They were in my back tag holder, pinned to my jacket and must have gotten caught on a branch as I moved through scrub brush. Can I purchase another license?

A: You can’t legally purchase a second hunting license, but you can purchase a duplicate of your lost license and tags at any license-issuing outlet. Replacement of a license costs \$5.00, but replacement of each set of tags costs an additional \$10. A replacement back tag is free. We recommend putting only the back tag on your back and carrying your license and carcass tags in a secure interior pocket. A significant number of these are lost each year when carried in the back tag holder.



Ed Jakubowski

ALTERNATIVE AMMO:

Good for hunting; great for conservation.



By Gordon Batcheller

When the first deer dropped in its tracks, I was persuaded. My new copper shotgun slugs worked as advertised.

All hunters strive for one-shot kills, and I was hoping for this outcome during the 2011 firearms deer season. From my conversations with other hunters and firearms experts, I knew that copper bullets and slugs—as well as other solid non-lead ammo—were very advanced projectiles, following years of development by ammunition manufacturers. I was eager to see for myself. With the deer

management permits I had last year (in both N.Y. and Pennsylvania) I repeated this scene three more times. All four deer were either killed instantly, or in the case of one shot with a .308-caliber copper bullet, the adult doe ran about 60 yards before collapsing.

As New York's chief wildlife biologist, I am well aware of studies that show the unforeseen secondary effects of spent lead ammunition on wildlife. In California, for example, endangered condors that feed on the remains of deer shot with lead ammo

may ingest lead fragments and get sick or die. Here in New York, we have documented lead poisoning in several scavenging birds, including bald eagles.

Historically, hunters have led the way to implement sound conservation practices. Now that manufacturers have developed advanced slugs and bullets, I am encouraging New York hunters to take a hard look at this new technology. They will find excellent hunting performance, while preventing secondary exposure to lead in wildlife and people.



At modern muzzle velocities, lead bullets fragment on impact, even when sheathed in copper (left). Birds that scavenge carcasses may be poisoned when they eat these fragments. Hunters don't get as much high-quality, clean venison. In contrast, copper bullets (right) are less likely to fragment.

James Clayton



High-tech copper and similar solid non-lead bullets are available in many popular cartridges and produce near-perfect "mushrooms" when they hit the target.

James Clayton



Shotgun slugs made of copper (right) fold nicely down into "petals" expanding the slug's surface area better than slugs made of lead (left).

By its nature, lead is soft, heavy, and easily molded. Centuries ago, gun makers learned that this metal makes a very good projectile. With the slower velocities of early firearms, lead typically did not fragment. However, at the higher velocities of modern centerfire rifles, lead bullets often break up upon impact, even when sheathed in copper. Lead fragments can scatter up to 18 inches along the path of the bullet, even when it passes completely through a deer. In some cases, this lead can ruin a great deal of meat as it fragments, reducing the hunter's yield of venison and increasing the chances that scavenging wildlife may consume lead and get sick or die. Some of the fragments are too small to be seen, felt or tasted, and are therefore difficult for people to remove or scavengers to avoid. To date, there have been no reported human illnesses related to the consumption of wild game shot with lead ammunition, but lead is a known neurotoxin, and hunters should consider potential exposure risks from the consumption of lead fragments, especially in growing children.

Since copper is harder, modern bullets and slugs made of this material typically remain intact on impact. This means more energy is transferred to the target; in my case, deer. With little or no bullet fragmentation, hunters get more high-quality venison from their deer.

Before embracing a new technology, however, hunters want assurances about performance: Will the bullet or slug be accurate? Will it expand to form a "mushroom" when it hits the intended target? Fortunately, manufacturers of ammunition have designed projectiles that do both. Copper and other solid non-lead bullets and slugs are designed to fold downward from the tip into multiple "petals" that greatly expand the surface area up to two times the original bullet diameter, resulting in a quick, humane kill and more high-quality, uncontaminated meat.

What about the cost? Let's face it, this new ammunition is more expensive than lead. However, *premium* lead ammunition actually costs about the same. As the use of copper and other solid non-lead ammo grows, prices should come down. Some manufactures already produce a "standard" grade bullet at a lower cost.

Another consideration is product availability. I recently visited a large sporting goods store in eastern New York and asked for copper ammo. The sales clerk could find only one box of 12-gauge copper slugs, while they had hundreds of boxes of lead ammo. Fortunately, there are many options for buying this alternative ammo from specialty shooting supply stores, and there are also many online options. Hunters willing to go the extra mile to find solid non-lead ammo won't have any trouble. There are endless options for reloaders, too, since bullet manufacturers make almost every caliber.

We have updated DEC's website to provide information to New York hunters on the technical properties of non-lead ammo, and list products made by several major manufacturers to help you find what you need for your firearm. Of course, it's important to practice and test the performance of your firearm with new ammo to ensure good results.

For me, solid non-lead ammo is the right choice. It performs exceptionally well in my shotgun and rifle, it has excellent ballistic properties, and it's deadly on deer. By using this ammo instead of lead, I get more clean venison for my family, and I'm doing the right thing for wildlife conservation.

Gordon Batcheller is Chief of DEC's Bureau of Wildlife and is an avid deer hunter.

For more information on alternatives to lead ammunition, visit: www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/48420.html

Your Leaves:

Bill Banaszewski



To Love 'Em Is to Leave 'Em.

By Mark Gilliland
photos courtesy of author

Fall is a beautiful time of the year; trees are dressed in brilliant colors of yellow, red and orange. But as fall progresses, that colorful foliage starts dropping, covering your lawn in a carpet of leaves. If left intact on the grass, these leaves will deprive the lawn of oxygen and sunlight resulting in dead spots the following spring.

To maintain a healthy lawn, fall's leaves must be managed in some way. If you live in a city, town or village, many of these municipalities provide a service to pick up the leaves and take them to a compost facility. There the leaves are most often put into long piles (called windrows) to biodegrade and turn into compost. Often a portion of this compost is made available to residents. Compost can be used as mulch, tilled into the soil or spread in a thin layer on the lawn. It retains soil moisture, adds nutrients and beneficial microorganisms, and improves soil structure.

While collecting leaves and composting on a large scale is great, in densely populated suburban areas this may not always be a cost-effective and available option, and it can have drawbacks. For municipal pickup, leaves are frequently raked or blown into piles on the curb. Sometimes these piles spread out, creating a safety hazard for drivers and pedestrians. Leaf piles can also wash into storm drains, clogging storm sewers and causing flooding. Some communities require homeowners



to put their leaves into bags by the curb. Aside from the amount of effort it takes to move bagged or loose leaves to the curb for pick up, where destination facilities are distant, the transportation takes a lot of fuel and generates emissions.

There is another option for property owners to deal with fall's bounty of leaves: an initiative that the Village of Irvington in

Westchester County and some local municipalities have instituted. It's called "Love 'Em and Leave 'Em." Simply put, the idea is to mulch (shred) your leaves in place. It's an easy practice to do, and has a number of benefits, including:

- **Keeps your property healthy:** Leaf mulch recycles nutrients into your soil to feed your plants, improves soil health, helps retain moisture (reducing the need for watering in dry spells), and provides additional winter coverage for plant roots.
- **Saves money:** Helps keep your taxes down by reducing municipal leaf pickup and costs associated with municipal composting or disposal.
- **Saves effort:** Many homeowners (and landscapers) find that mulching leaves in place is easier than raking or blowing them to the curb or stuffing leaves into bags.
- **Helps the planet:** Avoids the energy use and air emissions associated with transporting leaves to a distant composting or disposal facility.

So how do you mulch-in-place? The simplest method is to use mulching or shredding equipment such as a mulching lawn mower, a leaf shredder, or a leaf vacuum/shredder. The trick is to shred 'em directly on your lawn into fine pieces (less than 1" square) which will then break down over the winter. Shredding can reduce your leaf volume up to 10 to 1. Of course, you want to make sure that the resulting leaf mulch isn't too thick as leaving too many mulched leaves on the lawn could be harmful. The proper thickness depends on your lawn, the mulching equipment, the number of mulching passes you make and the type of leaves. As a starting point, the tips of the grass blades should still be visible after mulching—if the shredded leaf buildup appears too dense, simply rake the excess onto other areas.

Shredded leaves can also be used for mulch on your garden. You can do this by raking leaves into piles on the driveway, shredding them there and then putting the finely chopped mulch two- to three-



inches thick on your garden beds as you would any other mulch.

For leaves in your wooded areas, simply leave them alone and let them decompose naturally. After all, your trees evolved to recycle their leaves, thereby fertilizing themselves and helping to maintain the vigor of their root zones. The one "problem" area may be your landscape garden beds, including groundcover areas. Unshredded leaves can be heavy and damp (especially oak and sycamore) and may lead to crown rot in some perennial species. In these cases, carefully pull, rake or blow off the leaves from the beds, then shred and apply the fluffy mulch back onto the beds.

Excess leaves left over from mulching can be used as a "brown" layer in your compost pile. (Shredded leaves have increased surface area and natural decomposition will be more efficient.) Store a pile of leaves near your compost pile; then when you need "browns" to mix with your greens (food scraps and grass trimmings), they will be close at hand. If you'd like to learn how to compost at home, check out the brochure *Everything You Have Always Wanted to Know About Home Composting But Were Afraid to Ask!*, available on DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8799.html.

The benefits of mulching-in-place can be expanded to encompass a three-season approach when you include grass clippings. Leaving mulched/shredded grass clippings in place adds nitrogen and other nutrients back into the lawn. If you use a landscape maintenance company, your landscaper may require some initial instruction in these greener practices, as well as needing a simple, low-cost conversion of mowers to perform efficient mulch mowing. If you use your own equipment, make sure it is in good working condition to minimize any small engine emissions.

Participants in the "Love 'Em and Leave 'Em" program encourage all homeowners, property managers, landscapers, and local municipal parks and Department of Public Works staff to check out the valuable information, How-To videos, resources, and calendar of training events, on the program's website at www.leleny.org.



Mark Gilliland is Trustee Liaison to Irvington's Green Policy Task Force, part of the LELE educational outreach team, and webmaster for the [leleny.org](http://www.leleny.org) site. Contact him at info@leleny.org.



USFWS / Steve Hillebrand

Pigs Gone Wild

—Feral swine threaten New York State

By Eileen Stegemann

Standing at the edge of the cornfield, looking at the upturned earth and destroyed crops, I think to myself, “Pigs did this?”

I’m with DEC Wildlife Biologist Ed Reed, who has taken me to an upstate farm where feral swine (a.k.a. wild pigs) have been wreaking havoc for more than a year now. The area is a small patch by Ed’s standards, but the damage is no less dramatic. Stalks have been broken and trampled, corn only half-eaten, most likely the result of another ear looking more delectable. For the farmer, this is

DEC photo



(Above and next page) Damaged crops and land.

devastating and in these tough economic times can mean the difference between remaining solvent or going under. Regardless, it’s clear something must be done.

We walk into the woods bordering the property to scout for more sign of pigs. There is evidence everywhere—broken twigs, tracks, turned-up ground, semi-dry muddy patches used as wallows—most several days old, but no pigs. Of course, we weren’t really expecting to see pigs because they are most active at night, but it didn’t stop me from hoping.

You Can Help

Since 2008, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Wildlife Services has provided federal leadership in the management and disease surveillance of feral swine in New York. USDA is working with DEC and landowners throughout the state to eradicate feral swine. An important part of this feral swine eradication program is the relationships the USDA has established with homeowners, farmers, sportsmen and foresters, as well as conservation and agriculture officials. DEC's goal is to eliminate and prevent further establishment of feral swine in New York.

You can help the USDA and DEC battle this new invasive. If you're outdoors and see a feral pig, please report it to the nearest DEC regional office right away (www.dec.ny.gov/about/558.html). The more information you can provide (such as date, exact location, number of swine and piglets, and any photos), the better. Given feral swine's high rate of reproduction, time is of the essence.



The pigs raiding this farm are Russian boars, escapees from a nearby property whose owner was raising them for game. As Ed laughingly describes, they are "large and in charge," formidable animals that can become very aggressive when they perceive they are threatened. Despite their size, they can run fast—up to 30 mph. Imagine a 300- to 400-pound, animal with razor-sharp tusks charging you. You get the picture.

However, Ed explains, "It really wouldn't be much different if these were escaped domestic or 'pet' pigs, as even these will revert back to their wild state in a relatively short time. And that doesn't mean the next generation—the actual escapee will begin to grow hair and tusks in the wild." I'm astounded at this news, and yet the biologist in me is fascinated.

As we continue to scramble through the underbrush, heading deeper into the woods towards the swampy area where Ed suspects the pigs spend the daylight hours, he explains that in the years he's been doing this, he's only seen actual pigs twice. But he's heard them a number of times at night, moving around in the

cornfield, seemingly confident in their ability to elude capture. In Ed's words, they are extremely wary, incredibly smart, and fearless when confronted, a combination that makes them difficult to catch.

Showing me a large corral trap hidden in the woods, Ed explains some of the methods he and his coworkers use to lure these crafty animals. To avoid spooking the swine, biologists and technicians take weeks to painstakingly habituate the pigs to come to a particular spot by putting out bait. Continuing to provide bait, DEC staff then slowly bring in and set up the corral one section at a time. For the enclosure in front of me, this took more than two weeks. The pigs showed up faithfully, chowing down on the free food. That is, until the last piece of the corral—the gate that springs shut to trap the pigs—was added; then the adult pigs wouldn't venture inside. It's as if they knew it was a trap. So as I stood looking at the empty enclosure—gate wide open, the center freshly baited with corn—I couldn't help but sympathize with the biologists and the landowner. Fortunately, however, piglets are not as savvy as adult

DEC photo



DEC photo



pigs and will venture inside in pursuit of an easy meal. Because of this, a couple of weeks before my visit, DEC staff captured 16 piglets. Interestingly, trail cams set up in the area captured images of adult pigs standing all around, but remaining outside the enclosure.

Ed also took me to a tree stand set up near a baited pile on the outskirts of the field. Despite being manned many a night by DEC staff, they only managed to get half-a-dozen adults. As Ed says, “The pigs know we’re there and so avoid that area. Once we leave, they come right back.” DEC has many a trail cam picture of numerous large pigs—as well as raccoon, deer and rabbit—visiting the bait pile.

What compounds the problem of controlling feral swine is that they are extremely prolific. In fact, a single female (sow) can have two to three litters of six to eight piglets each year. And the sows can start breeding as early as 6-10 months of age. That means that a few can quickly become an extended family, which in turn can quickly become a very large group. The numbers are alarming. Fortunately, New York winters limit feral swine reproduction to the warmer months. It’s a small consolation, but one our biologists are grateful for. In the southern U.S., feral swine can reproduce year-round.

Feral swine are also highly adaptable and can live most anywhere near water. Combine this with the fact that they will eat pretty much anything—from acorns and roots to tree seedlings and farm crops, and from reptiles and amphibians to birds and young wildlife—and you can understand why it’s so hard to contain them.

New York is actually a relative newcomer to the feral swine epidemic. Feral swine have long been wreaking havoc across parts of the U.S. Like the group Ed is battling, the majority of feral swine are the result of escapees from farming operations or enclosed game and

DEC photo



Biologists use corral traps to try and capture feral swine. (Notice the trail cam on the tree on the right.)

DEC photo



A DEC trail cam caught this image of a group of feral swine in upstate New York.

Kelly Stang



Swine, including this pet pig, cause serious damage to the landscape when rooting for food or wallowing in wet areas.



Facts About Feral Swine:

- Also called feral pigs, wild pigs, feral hogs, wild boar, wild hogs, razorbacks, Eurasian boar and Russian boar.
- Feral swine can include domestic pigs or “pet” pigs that have escaped captivity or been released and “gone wild,” as well as wild boar that escaped from fenced shooting enclosures, or hybrids of any of the above.
- Run fast (up to 30 mph) and are good swimmers, have razor-sharp tusks, and can be aggressive toward humans, pets and livestock.
- Their tracks look similar to deer, however, the toes of feral swine are more turned out.
- Are omnivores (eat both plant and animal matter) and are opportunistic, eating just about anything. They forage almost continuously.
- Adults vary widely in size and color. Can be black, brown, gray, red, tan or cream-colored; may have spots, stripes or bands. Piglets often have stripes that fade or disappear as they get older.
- Have relatively poor eyesight, but keen senses of hearing and smell.
- In New York, adult feral pigs have few, if any, known predators. However, vehicle collisions and road kills have been reported.

For more information about feral swine in New York, check out DEC’s website at: www.dec.ny.gov/animals/70843.html.

swine shooting preserves, but some are from deliberate releases. The Wildlife Society’s June 2011 newsletter stated: “Free-roaming wild pigs have become one of North America’s most threatening invasive mammal species. Spreading fast, they now number up to six million across at least 37 U.S. states and four Canadian provinces, where they are destroying crops, ruining property, killing livestock, fouling waterways, and spreading disease. Fat, mean, and prolific, these pigs pose enormous challenges for wildlife professionals.”

Despite battling this group of pigs in northern New York for a while, Ed says that upstate N.Y. is relatively lucky. At present, there are only a few established groups. Across the state, near Cortland, however, the USDA has been battling a number of pockets of feral swine since the first known group was discovered there about a decade ago. Currently, these destructive animals have been documented in at least 38 counties, with breeding confirmed in six. And that’s just the ones we know about—the numbers are always changing.

The more I learn about feral swine, the more I realize just how important and difficult a task it is for DEC to control them. And just when biologists think they’ve gotten the problem under control, another group of pigs crops up. It’s the ultimate game of cat and mouse; in this case, it’s hard to tell who’s winning.

The reality is that swine are here and must be dealt with before they do too much more damage—not just to the landscape like farm crops and lawns, but also to our native species. Feral swine directly compete with local wildlife (such as deer, bear, turkey, squirrels and waterfowl) for food and space, and they cause serious damage while rooting for food or when wallowing in wet areas where they destroy native vegetation, cause erosion, and negatively affect water



quality. These invasives also disturb and prey on the nests and eggs of ground-nesting birds, snakes, lizards, frogs and salamanders, and will kill and eat fawns and young domestic livestock. In addition, they eat almost any agricultural crop, as well as tree seeds and seedlings, and tear up lawns and golf courses in search of tender roots, grubs and worms. Feral swine also pose potential health risks to native wildlife, livestock, pets and humans as they can carry pathogens like *E. coli* and transmit at least 30 diseases including swine brucellosis, trichinosis, and pseudorabies.

As Ed and I get in the truck to head back to the office, I ask him if he thinks DEC will be able to win this battle, and without hesitation he says that he and the other biologists are confident we will eventually be able to get feral pigs under control. It may just take a while. In the meantime, DEC will continue the fight, capturing as many feral swine as they can, and seeking ways to prevent new introductions of these destructive animals.

Eileen Stegemann is the assistant editor of *Conservationist*.

What Is It?

If you guessed the image in the Table of Contents is from a mammal, you’re right. It’s a close-up of a feral piglet’s fur (see image at top of page).

A Legacy of Wildlife Management

75th Anniversary of the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program

By Douglas Stang

Illustrations by Wayne Trimm—DEC photos



SEVENTY FIVE YEARS AGO, wood ducks were nearing extinction and wild turkeys and white-tail deer were scarce. Recognizing the need to correct this downward trend, Congress passed, and President Franklin Roosevelt signed into law, the Pittman-Robertson Act in 1937—key legislation that would help restore and manage wildlife in the United States.

The Pittman-Robertson Act created a special fund derived from federal excise taxes collected on firearms and ammunition. The funds are given to individual states to use for programs that benefit wildlife restoration efforts. In New York, the act has been instrumental in supporting wildlife population research and management that led to the recovery of many wildlife populations, including deer, turkey, bear and numerous species of waterfowl. Today, the excise tax extends to include archery equipment and accessories.



Biologists capture (above) and release (below) wild turkeys, a project that began in 1952 in NY.



Fish stocking at the Constantia Fish Hatchery, April 1940.

In 1950, based on the success of Pittman-Robertson, another act (called the Dingell-Johnson or D-J Act) was implemented to similarly help the nation's fisheries resources. This act created a special fund derived from a federal excise tax on fishing rods, reels, creels, artificial lures, baits and flies. In 1984, Congress significantly enhanced the fund by passing the Wallop-Breaux Amendment, which expands the act to

include taxes on motorboat and small engine fuels, and import duties on pleasure boats and yachts.

Collectively, these acts are known as the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, whose creed is that fish and wildlife are a public trust resource (they belong to all North American residents) and fish and wildlife must be scientifically managed in such a way that their populations will be sustained



Biologists measuring fish, circa 1980.



Projects and program areas funded by Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Dollars over the past 75 years:

- A long-term research and management program to identify, characterize and protect muskellunge spawning and nursery grounds on the St. Lawrence River
- Restoration of wild turkey and bald eagle populations
- Comprehensive fisheries research and management programs on Lakes Ontario and Erie
- Investigation into the foraging ecology of common mergansers in southeastern New York with regards to potential impacts on stocked trout
- Monitor ecology, population characteristics, and harvest of several game species, including white-tail deer, black bear and American marten
- Implement the **I FISH NY** program and develop and produce the **I FISH NY Guide to Freshwater Fishing in New York State** map
- Monitor Peconic Bay finfish and crustacean populations
- Waterfowl banding and research projects
- Acquisition, access development and continued habitat management of Wildlife Management Areas and other public lands



forever. Since the programs were first implemented, New York has received more than \$202 million in federal Wildlife Restoration Program funds, and more than \$175 million in federal Sport Fish Restoration money.

In New York State, federal Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Funds are woven through nearly every aspect of DEC's fish and wildlife programs, funding such projects as reintroduction of declining species, population surveys, species research, acquisition of habitat, restoring aquatic habitat, hunter and aquatic education, development and enhancement of shooting ranges, and construction and maintenance of boat ramps and fishing piers in freshwater and marine environments.

Without such federal support, New York State couldn't sustain the healthy fish, wildlife and marine populations found here. While many people are familiar with the term "user pays, user benefits," the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program is more poignantly a user pays, *public* benefits program. We all enjoy the fruits of the program's science-based management of these populations, including the quality recreational opportunities these species provide.

Douglas Stang is the assistant director of DEC's Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources.



Through the Wildlife and Sport Fish Restoration Program, biologists have been able to study a variety of species including finfish, bald eagles, ruffed grouse, marten and black bear.

John Mosseso



James Clayton



Attention Big Game Hunters

DEC recently adopted several new regulations that affect deer and bear hunting seasons, including: lengthened bowhunting seasons in the southern zone; established a late bowhunting season in the northern zone; established mandatory antler restrictions in certain wildlife management units; and adjusted bear seasons in the northern and southern zones. You can check out these new regs on DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/65231.html.

Greening the Blue

DEC is conducting a new project to educate the public and land-care businesses on lawn care maintenance and pest management. Called "Be Green in the Great Lakes," the project is funded by the Federal Great Lakes Restoration Initiative as an outreach effort to inform New Yorkers in the 28 counties of the state's Great Lakes watershed that they can help reduce water pollution through careful land care and pest management. Conventional lawn and landscape maintenance often require large amounts of water, and land-care pesticides and fertilizers have the potential (especially if improperly used) to seep into groundwater and run into streams that can enter the Great

Lakes. To learn more about the project, and to take a survey about your current land and pest management practices, visit the Be Green in the Great Lakes information page at www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/76234.html on DEC's website.

Two Invasives Spread

For the past several years, spiny water flea and emerald ash borer (two invasives) have rapidly spread through New York's waters and forests (respectively). First discovered in Great Sacandaga Lake in 2008, the aquatic spiny water flea was just recently confirmed in Lake George. (Go to www.nyis.info/index.php and click on "spiny water flea" under "Aquatic Animals" for more information.) To the south, emerald ash borer was recently confirmed in a DEC campground in Ulster County in the Catskill Forest Preserve. Originally discovered in NY in Cattaraugus County in 2009, this is the first time the tiny beetle has been found in a DEC campground. For more information about the beetle, visit www.dec.ny.gov/animals/72136.html.

Safe Hunting Year

The 2011 hunting season tied 2009 for New York's safest hunting year on record for the number of hunting-related shooting incidents. There were 26 incidents reported, including four fatalities that occurred during the regular deer season; one was self-inflicted. Though hunting is safer than ever, accidents do happen and it is important to remember that every hunting-related shooting incident is preventable. First-time hunters are required to attend a comprehensive hunter safety course of a minimum of 10 hours, taught by DEC's highly trained instructors. All courses are offered free of charge, and students must successfully complete the course and pass the final exam before being eligible to purchase a hunting license. Visit DEC's Sportsman Education program webpage at www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7860.html for more information.

emerald ash borer



David Cappaert

spiny water flea



Kate Feil



Unique Visitor

This saw-whet owl found its way into our house and flew around until we cornered it in an upstairs bedroom. We opened all of the windows and waited. No luck. Finally, remembering the saw-whet's reputation for "tameness," my wife held out her hand. It calmly perched on her hand and allowed itself to be carried to a window and freedom.

Robert Kuehl
Rochester, Monroe County

Its sounds like everyone involved had quite an experience! Small owls, saw-whets are named after one of their calls that sounds similar to a saw being sharpened. They are known for being quite tame, but as with all wildlife, people should remember to keep their distance.

—Conservationist staff

Proud Pups

Here is a picture of my German shorthaired pointer Jaeger at Alder Bottom Wildlife Management Area in Clymer. I have hunted Alder Bottom for more than 15 years. These cock pheasants were some of the many released by DEC.

Daren Smith
Derby, Erie County



I am a falconer. I thought I would share this photo of my red-tailed hawk Emmy and my standard poodle Bullet on a rabbit hunt. I have been trying to get them to work together. Emmy has become very tolerant of Bullet, but Bullet is still very excited when she gets something.

Chris Paparo
Suffolk County



Sometimes hunting with a "buddy" can be quite rewarding! Though not common, falconers do use dogs from time to time. For instance, falconers might use mini-dachshunds and Jack Russell terriers to move rabbits out of cover; beagles to keep pressure on running rabbits; or pointers to locate feathered quarry. Both the raptor and canine instinctively know their roles in a hunt, it's just a matter of getting each party to recognize each other as a member of the same team. It takes some time and patience, but it can work.

—Billy Deckert and Jim Webber, current and former presidents (respectively) of NYS Falconry Association

Fish Food

I took these photos of a water snake eating a white perch on the shore of the Hudson River in Poughkeepsie. That's what's so great about going to the river; you always see something special!

Michael Luke
Poughkeepsie,
Dutchess County



Thanks for sharing your great photos! In the world of snakes, water snakes have high metabolisms, so that fish will probably be digested in a matter of days, if not sooner. As a lot of energy was used in swallowing the fish, this water snake will most likely stop to rest close by. It might bask on a rock to raise its body temperature to start the digestion process, as well, and then move on to a more secure location.

—William Hoffman, DEC Fish and Wildlife Technician



Autumn Eagle

Here is a bald eagle in Cornwall that appears to be admiring the beautiful fall colors.

Maureen Moore
Orange County

It certainly makes us want to get outside! For a list of places you can go to enjoy New York's fall foliage, check out "Colors of Fall: Leaf Peeping at Prospect Mountain" in the October 2010 Conservationist.

—Conservationist staff

Close Cousins

I was fishing for trout at West Lake and caught what I believe is a grass pickerel. I took a picture because I've never seen one here, and it is not listed on DEC's website as a species of fish for this lake. Can you confirm what species it is?

Chris Ceresko
Long Island

You're close! You actually caught a redbfin pickerel. Both redbfin and grass pickerels are subspecies of the same species. Ice Age glaciers pushed the species south and as the glaciers receded the fish came back north on either side of the Appalachian Mountains, dividing into two subspecies. Redfins are found east of the



Appalachians, while grass pickerel occur in the Great Lakes and Mississippi drainages. On Long Island, redbfin pickerel are not uncommon in south shore streams and ponds. DEC regulations do not distinguish between species of pickerel, so the size limit is the same as chain pickerel, which is 15 inches.

—Chart Guthrie, DEC Regional Fisheries Manager,
Stony Brook

Family Tradition

I took this photo of my son Christopher with my dad Lewis (a.k.a. "Pa"). Christopher has been asking to go hunting, and Pa (a former NYS Hunter Safety Instructor) was itching to take him. This was Christopher's first time hunting and, as he and Pa were walking in front of me, I couldn't help capture the moment. It illustrates how Pa is teaching Christopher all the aspects of safe and successful hunting.

Jim Wargo
Erie County



We're pleased to hear Christopher is learning safe and happy hunting habits from a great teacher.

—Conservationist staff



Write to us

Conservationist Letters
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Albany, NY 12233-4502

or e-mail us at: magazine@gw.dec.state.ny.us



Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

Sitting Silently

by Heidi Fuge

When I first started hunting, my dad stressed the need for me to sit very still and quiet. He told me that if a deer came by, I couldn't even blink. So I practiced sitting still and holding my eyes wide open, unblinking, until they ran with tears. Eventually, I realized that I didn't need to practice an unblinking stare; how could I possibly shoot with tears streaming down my face? However, with practice, sitting still became easy for me. For this I was rewarded in a variety of wonderful ways.

Once, while sitting on a log at the edge of a field, I felt a strange movement at my feet. Daring not to move a muscle, I glanced down without moving my head. There, I noticed a little brown mouse chewing on the edge of my leather boot. Since I could be seen from the field, I knew that I shouldn't move. But I wasn't pleased to have a mouse chewing on me. So, V E R Y slowly, I raised my foot and shook him off. He was, however, a persistent little fellow and kept coming back. I wouldn't have minded much, except that I kept picturing him tiring of chewing on my boot and deciding to run up my leg. I just KNEW that at the same moment he ran up my leg, a huge buck would appear in the field and I would have to decide whether to jump up and shake off the mouse, who by then would probably be chewing on my face, or shoot the buck.

Deciding that movement now was better than movement later, I raised my foot and gave it a very hard flick. I managed to send the little mouse flying into a patch of leaves. He sat up, considered his situation, and decided (thank heavens!) that my boot was just not worth



Barbara Northrup

it, and scampered off. Of course, the monster buck never appeared but I had a good story to tell at the end of the day.

Another time, while comfortably ensconced behind a downed log, I had an encounter with a squirrel. Again there I was, still and unblinking. And there was a little red squirrel, hip-hopping its way down the log, directly toward me. I had the barrel of my gun resting on the log and the squirrel found that to be an interesting perch. Have you ever tried sighting down your gun with a squirrel perched on it? It's nearly impossible. And I couldn't move because I know red squirrels; once you disturb them, they let the WHOLE WOODS know exactly where you are and you don't have a moment's peace after that. Again the quandary: what was I going to do when that monster buck came charging by? Should I try and get rid of the squirrel now and live with the chattering that would ensue, or should I just sit there and hope that he would go

away before the buck arrived? Decisions, decisions.

Then, the squirrel turned and looked right at me. We were almost nose to nose. I swear I didn't even blink, but the squirrel saw enough to send it off in a screaming frenzy. It tore up the tree next to me and made so much noise, and for so long, that my dad even heard it as he came through the woods to get me. No monster buck that day either. But another good story.

Experiences like these happen to all patient hunters at some time or other; such instances make it easy to sit in the woods for hours on end. There are so many little epics going on around you all the time. If you sit silently, you become part of them.

Adirondack native **Heidi Fuge** was a prize winner in DEC's Great Stories from the Great Outdoors contest in December 2010.

2011 Big Buck Club Awards

The New York State Big Buck Club, Inc. is a private organization that maintains records of large deer and bear taken in New York. Each year since 1972, the Big Buck Club has recognized the hunters who take the largest trophy bucks in the state. The winner in each category receives an original painting of his or her deer.



Largest Archery Deer:
Taken in: Suffolk County
Score: 210-4
Non-typical
Points: 23
Taken by: Mike Giarraputo



Largest Gun Deer:
Taken in: Ontario County
Score: 201-4
Non-typical
Points: 18
Taken by: Mike Canale

For more information, write to: NYSBBC, Records Office, 360 McLean Rd., Kirkwood, NY 13795
Or visit their website at: www.nysbigbuckclub.com



See page 2

Chapel Pond, Essex County

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