

Falconry | The White Pine | Tracking Dogs

NEW YORK STATE

Conservationist

OCTOBER 2013

Autumn
in New York



LARK IN THE PARK 2013!

Come Celebrate the Catskills

From October 5 through 14, 2013, the 10th annual Lark in the Park will offer exciting outdoor events in the Catskills.

Join in the fun by hiking to a Catskill firetower, paddling the Pepacton Reservoir, fishing a world-class trout stream, cycling on the Catskill Scenic Trail, taking a guided nature walk, or attending any number of scheduled cultural or social events. Lark in the Park activities are typically free of charge—and everyone is welcome!

Lark in the Park was created in 2004 to mark the 100th anniversary of the creation of the Catskill Park. Be sure to regularly check the Lark in the Park website at www.catskillslark.org for schedules and other important information, including pre-registration for some events. Follow Lark in the Park on Facebook at www.facebook.com/CatskillsLarkInThePark.



Lark in the Park is a cooperative effort between DEC, NY-NJ Trail Conference, the Catskill Mountain Club, and the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development.



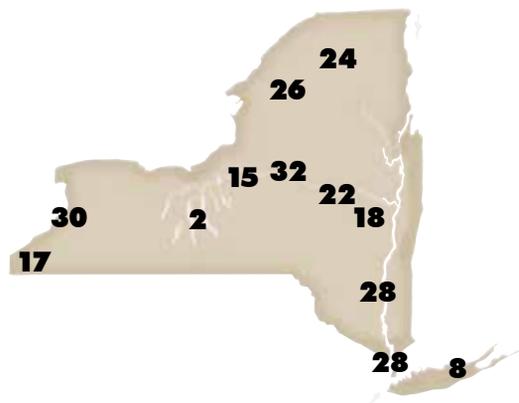
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Jolanta Jeanneney

October 2013 Volume 68, Number 2

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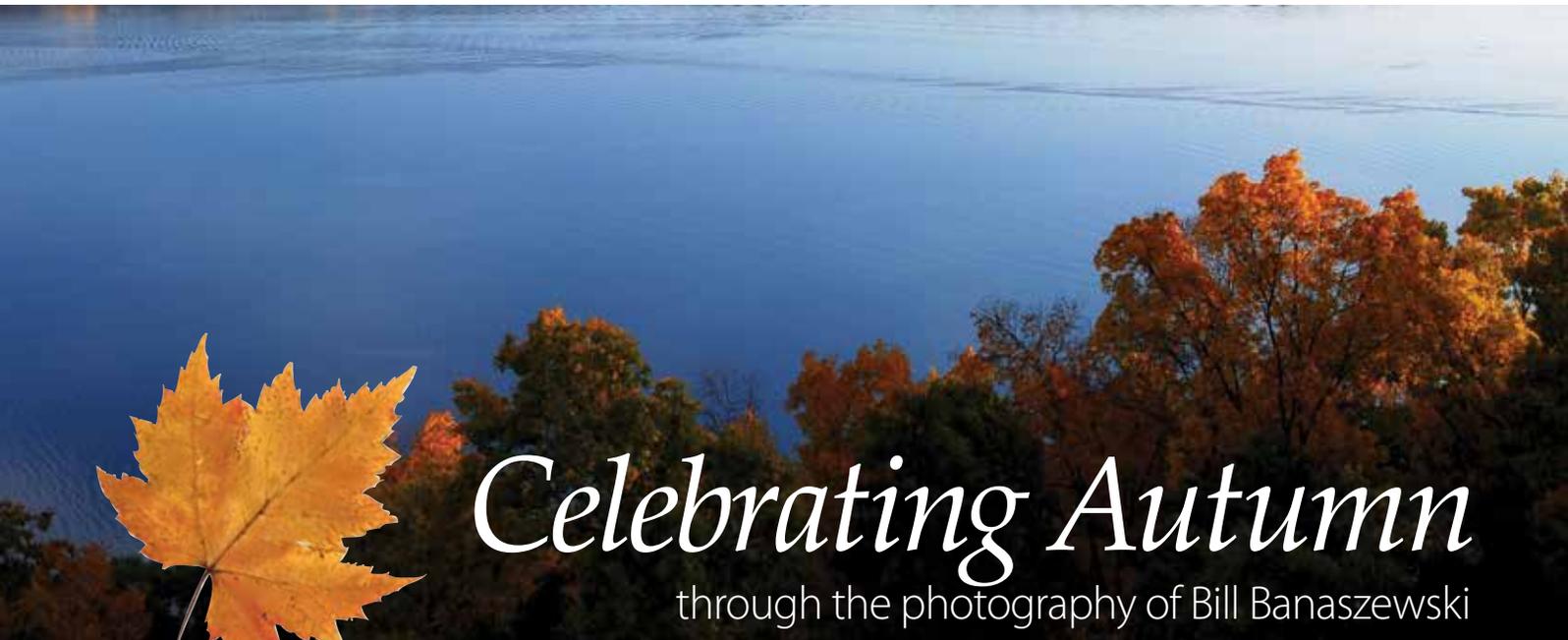


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Celebrating Autumn

through the photography of Bill Banaszewski

“ ... Already, by the first of September, I had seen two or three small maples turned scarlet across the pond, beneath where the white stems of three aspens diverged, at the point of a promontory, next the water. Ah, many a tale their color told! And gradually from week to week the character of each tree came out ... Each morning the manager of this gallery substituted some new picture, distinguished by more brilliant or harmonious coloring, for the old upon the walls ... ”

—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*



Skaneateles Lake

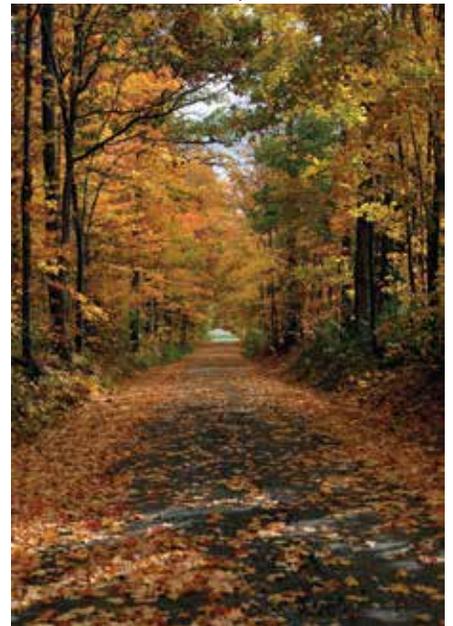
Adirondacks



Letchworth State Park



Fall road, Steuben County



Allegheny State Park

" ... It is a soothing employment, on one of those fine days in the fall when all the warmth of the sun is fully appreciated, to sit on a stump on such a height as this, overlooking the pond, and study the dimpling circles which are incessantly inscribed on its otherwise invisible surface amid the reflected skies and trees. ... Nothing so fair, so pure, and at the same time so large, as a lake, perchance, lies on the surface of the earth. Sky water.... "

—Henry David Thoreau, *Walden*



Skaneateles Lake





Hemlock Lake



Garrett Memorial Chapel
at Keuka Lake



Seneca Lake



Autumn moon



"Thou comest, Autumn, heralded by the rain,
With banners, by great gales incessant fanned ..."
—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, "Autumn"

"... Release one leaf at break of day;
At noon release another leaf;
One from our trees, one far away.
Retard the sun with gentle mist;
Enchant the land with amethyst ..."
—Robert Frost, "October"



The author working with his red-tailed hawk, Emmy.



Angelo Peluso

The Sport of Falconry

By Christopher Paparo

Photos by author (unless otherwise noted)

While at work one day, I met a gentleman named Mario who mentioned that he was a falconer. I was intrigued; I'd never met a falconer before, and quite frankly, didn't know they even still existed except in old movies. I started asking many questions, and after a short talk, Mario offered to take me on an outing with one of his birds. Being an avid hunter and enjoying birding and wildlife photography, I jumped at the chance to combine all three hobbies.

The following week, I accompanied Mario to one of his many hunting spots on the east end of Long Island. Driving down the highway in his Jeep, I could hear a piercing call coming from inside a wooden box he had secured in the back seat. We pulled off the highway and turned down

a bumpy dirt road leading to a field of tall grass and briar patches with tall cedar trees scattered throughout. Almost instantly, the cries from the box became more intense as if the occupant knew where we were and couldn't wait to get out.

Stopping the car, Mario grabbed a single leather welding glove with a ten-inch long leather strip attached to the cuff. He put it on, opened the box, reached in with his gloved hand and brought out one of the most beautiful birds I had ever seen: a female northern goshawk named Nadia. Strong and powerful looking, the bird's wingspan measured more than three feet!

While Nadia stood on Mario's fist, he clipped the leather strip of the glove to a pair of leather strips that dangled off her

legs. These strips are known as jesses and enable the falconer to control the bird while it stands on his/her fist. Each jess is attached to a leather strap, known as an anklet, which is wrapped around each leg of the hawk. Just above the anklets, Nadia also wore a pair of small bells. These special falconry bells are handmade, and have a very high pitch. As Nadia flies around, the sound of the ringing bells allows Mario to keep tabs on her location if she should fly out of sight.

Mario then attached a small radio transmitter to one of the anklets and explained that while the bells are a great way to find Nadia when she is fairly close, sometimes she will fly out of earshot in pursuit of prey. The transmitter enables him to track her up to 15 miles away.

Once outfitted with the transmitter, Nadia was unclipped and immediately flew to the top of the nearest cedar tree. Perched high above the field, she waited there for us to join her. I have hunted fields many times with working dogs that flush rabbits or pheasants, but this was different: there was going to be a role reversal where Mario and I were the “dogs,” and Nadia the “gunner.”

Spreading out approximately 20 yards apart, Mario and I walked the field, pushing through briar patches and other dense cover trying to flush out rabbits. As we made our way through the field, Nadia would fly treetop-to-treetop keeping up with us, but more importantly, she was watching the field ahead. About 75 yards into the field, Mario yelled loudly, “HO! HO!” In an instant, Nadia took off in Mario’s direction, flew right over his head, and was in hot pursuit of a rabbit. I watched in awe as Nadia buzzed back and

forth, in-between the small briar patches after the rabbit.

Suddenly, Nadia slammed through a brush pile and landed on the ground. We ran over to find her standing in front of a woodchuck hole clutching a clump of fur in her talons. The rabbit had escaped. Mario knew that once a rabbit ducks into a hole, it is not seen again during that outing, so he bent down to pick up Nadia.

Nadia hopped onto his fist and ruffled her feathers back into place. I was amazed that she appeared completely unharmed after crashing through such a dense brush pile. It didn’t take her long before she flew to the next tree in the field. Once she was in position, we started the process again.

This happened several more times, and each time the rabbit was victorious. With the sun beginning to set, we headed for the truck, attempting to flush game as we walked. It wasn’t long before I flushed a rabbit from a thick patch of tall grass and

cried out “HO! HO!” The chase was on.

The rabbit entered a briar patch for cover, and without missing a beat, Nadia slammed through the thorns as if they did not exist. As we approached, we realized Nadia had succeeded this time. She spread her wings, covering the rabbit in a behavior known as mantling. This allows her to hide her catch from other hawks that might swoop down to steal her hard-earned meal. When we reached Nadia, she lifted her head, looked at us, and let out loud cries, as if shouting a victory scream.

Nadia wasted no time enjoying her catch: quickly plucking the fur to get at the tasty meal beneath. As is usual for a hawk, she started with the organ meat which is packed full of nutrients. Once she had eaten all of this “good stuff,” Mario traded Nadia a leg of a rabbit that she caught the day before for the carcass of the rabbit she just caught. Mario explained how this allows him to save rabbits to feed Nadia



A northern goshawk mantles a prey item.



After spotting prey from its perch atop a tall tree (inset), the falconer's goshawk takes off after its quarry.



At the end of the hunt, the author's bird returns to accept a treat.

Clifford Dayton

in the future, or to roast himself. I confess it surprised me how easily she gave up the fresh rabbit for the older reward.

Once Mario had the rabbit tucked away in his game bag, we walked back to the truck, leaving Nadia to feed in the field. By the time we reached the truck, Nadia was done with her prize and was looking to see where we had gone. At this point, Mario held up another rabbit leg in his gloved hand, and blew a whistle. In an instant, Nadia landed on his fist to eat the newly offered morsel. When she was done eating, Mario opened the box and Nadia hopped right in, seemingly ready to go home. It was an amazing day; one that caused me to become hooked on falconry.

For the remainder of the season, I accompanied Mario as often as I could, watching not only his goshawk, but also his red-tailed hawk and peregrine falcon. When the season ended, I was disappointed that it would be another six months before we could go afield with the

birds. But disappointment quickly turned to excitement when Mario offered to be my sponsor if I wanted to pursue the sport of falconry. Without hesitation, I said yes.

Falconry requires serious dedication. Unlike a gun in a safe, a live raptor cannot be ignored. They require care and attention 365 days a year. Apprentice falconers must practice under the guidance of a seasoned falconer for at least two years, and can only become licensed if the sponsoring falconer approves.

As an apprentice, I was required to capture my first raptor from the wild, and was only allowed to trap a young red-tailed hawk or an American kestrel. I decided on a red-tail for my first bird, because they will hunt squirrels, which are plentiful near where I live on Long Island.

After building the necessary facilities and obtaining all required state and federal licenses, I captured "Emmy." After two months of fairly intensive training, Emmy had caught her first squirrel.

As the seasons passed, our bond grew stronger and we have become an efficient hunting team. Emmy has had many squirrels, rabbits, muskrats, pheasant, and even a mallard under her talons. Our relationship continues to grow tighter with each passing year, and now we are anxiously awaiting our fifth season together.

It's been many years since Mario shared his love of falconry with me, and I still get a thrill every time I head out with my own birds. Being a falconer takes a lot of work, but the rewards are well worth it.

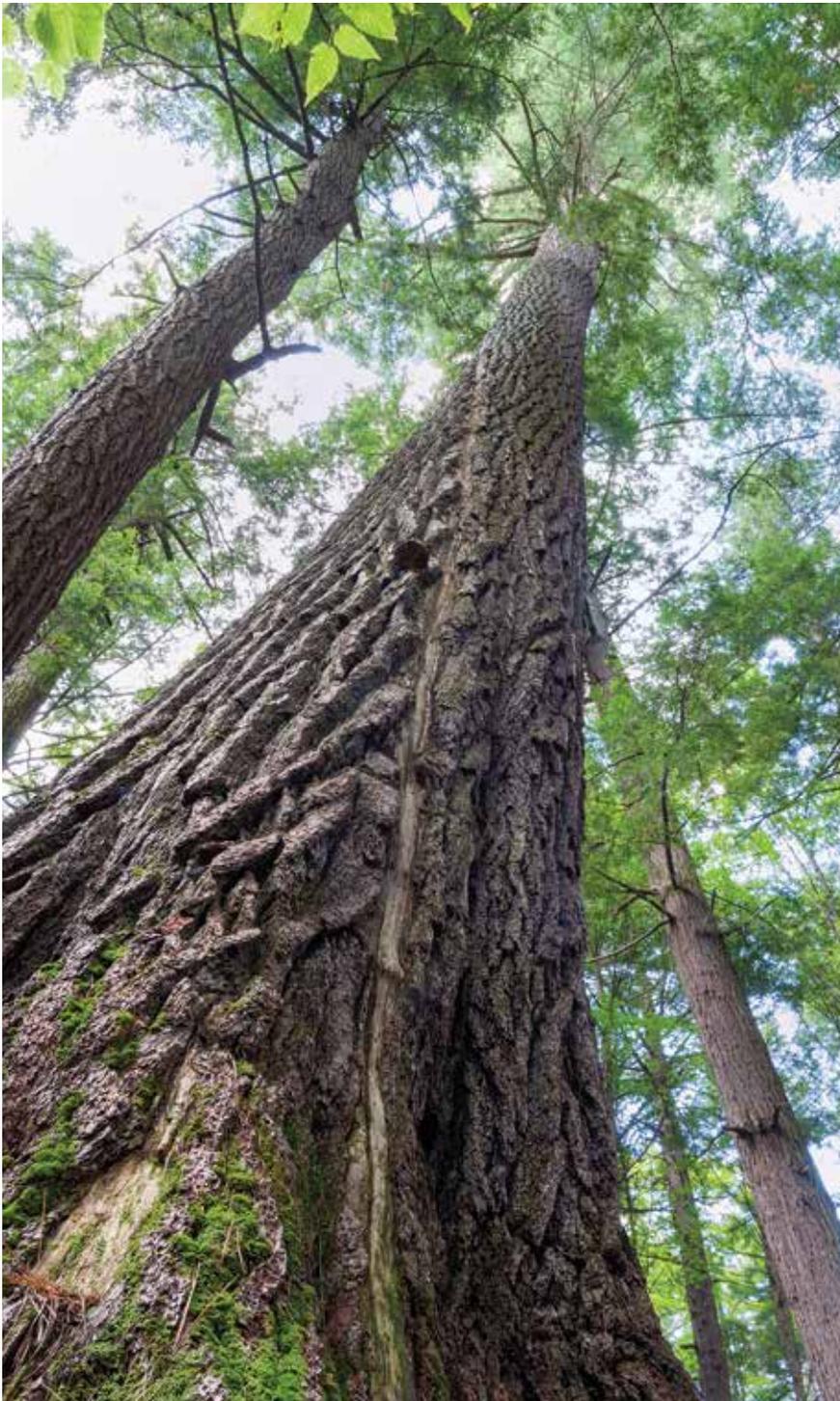
Christopher Paparo is an avid outdoorsman who enjoys fishing, hunting, photography, and of course, falconry. You can check out his images at www.fishguyphotos.com.

Editor's Note: A version of this article appeared in the July 2013 issue of *Fur-Fish-Game* magazine.



EASTERN WHITE PINE: *a monarch among trees*

By Gloria Van Duyne

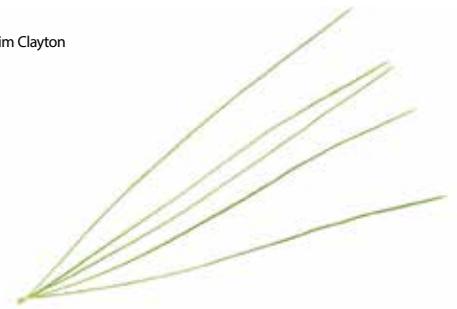


Wayne Jones

The eastern white pine is one of my favorite trees. Tall, statuesque and imposing, it often towers over the other trees in a forest. In fact, the white pine is the tallest tree in New York State, with some reaching nearly 200 feet in height. Elder's Grove, near Paul Smith's College in the Adirondacks, and Pack Demonstration Forest near Warrensburg are both home to specimens taller than 150 feet.

Also known as soft pine, northern pine and Weymouth pine, the white pine is most easily identified by its soft, bluish-green 2-5" long needles, which are set in bundles (called fascicles) of five. Since it is the only five-needled tree in the northeast, this mnemonic device may help you remember how to identify the white pine: it has five needles, and there are five letters in the word "white" (W-H-I-T-E).

Jim Clayton



Sun-loving, the white pine is one of the first trees to colonize old fields. Both young and mature trees provide shade for sun-sensitive trees, and food and shelter for many wildlife species. White pine seeds are eaten by birds such as crossbills, evening grosbeaks and red-breasted nuthatches, as well as three types of squirrels, chipmunks, and other small mammals. Black-capped chickadees, pine warblers and other insect-eaters feed in fissures and furrows on the bark. Porcupines will eat the inner bark. Cavity dwellers such as screech owls, several species



Wayne Jones

Tall, straight and strong, white pine made good ship masts.



Susan Shafer

of woodpeckers, tufted titmice, bats and squirrels will make use of larger white pines with decaying centers.

Black bear sows use the base of large white pines for rest and refuge sites with their cubs in early spring, and snowshoe hare, grey fox, fisher, and many small mammals find cover and food beneath young white pines. Deer also use these young pines as shelter during winter, eating the needles when other food is scarce.

Eagles and osprey prefer to nest in “super canopy” white pines, lone specimens extending above the rest of the forest, which provide easy access to and from the nest. Arrangement of the white pine’s whorled branches provides a strong base for nest construction.

The multifaceted white pine has long been admired and used by people as well. The needles contain large amounts of Vitamins A and C, as well as resveratrol, an anti-oxidant and anti-inflammatory also found in red wine. When pine bark is cut, resin oozes out to seal the wound. It then hardens and turns white. White pine resin has been used to waterproof baskets, pails and boats. Sap flowing through the xylem and phloem (vascular tissues) has antimicrobial properties that has been used to treat wounds and ailments. The sap can also be processed to make turpentine.

Although it’s difficult to imagine today, white pines historically grew as tall as 230 feet. When European colonists arrived in North America, they quickly made use of

these tall pines. Colonists felt it was the perfect building material—the wood was easily worked, and it was relatively lightweight, strong and plentiful. Early settlers used it for framing, furniture, utensils, coffins, bowls, flooring, and much more. Twenty years after the pilgrims arrived, they were shipping white pine as far away as Madagascar.

Because of its length, strength and relative lightness, white pine wood also made great ship masts. During colonial times, a country’s power depended in part on the strength and speed of its navy. The taller the mast and larger the sail, the faster a ship could go. In many ways, the importance of masts could be compared to fuel oil today, because good masts meant

strong propulsion. England had long ago cut its large trees and relied on ship masts cut from firs in the Baltic. Unfortunately they were forced to compete with France and other rivals for the same trees. But then Great Britain turned to white pine, making their ships become the “greyhounds of the sea,” and collectively augmented a powerful naval force.

King George III considered the colonies “Crown Land” and thus their resources were reserved for use by the British Empire. The king became concerned, and rightfully so, that white pines were being cut at an unsustainable rate. The king’s royal surveyors were sent to claim the pines as Crown property. Each white pine was marked with an arrow made by three hatchet slashes on the trunk.

Known as the King’s Arrow and signifying Crown ownership, this emblem enraged landowners and added to the colonies’ unrest against Great Britain. Some believe that in addition to the greater topic of “taxation without representation” and political protests like the Boston Tea Party, the taking of white pine may also have played a part in bringing about the American Revolution. The white pine was depicted on the first colonial flag.

Like other trees, white pine has its share of pests, diseases and other challenges. After 300 years of uncontrolled logging and agricultural clearing, New York started replanting trees to prevent soil erosion, protect water quality, and provide for future sources of timber. But neither New York nor other states had sources of seedlings in quantity, so millions of seedlings were shipped from Europe until state-owned nurseries could be established. Unfortunately, along with the seedlings came “hitchhikers,” like white pine blister rust, which caused up to 80% mortality in mature white pine groves in the early twentieth century. Because white pine blister rust requires a second host plant in the genus *Ribes*



Wayne Jones

(gooseberry and wild currant) to complete its life cycle, a tenacious *Ribes* eradication campaign ensued. Today, wild currants are relatively rare and white pine mortality from rust is now only about 3%.

Some other insects and diseases that affect white pine today include the white pine weevil, red and black turpentine beetle, *Caliciopsis* canker, and *Armillaria* root disease.

In spite of white pine’s many challenges, it continues to be an important part of our landscape, deep in the forest, in old fields, and in our neighborhoods. Spared the ax and chain saw, and with a

little luck to avoid debilitating diseases, these magnificent trees can live hundreds of years. I often notice these towering giants and wonder what animals might be found in and around them.

I have a row of white pines bordering my property. Their “fluffy” evergreen branches provide lovely screening, the birds nest in them, and the squirrels enthusiastically eat the seeds from their cones. I feel honored to have these monarchs of trees grace my yard.

Gloria Van Duyne works for DEC’s Division of Lands and Forests.

Great Tree of Peace: The White Pine

By Neil Patterson Jr., Skarure (Tuscarora)

The white pine is a national symbol to the Haudenosaunee, or “People of the Longhouse.” The tree plays a major role in the story of how five separate, warring nations, the Mohawk, Oneida, Onondaga, Cayuga, and Seneca, became united under one law. A “Great White Pine” is mentioned several times in most versions of the story still recited in Haudenosaunee communities today:

“Thousands of years ago, the people were at war with each other. A man named the Peacemaker saw a vision of a Great White Pine reaching into the sky. Beneath the pine, the weapons of war were buried and four white roots extended in all four directions to the corners of the Earth. Those who followed the roots at the base of the Great White Pine found shelter beneath its branches. At the top, an eagle alerts the people of approaching danger.”

The eastern white pine (*Pinus strobus*) is generally considered to be the “Great White Pine” in this formative story. Eastern white pine is the largest native conifer in Haudenosaunee territory, whose aboriginal range nearly mirrors that of the tree, reaching from the southern Appalachian Mountains into the upper Great Lakes and St. Lawrence Valley. White pine is also the only five-needled tree in New York State, and has been used by generations of Haudenosaunee storytellers to depict the “bundling” of five nations together under one law.

The Hiawatha Belt, which records the formation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, is a purple and white belt made from deer sinew and beads cut from the shells of quahog clams. The belt features four rectangles representing (from left to right) the Seneca, the Cayuga, the Oneida and the Mohawk, united by a line with an elongated triangle in the center representing the Great White Pine. The tree symbol also represents the Onondaga Nation, in whose territory the Confederacy was formed and where the central fire of the Confederacy government is kept.

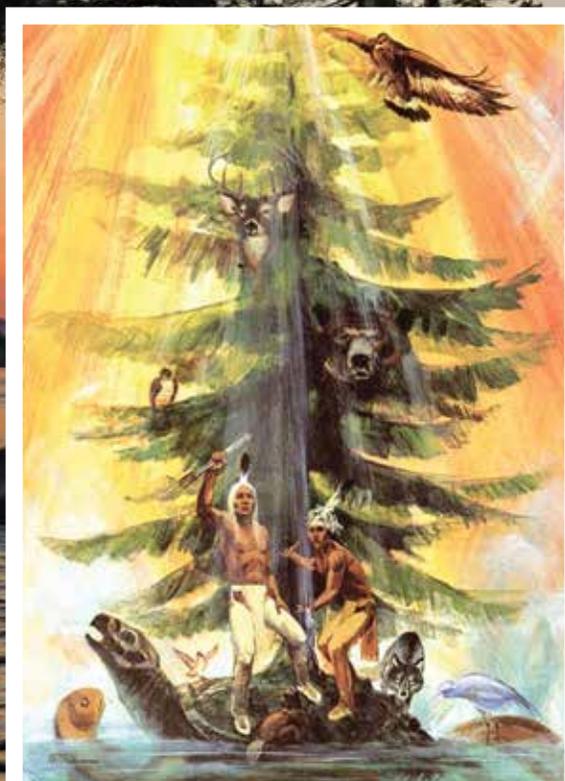


In 1722, after being driven from North Carolina, the Tuscarora Nation followed the roots of this metaphorical tree back to the Confederacy. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy is often referred to as the “Six Nations,” or “Iroquois Confederacy.”

The Great White Pine is found throughout historical and contemporary Haudenosaunee culture, and is often depicted growing on the back of a giant snapping turtle (see image at right) to portray the Creation Story of the Haudenosaunee. (See *Conservationist*, January 1976, page 3.)

I’ve often wondered what the Great White Pine tree must have looked like along the shores of Onondaga Lake more than a thousand years ago. Today, some of the largest old-growth white pines are found in portions of the Five Ponds Wilderness in the Adirondack Park. During a recent visit to this area, I was reminded of the majesty of the Great White Pine and the ancient story of peace.

Neil Patterson Jr., Director of the Tuscarora Environment Program, is a member of the Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force.



“The Iroquois Tree of Peace” by Oren Lyons, Onondaga

WILDLIFE HEALTH CORNER: A Look at Chronic Wasting Disease

By Dr. Krysten Schuler

First in a series of wildlife health-related topics.

Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) is a fatal disease that affects deer, elk and moose. The name refers to the emaciated appearance of animals in the final stages of infection. Infected deer may also drool and wander aimlessly. CWD in deer and elk is similar to “mad-cow disease” in cattle. At this time there is no evidence that humans can be infected with CWD. To be cautious, however, public health officials recommend that people refrain from eating meat from any animal known to be infected with CWD, and for hunters to take precautions when field dressing animals in areas where CWD occurs. Check out DEC’s website at www.dec.ny.gov/animals/86796.html#Human for tips on handling, processing and eating big game meat.

CWD is neither a virus nor a bacterium. It is transmitted by an infectious protein called a “prion” that causes holes to form in the brain. CWD is difficult to control in both wild and captive deer. Infected

deer may appear perfectly healthy for more than a year. During that time, they can infect other deer directly or indirectly by shedding prions into the environment via their urine, feces and saliva. Once in the soil, prions may remain infectious for many years. No treatment or vaccines are available for deer, and deer are only tested after they die.

When it comes to CWD, we would be wise to recall Ben Franklin’s adage, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” This is because once the disease is established, little can be done to eradicate it, and new infections keep popping up. Currently, wild deer are infected in 18 states; in 13 of those, CWD has been found in captive deer or elk.

New York is the only state to have seemingly eliminated CWD in the wild. In 2005, CWD was detected on two captive deer farms in Oneida County. DEC immediately set up a “CWD Containment Area.” With the assistance of NYS Department

of Agriculture and Markets and USDA Wildlife Services, DEC began a \$1 million operation to remove and test as many deer as possible from this area. Two infected wild deer were found near the captive deer farms. After seven years of intensive surveillance, no additional cases have been found. It appears that quick action may have removed infected deer before the soil was heavily contaminated with prions.

Other states haven’t been as lucky. CWD was just discovered in Pennsylvania. In Wisconsin, CWD was first detected in wild and captive deer in 2002. Last year, 20% of adult bucks and 10% of adult does in Wisconsin were infected. We hope education and prevention measures will keep CWD-infected materials and animals out of New York.

Dr. Krysten Schuler is a wildlife disease ecologist at Cornell University’s Animal Health Diagnostic Center.

Keep CWD out of NYS



Jim Clayton

- If you see sick or strangely acting deer, contact your local DEC Wildlife Office (www.dec.ny.gov/about/50230.html) or call the Environmental Conservation Officer Dispatch at 1-877-457-5680.
- Don’t feed deer—concentrating deer at feeding sites increases the risk of disease transmission.
- Place your deer carcass remains in a plastic bag, and dispose of the bag in a landfill.
- If you have a successful deer or elk hunt in another state, bring back only the meat, cleaned skull cap, or taxidermy mount.
- Choose synthetic deer lures; real deer urine can contain infectious prions.

For more information, visit the following websites:

www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7191.html

www.cwd-info.org

<http://knowcwg.com>

On Patrol

Carl Heilman II

Real stories from Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers in the field

Night Rescue—Essex County

ECO Steven Stubing was at his camp near Eagle Lake in the Town of Ticonderoga when he was awakened by a loud noise at 1:00 a.m. Suspecting a vehicle accident, he grabbed a flashlight and his cell phone, and went seeking the source. ECO Stubing found a tractor-trailer upside down in the lake with its cab almost completely underwater. The driver was conscious, but was trapped inside the cab with only a small amount of air. Stubing attempted to open the doors, but they were badly damaged and wouldn't open. Stubing called for help and remained in the water to keep the driver calm until emergency responders arrived. A short time later, responders were able to free the driver before the cab submerged completely. The driver was taken to the hospital with only minor injuries. Stubing also assisted with containment of the petroleum spill from the truck until DEC Spill Response staff arrived.



Just Watching—Chenango County

The day before bow season opened, ECOs Brett Armstrong and Jamie Powers responded to a deer-baiting complaint in the Town of Guilford. Shortly before sunset, they arrived at a seasonal camp with a truck parked in the driveway. In the back of the truck were two bags of corn and a bag of deer feed. Armstrong and Powers began scouring the 120-acre property looking for potential baiting spots. Eventually, they found a man dressed in camouflage in a tree stand. He had a bow in hand and broadhead-tipped arrows. The tree stand overlooked a fresh corn pile. Surprised to see the ECOs, the man claimed he wasn't going to shoot any deer, just watch them. When asked about the bow and arrows, he finally confessed and was charged with hunting deer out of season and over bait.

Contributed by ECO Lt. Tom Caifa and Forest Ranger Capt. Stephen Scherry

Marijuana Misfits—Chautauqua County

While patrolling an area of Mount Pleasant State Forest, Ranger David Pachan came upon an unoccupied vehicle along the roadside. It aroused his suspicion, especially since it was raining heavily. Looking inside the vehicle, Ranger Pachan spotted a container of plant fertilizer. He then searched the surrounding area but found nothing, so decided to wait down the road in case anybody exited the woods. A short time later, the vehicle's lights came on, and Ranger Pachan returned to the vehicle. There was still no one inside. However, while searching the area a second time, he found two subjects hiding. During questioning, they admitted to having marijuana plants and led Ranger Pachan to two buckets containing three plants each. While arresting the subjects, he also found a small plastic bag of marijuana. Both subjects were charged with unlawful growing of *Cannabis* and unlawful possession of marijuana.

ASK THE ECO

Q: I have taken a deer, and would like to take its carcass to a meat processor and its head to a taxidermist. Which part of the deer should the tag go on?

A: The tag must remain with the carcass. When transporting the carcass, you must not destroy evidence of the deer's sex, and you must attach a tag with the name and address of the taxidermist handling the head. You are required to create an additional tag with your signature, address and license number, the name and address of the taxidermist and, if it's a male deer, the number of points on each antler, and attach it to the deer's head.



JoLanta Jeanneny



Gordon Allen

wirehaired dachshund puppies

The author holding Clary von Moosbach.

 *Born to Track:*
 THE DOGS OF DEER SEARCH, INC.

By John Jeanneny

The hunter holds his breath as a buck walks in closer to his stand. His bow string is drawn, but just as he releases the arrow, the deer suddenly veers away. The arrow strikes the deer, but not in the intended spot. After due diligence in searching for the deer, but still unable to locate the animal or a strong blood trail, the hunter calls Deer Search, Inc. The hunter knows that a team of a tracking dog and handler will either find the deer, or determine, with a high degree of certainty, that it was not seriously wounded and will survive.

Deer Search teams have been helping hunters track and recover wounded deer and bear for nearly 40 years. What began in 1976 as an experimental research program to use leashed tracking dogs to find wounded big game, has grown into an official program that has successfully recovered hundreds of animals. The idea came from Europe, but had to be modified and adapted to conditions here. Initially, leashed tracking dogs were a hard sell. For years, DEC had successfully repeated the message: "Dogs and deer hunting don't mix." But the dogs proved



Mark Niad

Marc Niad holding his German jagdterrier.

themselves worthy, showing they could follow and locate their quarry, even when there was no visible blood trail. Ten years later, in 1986, the New York State Legislature passed a bill legalizing the use of leashed tracking dogs for finding wounded deer and bear, and a state license for tracking dog handlers was created.

The tracking dogs of Deer Search have been, and continue to be, the core of the program. But equally important is a close, working partnership between dog and handler. Sometimes this means “reading” your canine partner’s problem and helping him or her track in a particularly difficult situation, such as across a plowed field where there is little or no scent.

When the aroma of wild turkeys or fresh, healthy deer overwhelm the faint scent of a wounded-deer track that may be many hours old, handlers can steady their dogs and help them through the distractions.

Tracking wounded big game with a leashed tracking dog is a unique experience.

Over the years, many handlers have learned that it is deeply satisfying to succeed with a dog in a difficult search that neither team member could have normally accomplished alone.

Much of the early success of the program can be credited to the state’s first leashed tracking dog, Clary von Moosbach. A 22-pound, wirehaired dachshund, she educated her handler (me) and many hunters as well. I got a kick out of seeing the surprise on most hunters’ faces when Clary first hopped out of the truck. They were expecting a coonhound-sized dog, and clearly had doubts that little Clary was up to the task. But time and time again, Clary changed their minds as she successfully tracked and located the wounded animals.

As New York’s program evolved, dachshunds of the wirehaired variety became the most widely used breed. These dachshunds are registered by the American



Young wirehaired dachshunds exploring the great outdoors.

Kennel Club, and their ancestors are hunting/tracking dachshunds from Europe, where for generations they have been bred and used for finding wounded big game. Generally shorter in the back and higher on the leg than their American cousins, these European dachshunds were developed in Germany to work underground on foxes and badgers, and also to track in rough terrain.

Wirehaired dachshunds make excellent tracking dogs for several reasons. They have exceptional noses and so can learn to follow the “right” deer on a day-old trail. When there is no blood trail, they can track a particular deer by following the highly individualized scent left by the glands located between the cloves of the deer’s hooves. Wirehaired dachshunds



The author with “Tom vom Linteler-Forst” (one of his tracking dogs) on a wounded deer call.

also make excellent household companions who bond closely with the family, especially with their handler.

For some handlers, tracking becomes addictive and they move from using the multi-purpose dachshund to a breed specifically bred for tracking. In Deer Search, the second most popular breed among handler fanatics is currently the Bavarian mountain bloodhound (BMH). This is a 40- to 50-pound dog whose ancestry goes back to the early bloodhounds of the Middle Ages. They are half the size of today's American bloodhound and are much easier to handle on steep, slippery slopes and in briar thickets. The BMH has a bloodhound-class nose, and most of them bond closely with their handlers.

Rommel is a BMH who has the superior nose and cooperative attitude characteristic of the breed. In one

instance, Rommel and his handler Fred Zoeller tracked and found an exceptional buck 17 hours after it had been shot during rifle season. The hunter had been able to follow the deer for 300 yards before losing the trail in swamp water. The hunter called Fred in Cooperstown; the next morning the team began tracking from the site where the deer had been hit. By the time Rommel reached the swamp, he had assembled all the deer's scents in his consciousness and tracked through the water by following wisps of body scent on swamp grass. He located the dead deer on high ground on the other side of the swamp, enabling the hunter to use the meat.

Labrador retrievers have proven very effective deer trackers as well. Highly intelligent and cooperative, labs learn rapidly to stay on the "right" deer track,



Labrador retriever

Jolanta Jeanneny



A hunter with his deer that Rommel (a BMH) tracked across a swamp.

Fred Zoeller



Often used for hunting, German shorthaired pointers also make excellent tracking dogs.

which is actually the most challenging aspect of training. The problem with some labs is that they have been bred exclusively as easy-going house pets to the point that they have lost their instinctive “prey drive,” a trait inherited from the dog’s wolf ancestors, and essential for being a good tracker.

But good tracking dogs cannot be selected by breed, and across New York there are a number of different breeds that track successfully. Scenting power is very important, but intelligence and a desire to cooperate with the handler count for even

more. Versatile hunting dogs like German shorthaired and wirehaired pointers are proving themselves here, as they did in their country of origin. In southeastern New York, hunters are served by an outstanding German jagdterrier owned by Marc Niad. Miniature dachshunds of about 13 pounds are also finding New York deer, despite their small body mass that can be a handicap in cold, wet conditions. While beagles have not caught on widely in New York, one outstanding beagle named Mickey found 160 deer for his owner Tim Nichols.

Tracking wounded big game with a leashed tracking dog is a unique experience, and something that handlers do for free (unless they are a Licensed Guide who can charge a fee). The rewards come from knowing that you are doing the right thing: reducing animal suffering and preventing the waste of venison. New York’s program proved so

successful that 23 other states followed our example and legalized leashed tracking dogs.

To me, using leashed tracking dogs has been a way of life, and something I hope to do for years to come. I’ve found that tracking with my dog on the end of a thirty foot leash has made me more aware of his world of scent, and opened my eyes to a whole new dimension of nature.

Co-founder of Deer Search, Inc. in New York, **John Jeanneney** has owned and hunted with European wirehaired dachshunds since he brought his first dachshund back from Germany in 1965. Check out his website at www.born-to-track.com.

For more information on New York’s leashed tracking dog program, visit:

www.dec.ny.gov/permits/25020.html

For more information on Deer Search, Inc., an organization of volunteers who help hunters find deer wounded during hunting season, visit: <http://deersearch.org>



Andriel Nicolaou

Nova, a German wirehaired pointer



TWO DEER *in* TWO MINUTES

Dave Spier

By George Steele

Photos by Anita Sanchez (unless otherwise noted)

I hunt.

Some of the students and teachers I meet in my environmental education programs are surprised by this. But I don't try to hide it. When kids ask where'd I get that deer skin, or where'd I get the deer skull, I tell them I got it from a deer I hunted for food.

As an educator, the most important fact I share is that people are *a part of* nature, not *apart from* it. Eating a deer connects me to the land, plants, sunshine and water that make up my world. Eating that deer connects me to a food chain that I understand and experience firsthand. There are no feed lots or antibiotics, and no overcrowding or manure runoff hidden from view. It's just a wild deer walking through the woods that I am lucky enough to shoot.

Of course I "hunt" other things, too. Not to kill, but to observe and study. I agree with the famous biologist, E. O. Wilson, who said that we each have an innate desire to connect to the natural world. This is something I am able to fulfill when I hunt. In my outdoor exploration, I search for birds, wildflowers, insects, fungi; nothing is too small or insignificant. To me, nature study is one

marvelous hunt, a treasure hunt of wonder and mystery. I've even hunted ticks along a trail observing how they'd sit perched on the edge of grass stems waiting for their prey—me—to pass by.



When deer hunting, one's fortune can change quickly.

New York State Conservationist, October 2013

Many's the time while deer hunting I've done more bird watching than deer hunting. More often than not there aren't any deer to be seen. Not so with birds. Sitting in my deer stand I've seen: northern shrikes hunting from a tree limb; a great horned owl flying ahead of a friend on a deer drive; and black-capped chickadees landing on my tree stand, responding to my "spishing" sounds.

But I do go deer hunting hoping to get a deer. I'm not really looking for big antlers; I'm hunting for meat. In my family, venison is the primary red meat we eat. If my deer hunting is successful, we seldom buy beef.

This put me in somewhat of a bind last fall. In my experience, hunting requires some skill, but there's even more need for a little luck. I'd been unlucky in 2011, and the '12 season was shaping up to be a repeat. I was scheduled for shoulder surgery in the middle of the southern zone regular deer season, which would cut short my opportunity to get a deer.

The first weekend had looked so promising, but that's always the case. I think that might just be human nature. I don't know any deer hunter who goes into the woods thinking, "I'm not going

to get a deer." In fact, I did see a deer but it was too far off for me to get a shot. It had actually walked past another of my tree stands, leaving me to second guess my choice of where to set up. The next weekend, with my surgery only a few days away, I headed out for what would be my last Saturday of hunting.

I decided to use the other tree stand this time, fighting the urge to think that deer would now pass my first stand. On the way to my stand, I spotted a doe coming across the field on the other side of some thick brush. She was headed right toward me. When I spotted her, she stopped and looked right at me. I stood still. She wasn't alarmed and turned to her right to follow the hedge row, and disappeared behind some brush. As I waited for her to come back into view, I picked out a spot where I would have a good shot. Moments passed and she didn't appear.

I began to wonder if she might have turned around and gone back in the direction she had come from. In my impatience I chose to move slightly to get a better view into the field. As I did, I saw her standing out in the open, looking at me. I took aim and shot.

Nothing happened. I missed, but the doe didn't panic. She just turned slightly, giving me an even better angle, and my second shot hit the mark. She went down immediately, but made a noise. I thought, "Oh no, I've just wounded her. I'd better get up there." I reloaded and began my way into the hedgerow.

As I got to the hedgerow I looked up and saw a deer looking right at me. My first thought was, "Uh-oh, she's back up," but when I looked more closely, I realized it was a buck. It looked like a fine four-pointer. The buck was facing me at a slight angle, which is not ideal, but I was close, so I took aim and shot. He immediately went down. I made my way to where both deer lay dead; the doe about 20 feet from the buck. I had gotten two deer only moments apart. That's how deer hunting is sometimes: all or nothing. To top it off, the buck wasn't a fork-horn after all, but a nice seven-pointer.

My freezer is full of venison. My shoulder is repaired, healed and working again. And I'm still on the hunt. As a matter of fact, I just lead a night program hunting for beautiful large silk moths that can only be found flying on early summer nights.

You see, good hunts don't always end with something to eat.

Consulting environmental educator **George Steele** lives close to the land on his farm in rural Montgomery County.



An environmental educator, the author tanned his deer hides and cleaned the buck's skull for use in his programs.



The Wild Center

A museum and environmental education center located in the heart of the Adirondacks in Tupper Lake—size: 31 acres

A premier watchable wildlife site

By John Razzano



Susan Shafer

A viewing platform overlooks the Raquette River.



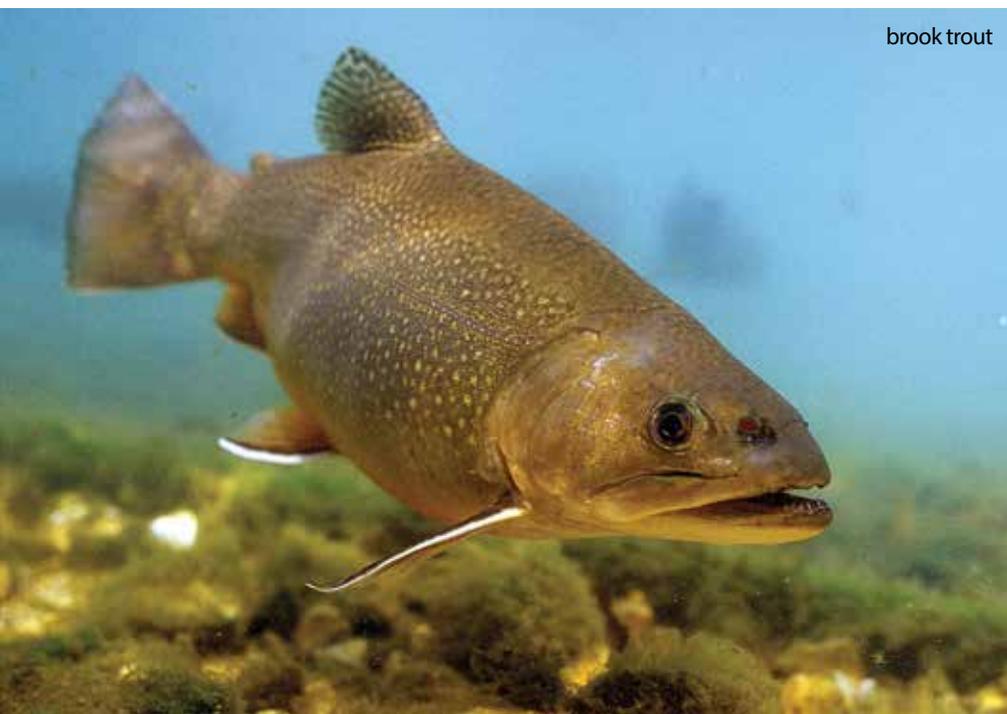
Susan Shafer

With hands-on indoor and outdoor nature exhibits, and hundreds of live animals (from big trout and salmon swimming in impressive floor-to-ceiling aquariums, to tiny turtles the size of walnuts), The Wild Center has fascinating discoveries that greet visitors at every turn. The center's beautiful mountain location, many cleverly designed displays, theater, state-of-the-art multi-media exhibits, and entertaining live critter programs ensure visitors will be delighted and inspired as they learn about Adirondack wildlife and their mountain environment.

In keeping with a place that celebrates nature, the center's buildings are innovatively designed to minimize their environmental footprint.

Wildlife to Watch

The most popular indoor attraction is the "Living River Trail" exhibit with its live northern river otters. You'll be enchanted watching these graceful aquatic mammals as they effortlessly glide around like underwater acrobats in their glass-enclosed river habitat. Staff regularly bring out these furry entertainers for a closer look, and their antics never fail to delight.



brook trout

Eric Engbretson

Porcupines, owls, ravens and timber rattlesnakes are some of the other extraordinary forest denizens that entertain visitors. The museum puts all of the Adirondack creatures and landscapes in context, with exhibits that take you from the mountain-grinding glaciers of the earth's great ice ages to the present.

Outside, learn how wildlife habitats are changing over time as you follow

trails with exhibits on forest ecology. Or, observe the variety of forest birds and waterfowl that reside in or migrate through the Tupper Lake area. Be sure to check the seasonal schedule for great field and indoor programs too.

John Razzano is a contributing editor to *Conservationist*.



Site Features

Site Notes: Open daily from Memorial Day through October 31, from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. During the winter, the center is open Friday through Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Closed during April. There is an entrance fee.

Trails: Two miles of trails take you through the center's habitats. One trail leads to an oxbow on the Raquette River with a scenic overlook platform. Another trail includes a bird blind. Interpretive signs provide information about various points of interest. Center staff regularly lead guided nature walks.

Accessibility: The visitors center/museum has accessible features and some of the outdoor exhibits are also accessible.

Directions: In Tupper Lake, take Hosley Ave. off Route 3. The entrance to the center is on the left.

Contact: 518-359-7800
45 Museum Drive, Tupper Lake
<http://wildcenter.org>



painted turtle

Susan Shafer

courtesy of author



COMING HOME *to Jadwin Forest*



By Gary Brown

If you drive through Lewis County on Route 812, sooner or later you will pass through the Frank E. Jadwin Memorial Forest. To many people, this huge tract of 20,000 acres of public land is just that. But to me, it is someplace special. You see, for many generations of my family, part of this place was home.

From the 1880s through the 1930s, my family farmed 600 acres of this land. This is where my great-grandfather landed, shortly after leaving England with his Irish wife. This is where my grandmother was born.

Many of us still meet here to hunt deer every year. Folks come from Texas, Pennsylvania, or from wherever life has taken them. It is certainly not the best place to go deer hunting, but for us, it's the only place to go.

We enter the woods on a path that is little more than a rut left over from the wagon trail to Hay Barn Hill. By now it has seen six generations of Browns. The old, hand-laid stone house foundation is still here, just to the left of the trail. I look at it every time I pass. There is nothing

new to see; I guess I am just paying homage. In the late 1800s the house that stood here was home to five adults and eleven kids. If I try hard enough, I can see my grandmother Ellen as a three-year-old playing in the backyard in 1878. It's always good for a private smile.

Several hundred yards down the trail, I pass Gramp's Pine. Although it's just a huge pine tree to others, it's a storybook to us, and I often stop to rest for a minute, or to simply reflect on my way out of the woods. A few hundred yards farther in,

We moved away from this place, but we never really left.

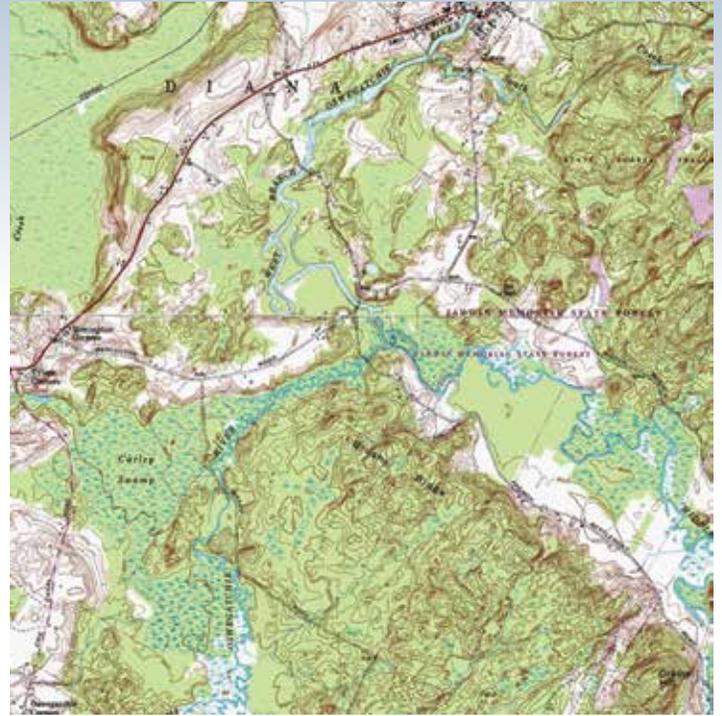
there are rock piles on both sides of the trail. I am amazed that anyone could have scratched out a living on this rocky land. From this vantage, even a stranger can figure out that someone cleared a pasture here long ago. I keep to myself that I know who did it, and just about when.

Nearly a mile from the main road, I arrive at Hay Barn Hill. Here is where our hunting party gathers, even after 132 years. Here is the hallowed ground: Tim's Rock, the White Birches, Piano Key Swamp and The Rocks. You can look for the names on your map, but you won't find them—they are known only to us. This is where my son got his first buck, and where my brother got his last.

I can see the ghost of a relative behind every tree. The old spring is still there, still full of water. I feel protective of the area, so you'll have to pardon me if I refuse to show you where it is.

The guy across the road now owns what once was Elmer Young's camp. He never knew Elmer. That is his loss. Elmer hunted and trapped these woods to survive. His stories mesmerized me as a kid. They still do.

In 1985, I came here from Pittsburgh to hunt with my father. While we were here, Dad had a stroke. Three nights later in his hospital room, he told me that if he was going to die, at least he was in the right place. You see, we moved away from this place, but we never really left.



Courtesy of USGS

People come and go, but these lands remain. Like the rocks that pepper its fields and woods, Frank E. Jadwin Memorial Forest is a beautiful constant in a rapidly changing world.

For a lucky few, it is full of private memories.

Gary Brown is at home in the Adirondacks and on the St. Lawrence River.



Edwin Sykes

Take a Hike!

Located in northern Lewis County, 20,412-acre Frank E. Jadwin Memorial State Forest is one of the largest and most diverse state forests in New York. The area contains more than 12,000 acres of natural hardwood and conifer forest, 5,000 acres of softwood plantations, 2,500 acres of ponds and wetlands, and 500 acres of brush land, historic sites, and other unique areas. There are several trout streams here, including the West Branch of the Oswegatchie River, Blanchard Creek, Brown Creek, and Compo Creek.

The forest was named after Frank E. Jadwin, a former Conservation Department District Forester who was locally instrumental in the acquisition and establishment of the state forests that exist today. Visitors can explore a number of trails. There is motor vehicle access on many miles of roads, and there are (via a permit) special motorized routes for people with disabilities.

Directions: Access to the forest is located off State Route 812, approximately six miles south of Harrisville. From Harrisville, take Routes 3 & 812 south for three miles, then continue to follow Route 812 south another 3 miles.





2012 Hunting Season Wrap-Up

New York bear hunters took 1,337 black bears during the 2012 hunting season, making it the third highest bear harvest on record in the state. (Harvest was 1,864 in 2003 and 1,487 in 2009). Deer hunters harvested approximately 243,000 deer (124,000 antlerless deer and 119,000 adult bucks) during the 2012-13 season; about a six percent increase from the previous year. To check out the complete reports, visit www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/42232.html. Also be sure to visit www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/86468.html for results of the 2012 Youth Deer Hunt.

Trees for Arbor Day

This past Arbor Day, DEC forest rangers led a day of tree planting in the Hudson River Special Management Area along the Upper Hudson River in Warrensburg. Staff from the non-profit organization, Adirondack Wild: Friends of the Forest Preserve, and boy scouts and troop leaders from Boy Scout Troop 100 in Warrensburg joined in planting trees to prevent erosion and to re-green former campsites abused by years of overuse. DEC's Saratoga Tree Nursery provided a variety of



DEC photo

seedlings and potted trees, and forest rangers, led by Chuck Kabrehl, Evan Donlon and Art Perryman, imparted lessons of tree planting and careful stewardship of our Forest Preserve and Upper Hudson River. A spirit of friendly competition also ensued, to see who could plant and water the most trees!

CWD Regulations Amended

DEC has adopted changes to its Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) regulations that prohibit the importation of certain parts of white-tailed deer or elk taken in Pennsylvania. This is in response to the first confirmed case of CWD in Pennsylvania last fall. CWD is a contagious, neurological disease affecting deer, elk and moose. (See Wildlife Health Corner on page 16 for information about the disease.) Since movement of infected meat may be one route of spreading this disease, hunters who take deer or elk in Pennsylvania are required to remove the brain, eyes, spinal cord and other parts, before entering New York. DEC advises hunters not to consume the meat of any animal that acts abnormally. For more on CWD, visit www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7191.html.

Grants to Improve River Access

DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program and the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission recently awarded grants totaling \$117,611 to four communities to support projects that will provide access to the Hudson River and its tributaries for fishing, wildlife education and river watching in underserved communities, including for people with disabilities and individuals living in disadvantaged neighborhoods. Recipients



DEC photo

were: The City of Albany, to increase educational and recreational opportunities along Patroon Creek in the Tivoli Lake Preserve; The City of Kingston to install a fishing pier on Rondout Creek; West Harlem Environmental Action Inc., to develop plans for a new community center for ecological education and recreational activities; and Yonkers, Groundwork Hudson Valley, to develop access plans near Saw Mill River for fishing, birding, walking, and environmental education. For more information, contact DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program at (845) 256-3016, or visit www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4920.html.

Conservationist for Kids Gets Kudos

DEC's Division of Public Affairs and Education, and the Division of Fish, Wildlife and Marine Resources recently received an award from the Northeast Conservation Information and Education Association for the *Conservationist for Kids* April 2012 issue, "Habitat is where it's at." The award is given to an individual or group for service to the field of information and education in the conservation and management of fish and/or wildlife. The magazine encourages youngsters to explore the world outside and learn about natural resources first-hand. Gina Jack, editor of *Conservationist for Kids*, noted that each issue is a product of a partnership among resource professionals, educational specialists and editors, with designer Frank Herec bringing the words to life with creative graphics. *Conservationist for Kids* is included three times each year in the *Conservationist*.



EPF Anniversary

This year marks the 20th anniversary of New York's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF), an important source of funding to support projects that protect the environment and enhance communities. During the past 20 years, EPF has invested billions of dollars in clean air and water, conservation, recreational opportunities, and a green economy. EPF monies have been used to build new parks, add to the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserves, and conserve working forests and farms. Visit www.dec.ny.gov/about/92815.html for more information.



Smiley Salamander

I found this spotted salamander slowly climbing through the grass in my front yard. It paused for the photo with the Catskill Mountains in the background. Fifteen minutes later, all I could see was two inches of its tail as it burrowed under the grass for the night.

Andrew Thompson
Freehold, Greene County

Great eye—and photo! Spotted salamanders are found throughout New York and the eastern and midwestern U.S., but are hard to find due to their secretive habits. They tend to spend much of the year in tunnels beneath the ground feeding on earthworms and only emerge to breed and lay eggs in vernal pools.

—Eileen Stegemann, Assistant Editor

Froggy Friend

This summer, an odd friend lived in my bluebird house: an eastern gray tree frog. I first found him in May when I was checking for a bluebird nest. I figured his presence was a one-time thing so I took him from the box and put him behind our pool, but he was back the next day. He lived in the birdhouse all summer.



Around September I saw him less and less, until I didn't see him anymore. He probably went under a log or pile of leaves to hibernate, because gray tree frogs hibernate on land in winter. I hope I see him next summer.

Jay Bartow
Clifton Park, Saratoga County

What a great opportunity you had to observe nature. We hope you see him next summer, too!
—Conservationist staff

Fall Flames

I thought your readers would be interested in this photo I took of a unique waterfall in a county park in the Buffalo suburb of Orchard Park. It is known as “Eternal Flame Falls.”

Adam Yetter
Blasdell, Erie County



The beautiful “Eternal Flame Falls” are located in Shale Creek in Orchard Park. The flame is actually fueled by methane gas escaping through fissures in the rock, and despite its name, sometimes dies out. However, it can be easily rekindled with a common barbecue lighter.

—Samuel Christenfeld, 2012 *Conservationist* summer intern

(Editor’s note: I’d check with the local authorities before I touched a flame to a source of leaking gas!)

Spooky Squirrel

While checking our trail cam photos for deer, we were pleasantly surprised to find this flying squirrel posing for us!

Michael Morsch Sr.
Long Island



An image fit for Halloween!
—Conservationist staff

✉ LETTERS

Magazine Abroad

I am an associate wildlife biologist monitoring cheetah populations in Kenya. I was analyzing hairs from cheetah scat at the Kenya Wildlife Service laboratory when I noticed a *Conservationist* magazine in the library. It was from 1986, and it had been mailed to someone in Arlington, VA and somehow ended up in Nairobi! I am originally from NY and interned with DEC for a couple of summers in college, so it was nice to see a piece of home here in Kenya.

Deanna Russell



Thanks for the great picture and update! Good to hear you're able to enjoy a slice of New York while doing such important work in Kenya. Have any other readers found the magazine overseas?

—Jenna Kerwin, Staff Writer

Fall Ride

I thought I'd share a photo of my son, Aven, enjoying a leaf-covered path in Schenectady's Central Park.

Erik Schmitt

Columbia County



Thanks for the great image! It looks like you might have a future explorer on your hands.

—Conservationist staff

Fancy Feathers

My friend, Joe Kadi, showed me some pictures he took of a turkey visiting his backyard bird feeder along with a flock of around 20 others. I've never seen, or heard of anyone else seeing, this odd-colored bird!

Dennis Buczkowski

Orchard Park, NY



Great photo! This turkey could be showing signs of leucism, a genetic mutation that prevents the pigment melanin from being normally deposited in feathers. Or, this bird could be a domestic breed that "flew the coop." There is a breed called a "Narraigansett" that is similar in appearance to yours. It could also be a cross between a wild turkey and a domestic turkey. So unfortunately, I can't say what it is, but I can say you are lucky to have seen this unique bird!

—Michael Schiavone, DEC Wildlife Biologist

Contact us!

✉ E-mail us at: magazine@gw.dec.state.ny.us

✉ Write to us at: Conservationist Letters
NYSDEC, 625 Broadway
Albany, NY 12233-4502

📘 [facebook.com/NYSDECtheconservationist](https://www.facebook.com/NYSDECtheconservationist)



Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

Accidental Outdoor Writer by John Pitarresi

I had no intention of becoming an outdoor writer.

The guy who had the job came in one day, asked for a raise, didn't get it, and quit. A moment later, the sports editor came out of the boss' office, walked over to my desk and said, "You're writing the outdoor column."

What? I was not pleased. Sure, I loved to hunt and fish, but I had been a full-time sportswriter for nearly a decade, a football/basketball/hockey/baseball guy. My outdoor writing had been limited to an opening day deer hunting or trout fishing story each year. I had no idea how to be an outdoor writer.

Thirty-three years later, I continue to write "Outdoors" for the *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, although some readers might tell you I still have no idea what I'm doing. I write it every week, celebrating outdoors people, telling their stories and a few of my own, commenting on issues, writing a little natural history, picking up a local angle on a national story sometimes, adding a bit of adventure, digging up some history, and producing a travelogue now and then.

I've learned more about the outdoors by writing the column—talking to sources, reading, researching, going into the field with experts and experienced outdoors people—than any of my readers ever learned from me. That might not seem fair or right, but it is the way it is.

Sometimes folks ask me which column I like most. I don't really have a favorite of the 1,600 or so I've written. I suppose the ones I like best are about people.

Take my grandfather, for example. He hunted with us until he was well past 90, and was the heart and soul of our camp. When I wrote about him the year he died—his colorful personality, a few of his outrageous foibles, and what he meant to us without saying it in so many words—I got more reaction than for anything I had written up to that time.

Or the hunter who called me about the huge buck he had found several years before. He still had the arrow that killed it, and with that I was able to track down the archer who shot it. Thanks to a generous fellow hunter, a little detective work, and a lot of luck, we got that trophy back where it belonged...and a great story to boot.

It's not always about people.

There was the fellow who called about the dying red-tailed hawk he found in his backyard. The bird wore a leg band that led me to the guy who had banded it at Hawk Mountain, PA as a mature bird more than 25 years earlier, meaning it was at least 27 years old. That story wrote itself.

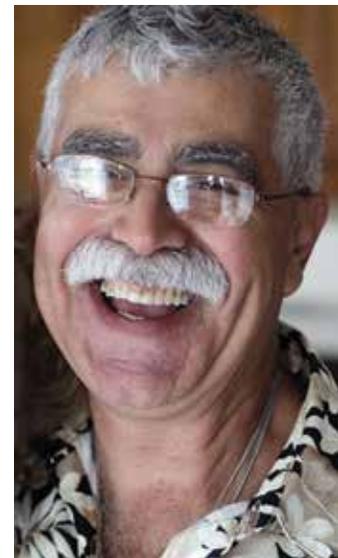
A recent column was about the thousands of snow geese that made a home on the old Valley View reservoirs in Utica for several weeks last winter. They made an astoundingly imposing sight and a heck of a lot of noise as they corkscrewed down out of the sky each day. Columns on birds tend to bring a good deal of comment, perhaps because birds are everywhere, are easy to watch, and are endlessly interesting.

If anything has changed over the years, I think it is that people tend to be a bit more aware of the natural world than when I started. I'd like to think I had something to do with that.

I was never told what the column's mission should be, and I don't know that I ever made a conscious decision myself. It just evolved, and continues to do so: to open up a small window on the natural world, to inform my readers, to celebrate their accomplishments, to challenge them a bit, to entertain them, to make them laugh and, maybe, once in a great while, make them shed a tear.

I hope it has done those things, and will continue to do so for a while longer. But I do know this for sure: no one has gotten more out of the experience than I have.

A Niagara Falls native, **John Pitarresi** honed his writing skills at Hamilton College, joined the *Utica Observer-Dispatch* shortly thereafter, and never looked back.



Nancy L. Ford

2012

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. Deborah Brosen of Kinderhook painted this year's artwork of the largest deer taken by bow, and Michael Barr of Corning painted the artwork of the largest deer taken by gun.



Deborah Brosen

Largest Archery Deer:

Taken in: Orleans County

Score: Net: 163-7; Gross: 182-0

Typical

Points: 12

Taken by: Samuel S. Recco



Michael Barr

Largest Gun Deer:
Taken in: Oswego County
Score: Net 185-1; Gross 196-5
Typical
Points: 12
Taken by: Raymond W. Swope

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



See page 12

Wayne Jones

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