



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 "Narragansett" 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)

