

Cooking Wild Game | Scenic NY | Passenger Pigeon

NEW YORK STATE

Conservationist

OCTOBER 2014

New York
is *Open* for
Hunting



Courtesy of Bill Rudge/Lark in the Park



LARK IN THE PARK 2014!

Come Celebrate the Catskills

From October 4 through 14, 2014, the 11th annual Lark in the Park will offer exciting outdoor events in the Catskills.



Courtesy of Bill Rudge/Lark in the Park

Join in the fun by hiking to a Catskill fire tower, 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.



Courtesy of the Rochester Museum & Science Center

See page 26

October 2014 Volume 69, Number 2

Contents

- 2 Magical Views**
New York photo essay by Wells Horton
- 8 From Field to Feast**
Hunting and cooking wild game and fish
By Moira M. Tidball
- 12 The Best Time to Fish**
Learning some secrets to fishing
By Emily Kilburn
- 17 Hunting for Life's Essence**
Reflections on deer hunting
By Dr. Eli J. Knapp
- 20 Adirondack Longshot**
Deer hunting leads to unexpected discovery
By Bob Dodds
- 23 Hunting by the Numbers**
Knowing when other hunters take deer might increase your chances
By Dave Nelson
- 26 Remembering Martha**
Celebrating the once-abundant passenger pigeon
By Jeremy Taylor



What Is It?



See pg. 12



Departments

16 On Patrol | **28** Briefly | **30** Letters | **32** Back Trails



Magical Views

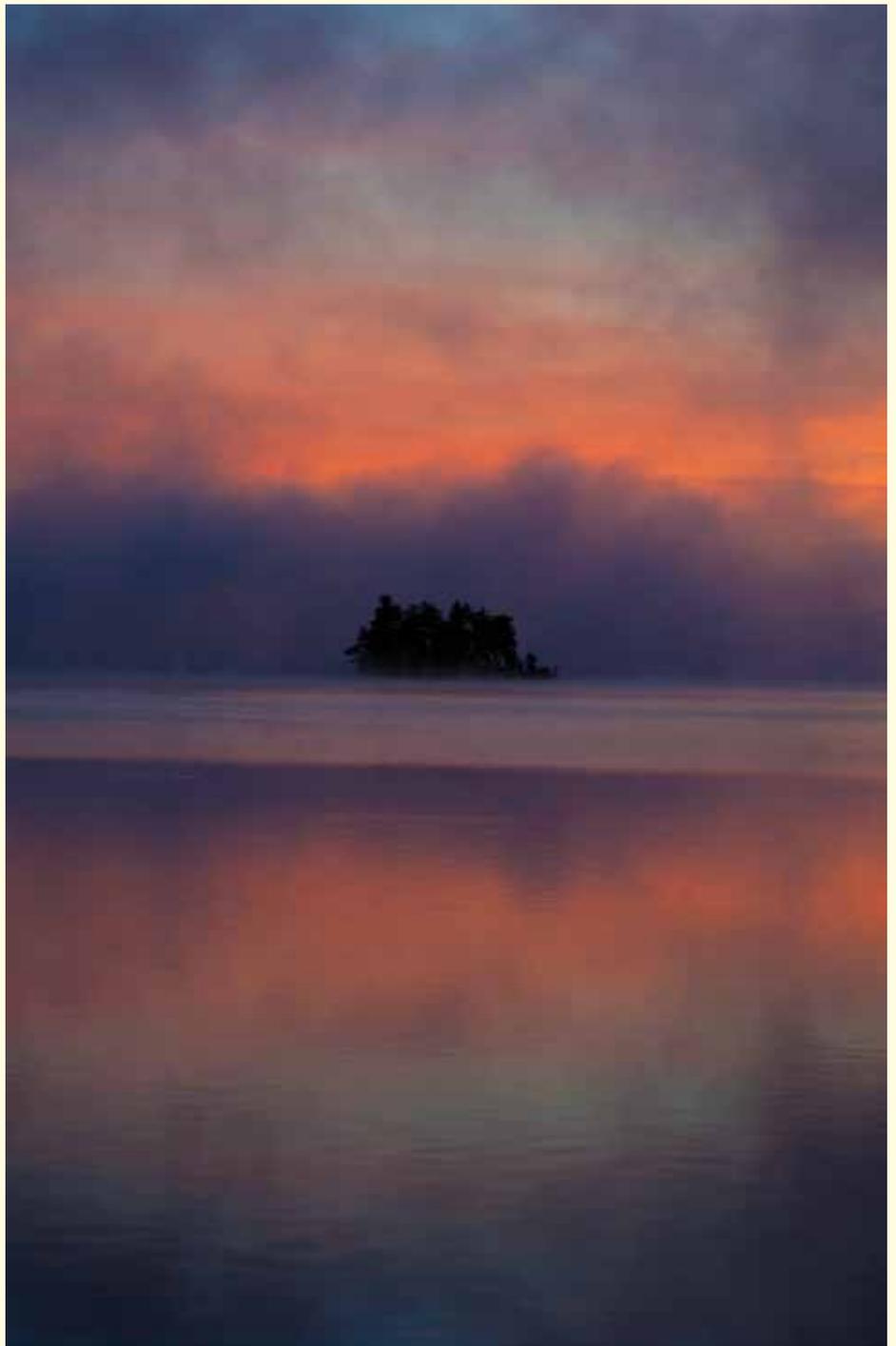
—New York photo essay by Wells Horton

When I was 13, I said that I would pursue landscape photography once I retired. That statement came to pass when in January 2011, I started a “Photo a Day” project, which continues today. The project is just as it sounds: take a photograph a day for an entire year. It seems like a large undertaking, but the results are worth it—both in finished product, as well as in personal and professional growth.

New York State offers many photographic opportunities, from Orient and Montauk Points; to the Catskills, Adirondacks, and Hudson Valley; to the Finger Lakes, and Central and Western New York. Mixing color, light and weather, I am able to capture the state’s landscapes in what feels almost like watercolor paintings. Visit <http://wells-horton.smugmug.com> to see more of my work.



View of Hunts Pond State Forest in
Chenango County



Sometimes the most magical light for photography occurs in the hour before, and the hour after sunrise. I took this during a canoe trip to the St. Regis Canoe Area and Upper Saranac Lake.



View of Harris Lake, from my campsite at the DEC Harris Lake Campground in Newcomb



Ferns cover the forest floor along the Brookfield Horse Trail System in the Charles E. Baker State Forest. With 130 miles of trails, there are many photographic opportunities in this state forest. I photograph here up to 100 times a year.



Fall brings frequent valley fogs, which offer plenty of mystical landscapes. Here's the view a mile from my home, near Sherburne.

Peck Lake in the southern Adirondacks, just before sunrise





This trail, known as Truck Trail 7, is part of the Charles E. Baker State Forest near Sherburne.



A foggy morning in Chenango County



Hunts Pond in first light



Oswego Harbor West Pierhead Lighthouse on Lake Ontario



venison stew

FROM FIELD *to* FEAST

— *Hunting and cooking wild game and fish*

By **Moira M. Tidball**; photos provided by author, unless otherwise noted

“I’m just the cook.”

That was my answer for years when someone would inevitably ask me if I hunted. You see, I was always cooking some type of game that my avid sportsman-husband Keith would bring home to my kitchen. In the fall and early winter he’d arrive with a bounty of ducks and geese. I would marvel at the feather patterns as I parsed them into cooking pieces for items such as duck à l’orange or smoked goose breast. A tasty ruffed grouse might come next, from the Finger Lakes National Forest in Hector,

with the help of our German shorthaired, polka-dotted dog. Pickerel and perch would be coaxed from the ice in front of our home at the north end of Cayuga Lake—perfect for a winter meal of fish chowder.

One Saturday in February, a pile of skinned (thankfully) squirrels arrived after a local squirrel derby. Really? Squirrel? A friend saw the doubtful look on my face and said, “It’s like chicken, only nuttier.” Amazingly, this turned out to be true, and braised squirrel in apple cider is now one of my favorite

dishes and served annually as part of our Thanksgiving feast. Spring brought wild turkey and trout. Summer would produce the occasional bass or panfish, and autumn was mostly about white-tailed deer.

I love to cook and appreciate eating locally and seasonally, with the freshest ingredients possible. Preparing and creating gourmet meals from my husband’s wild game and fish quarry connected me to the seasons, the animal, and the place it was from. But, perhaps not fully, for I was still *just the cook*.



The author and her husband Keith are both outdoor enthusiasts.

“Preparing and creating gourmet meals from... wild game and fish connected me to the seasons, the animal, and the place it was from.”

I work for Cornell Cooperative Extension in Seneca County as a nutrition educator, which includes teaching people how to prepare nutritious, healthy foods, including venison. Anecdotally, I would hear people who tried a food sample of venison meatballs say they didn't like it because it was too gamey. But when presented with a gourmet rendition of venison, they would say "...I like this!"

With encouragement from Keith, I started a blog-turned-website that offers recipes and tips on cooking wild game and fish: <http://wildharvesttable.com>. For each recipe, I created a nutrition label using a standard nutrition software package. I began to realize that a lot of wild game species were missing from the software which is based on the USDA's National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference. I thought, "How could every fad-driven new flavor of this or that packaged food be in the nutrition

software, but items such as brook trout, ruffed grouse or Canada goose were not?" As a nutritionist who liked to cook wild game, this bothered me, so I decided to do something about it.

I decided that brook trout, our state fish, was a good starting place. Ever since I tasted a brook trout cooked over a wilderness campfire—in a foil pouch, prepared simply with butter, salt and pepper—I was hooked on this culinary prize. The bonus of brook trout fishing was traveling to pristine waters in the Adirondacks to find them.

We applied for, and got, a USDA Hatch grant to collect brook trout to be nutritionally analyzed and added to the National Nutrient Database for Standard Reference. That spring was agony for Keith and me as most of the fish we caught had to go to the laboratory instead of our plates! Catching brook trout the size of dinner (or a research protocol) is not an easy thing to do.

Moira's Slow Cooker Duck a L'Orange

This duck recipe is an easy dish to make for a delicious dinner, on a tight schedule. Simply put all the ingredients in the slow cooker in the morning, and by the time you get back home for dinner, you'll have a tasty meal waiting for you.

Ingredients

4-6 duck breast halves, skin removed
1/2 teaspoon salt
1/4 teaspoon pepper
2 small oranges, peeled, sectioned
1 medium apple, peeled and cut into thick slices
1 medium onion, cut into thick slices
1 clove garlic, crushed
1 cup orange juice
1-2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley (1 teaspoon if dried)

Directions

Sprinkle duck with salt and pepper. Layer duck, oranges, apple, onion and garlic in a 3.5- to 6-quart slow cooker. Sprinkle a bit of sugar (or honey) and parsley on top of the duck. Pour orange juice over top.

Cover and cook on low heat setting about 6-8 hours or until duck is tender.

Remove duck from slow cooker. Discard fruit and onion mixture, since it may be bitter.

Slice thin to serve and drizzle an orange/Asian flavored sauce (available in many grocery stores) or some heated marmalade across the duck slices. For an appetizer, cut duck into bite-sized chunks, skewer a piece of duck with a slice of clementine or mandarin orange on a toothpick, and drizzle with orange sauce. As an entrée, the duck breast can be served on a bed of rice pilaf with a side vegetable or served on a bed of greens as a salad course.

For one of Moira's delicious venison recipes, check out our website at www.TheConservationist.org.

While I enjoyed pursuing my own dinner, I still wasn't sure if I could take the next step to hunting deer or small game. I'm not sure if it was resistance to actually killing the animal myself (though in my mind it shouldn't be different than a brook trout), or anxiety about the use of a firearm. I didn't grow up around guns, and they intimidated the heck out of me.

Our daughters were beginning shooting lessons and getting involved in 4-H Shooting Sports. They were quite competent around firearms, so I decided to join them in these lessons. Making a bad shot was a concern I had about deer hunting, but I was encouraged at the shooting range when I consistently hit the mark.

I continued to cook and create venison dishes for the website and educational events. And I was continuously asked if I hunted. It was becoming apparent to me that I needed to close this circle. Many months later, I found myself on a perch in a two-person deer stand, watching the forest wake up. It was a beautiful crisp November morning and my senses were heightened because I was finally hunting. With Keith (who is a licensed guide) by my side, I patiently watched a doe, waiting for that perfect shot. Remembering my firearm training, I took a breath, and pulled the trigger. The deer ran! I was devastated, but Keith said, "Relax, it was a good shot and it is likely only a few yards away in the brush. But



The author teaches youth how to properly prepare pheasants for cooking.

we have to wait at least fifteen minutes before we get down and check." Ugh. My heart was pounding with adrenaline and mixed emotions, mostly worry that I had made a bad shot.

After we climbed down from the tree stand, we found the doe just a few yards off the trail. It had been a clean heart shot. I must admit, I cried, but it was that mixed, emotional cry that came from some overwhelming combination of



Helping Dad bring home dinner

Do You Want to Become a Locavore?

If you are interested in obtaining your own food through hunting or fishing, check DEC's website (www.dec.ny.gov); it contains information on hunting and fishing, including rules, regulations and licensing requirements. You may also want to find a mentor. Mentors are invaluable resources; they can be a friend or family member, or someone you met through a local sportsmen's club or shooting range. Hiring a licensed guide is another option as well.

Women can learn about hunting and outdoor recreation skills through DEC's Becoming an Outdoors-Woman workshops. Visit <http://on.ny.gov/1uOFK2r> for more information.

For culinary tips, websites such as the Wild Harvest Table (<http://wildharvesttable.com>) offer insights into cooking and preparation techniques for game. Wild game meat is generally leaner than farm-raised meat and needs to be cooked accordingly, by adjusting cooking times, and by employing various tenderizing techniques like braising and marinades.



Brook trout cooked over a wilderness campfire is one of the author's favorite meals.

relief, joy and sadness. I thanked the deer and knew that it would be appreciated along every step to the dinner table.

Books such as Michael Pollan's *Omnivore's Dilemma*, and Tovar Cerulli's *The Mindful Carnivore: A Vegetarian's Hunt for Sustenance* indicate that there is an interest in connecting with our meat sources as part of the local food movement, including acquiring meat through hunting. As part of our Cornell research, in addition to collecting nutritional data for brook trout and two other species, we investigated so-called "locavores," people who strive to eat mainly locally produced foods. We explored their inclinations to acquire, prepare and consume wild game and fish, and the role of those decisions in conservation and ecological systems.

Results of a survey we sent to locavores in the Finger Lakes region in May 2014, indicated substantial interest

in topics related to consumption of wild game meat. Specifically, 58.7 percent of participants were somewhat or very interested in learning more about preparing wild game meat, and 58.9 percent of participants were somewhat or very interested in learning more about the conservation benefits of eating wild game. In topics related to wild-caught fish consumption, 69.1 percent of respondents were somewhat or very interested in learning more about preparing wild-caught fish, and 74 percent of respondents were somewhat or very interested in learning more about the conservation benefits of eating wild-caught fish. With these results, programming can be tailored to meet consumers' educational desires through Extension workshops and the Wild Harvest Table website.

I have found harvesting and cooking wild game tremendously satisfying. Wild game is very nutritious, and you can't

get any fresher ingredients! Ultimately, hunting wild game, fishing, and transforming this quarry into delicious meals provides a unique opportunity to connect with the reality of eating meat, conservation practices, and the culinary bounty in New York State.

Cornell Cooperative Extension Nutrition Educator **Moira M. Tidball** is a culinary aficionada who enjoys cooking all kinds of wild game.





Lincoln and I caught several smallmouth bass.

THE BEST TIME TO FISH

— *Learning some secrets to fishing*

By Emily Kilburn; photos by Jim Clayton

“The best time to fish in the Adirondacks is anytime you’re fishing in the Adirondacks.” This was Rich Preall’s reply to my simple question: “When is the best time to fish in the Adirondacks?” After spending time on the water with Rich, I began to realize the accuracy of his response.

In August, I had the opportunity to learn from Rich. He has 30 years of fishing experience—25 of which were spent in the Adirondack region. Another of Rich’s students, Lincoln Hull, accom-

panied us. Together, we traveled to the Cedar River in Hamilton County to fly fish; Meacham Lake in the town of Duane to fish with a spinning reel for bass; and Palmer Pond in the town of North Hudson to troll for brook trout.

I’m a native Adirondacker with little experience fishing, which just isn’t acceptable. This had become all too evident earlier in the summer. My niece and nephew love to fish and at only five and seven years old, were much more adept at it than I. I recall my nephew

angrily taking his pole away from me after my first cast resulted in a terribly tangled line. My niece was a bit more understanding. Her pole featured a closed reel of the pink and purple variety. It was nearly impossible to tangle this line since it was enclosed in a delightfully colorful compartment. By no means, however, did this guarantee my catching a fish. She, of course, was successful, gracefully reeling in a small sunfish. I was not, struggling (at best) to reel in bits of weeds and muck. I needed to redeem myself.



Retired DEC biologist Rich Preall helps Lincoln land his prize catch.

From my companions, I learned that the traits of a good angler include patience, being a good sport, sitting still, and having a good sense of humor.

Earlier in the summer, DEC launched a new mobile app, “The NY Hunting, Fishing and Wildlife App”; I wanted to check that out. The app has many features, from GPS data to species identification tools. With this latest technology and a mentor like Rich, I thought maybe I could become a better angler.

New York State Conservationist, October 2014

The app was our guide in finding a location. We used the “fishing near me” icon and, after reading descriptions of several nearby areas, we decided on the Cedar River. The app informed us that the river is 38.5 miles long, in the central Adirondacks in Hamilton County. We would fish the section of river upstream of the town of Indian Lake. It was a



There’s an App for That

DEC recently launched the New York Fishing, Hunting & Wildlife App for mobile devices. The app allows users to identify and locate New York’s many hunting, fishing, and wildlife watching sites, and provides information on species, rules and regulations, and important permit and licensing details. A calendar of events, social networking, photo sharing and cacheable maps for offline use, are just a few of the app’s great features. The app is available for free download in the iPhone and Android markets. Visit <http://on.ny.gov/1xyt8iK> for more details.



beautiful, rambling river, dotted with exposed rocks and lined on each side with cascading foliage.

I emerged from the vehicle an eager student. We donned our waders, and Rich explained and demonstrated the process and techniques of fly fishing. The technique involved precise timing and the importance of keeping one’s arm extended between 9 and 1 o’clock. Whip the pole back, pause to let out some line, whip the pole forward and repeat. Once enough line is let out,

wait for a bite. No bites? Repeat. As I practiced, I realized it was much more difficult than it looked.

Of my 30 or so casts, 15 ended up in the trees behind me, 5 ended up hooked on me, 5 ended in tangled line, and 5 ended up no more than 10 feet in front of me. This style of fishing is challenging, which makes the prospect of success seem even more exciting. I never came close to mastering the technique, but Rich did call me a “good sport.” I’ll take that as a compliment. (Lincoln fared much better, having fly fished a handful of times with his father, an avid angler.)

In the end: no fish, though the time spent enjoying the beautiful day had me beginning to understand Rich’s answer to my question.

The next day, we had two objectives: fish for bass and brook trout. Again, we went to the app for suggestions. This time we used the “where to fish” icon and decided on Meacham Lake for bass and Palmer Pond for brook trout. With the app’s “map it” feature, we plotted our route and headed for the lake.

Rich had enlisted his friend, Rich LaBomard, to be our boat captain. On the way to the boat launch, Rich (Preall) described him as a patient man with a good sense of humor. Perhaps these are traits all anglers share, but knowing my skill level, I assumed he had been specifically recruited to undertake fishing with me.

We reached the boat launch just before 9 a.m. The lake was smooth as glass. We went onto the dock for our pre-game pep talk (which is how I started to think of those educational moments) and Rich showed me the pole I would be using: a spin-cast rod. I shuddered as I thought of my previous experience with my nephew. I shared this fear with Rich. Not a seven-year-old boy, he was sympathetic and patiently explained how to use the rod.

He noted, “If you feel a nibble, quickly pull up on the pole to set the



Rich explains the finer points of choosing a fly.



Before fishing, we checked the New York Fishing Hunting and Wildlife App for local regulations, season dates, and creel limits.

hook. Reel in slowly and allow the fish to fight against you; this tires them out, leaving you in a better position to bring the catch all the way in.”

He also mentioned something about tightening the drag if a fish was pulling so hard that more line was going out than you were reeling in. By this time, though, my focus was only on catching a fish—ANY fish.

Eager to try my improved technique, we set out, staying close to the shoreline.

Rich described the location as optimum for smallmouth bass; the bass were using a shaded area near shore as cover. They hide in the shade and dash out to grab minnows and crayfish. Within five minutes, Lincoln had a bite. With Rich’s guidance, he was able reel it in. In my naïve opinion, it was a whopper. (Weighing in at 2.5 pounds, it was well within normal range.) After the obligatory photo op, we released the fish back into the cool waters.

With newfound determination, I cast and recast, determined not to leave without a story to tell. Then it happened: a tug on my line. I set the hook and began to reel in. To my surprise, the line started to zing, and more line was going out than I could reel in. (At this point I realized I should have paid closer attention to the lesson on tightening the drag.) Rich L. rushed to my aid, but it was not meant to be; the fish broke the line.

Soon, I had another bite. This one put up a fight, too, but I was able to reel it in. Lincoln got the net ready and I drew it closer to the boat. Success! The smallmouth bass was in my possession. Rich grabbed it, removed the hook and was ready to hand it to me. I wasn't ready. My questions ranged from "Does it have teeth?" to "What if I drop it?" After some assurances and instructions, I timidly took the fish. It was as scary and as thrilling as I thought it would be. I quickly posed for my photo op and released it. (I swear it bit me before I let go.)

Satisfied that I had not one, but two great fishing stories, we headed back to shore.

By the time we reached Palmer Pond, it was officially a warm, sunny Adirondack summer day. Via the app, we learned its waters are annually stocked with brook and brown trout.

This time, Rich's pre-game pep talk focused on method and plan, and not on physical technique. We would be "trolling." We would also be adding weight to our line; by August trout reside in the cooler waters, deep beneath the surface. We would use a canoe to slowly draw the line through the water.



After snapping a photo for memory's sake, we released this largemouth bass unharmed.

It was the most passive method of fishing we had done thus far. Rich quietly and slowly moved the canoe through the calm water while I held 40 to 50 feet of line out, hoping the sun glistening off the lure would result in a bite. I didn't get one bite, but what an enjoyable time I had out on the water, in such silence and tranquility! Rich commented that I was an excellent canoe passenger because I stayed very still—yet another compliment on my fishing abilities.

I've come away from this experience having learned several things. First, the vast expanse and diversity of water bodies and species in the Adirondack Park provide ample fishing opportunities in the most scenic and peaceful of places. This is true for a novice like me, as well as for the most experienced of anglers like Rich Preall. From my companions, I learned that the traits of a good angler include patience, being a good sport, sitting still,

and having a good sense of humor. On the Cedar River, I experienced the challenges of fishing; on Meacham Lake: the thrill of both losing and landing a catch; and on Palmer Pond: the relaxation of it all. It became apparent that Rich's answer to my original question was precisely correct. When is the best time to fish in the Adirondacks? Anytime.

Emily Kilburn is a lifelong resident of Lake Placid where she enjoys spending time with her nephew and niece, and her two dogs. She attended the University of Vermont, and currently works in the Adirondack/Lake Champlain Region for DEC's Office of Communications.

Author's Note: Some of the facts herein may have been embellished or exaggerated, as is the right of all anglers.

Improved Access to State Lands

This year, Governor Cuomo unveiled 50 new projects to connect hunters, anglers, bird watchers and other outdoor enthusiasts to more than 380,000 acres of existing state and easement lands that have not reached their full potential. These projects will improve access to various recreational activities at sites currently open to the public, as well as provide first-time access to new and existing sites. Many projects involve creating accessible trails, parking lots, fishing piers, and other features that will expand access to people of all abilities. The projects include sites as diverse as Mount Loretto Unique Area on Staten Island, Meacham Lake in the Adirondacks, and the Wellsville-Addison-Galeton Rail Trail in Allegany County. Improvements are currently underway at many sites; new features will be available as work is completed.



DEC photo

On Patrol

Carl Heilman II

Real stories from Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers in the field



Freshly Squeezed Sea Bass—Nassau County

When checking anglers, ECOs often find fish in interesting places. ECOs Mike Unger and Dustin Oliver checked a large group of anglers in the back bay under Sloop Channel Bridge. There, they discovered fish under rocks, in bags, and even one stuffed into a plastic orange juice jug. The ECOs issued seven tickets for failure to possess marine fishing registrations and for possession of undersized black sea bass.

Hiker Gets Lost—Ulster County

DEC Central Dispatch received a call from Ulster County 911 about a lost hiker in the Slide Mountain Wilderness. At approximately 8:10 p.m., the subject had texted a friend in Dutchess County that he was lost. An attempt to locate the subject via “pinging” (tracking) his cell phone placed him near the summits of Slide and Cornell Mountains—almost four miles from the trailhead. Ranger Marie Ellenbogen and a Shandaken police officer located the subject’s vehicle at the Slide Mountain Trailhead. Presently the subject emerged from the

woods. He explained he had left the Slide Mountain Trailhead at 3 p.m. and intended to hike to the summit of Slide. He went beyond, onto Cornell Mountain, before beginning the return trip. Overcome by darkness, he texted his friend. On his descent, the subject used his cell phone as a light until he encountered another hiker, who gave him a flashlight. He was then able to walk out to the trailhead. The subject did not have the proper equipment for such a late afternoon hike.

Wildlife Aren’t Pets—Suffolk County

ECO Matthew Krug received a complaint about a woman who had rescued two baby raccoons and was keeping them as family pets. ECOs Krug and Joshua Sulkey went to the woman’s home, where they heard kids in the backyard saying, “It’s my turn to hold it.” There, they found two children playing with the young raccoons. The children’s mother was issued a misdemeanor appearance ticket for possessing wild animals without a permit. The raccoons were seized and turned over to the Suffolk County Health Department.



Contributed by ECO Lt. Liza Bobseine and Forest Ranger Capt. Stephen Scherry

K-9 Assists in Delicate Situation—Greene County

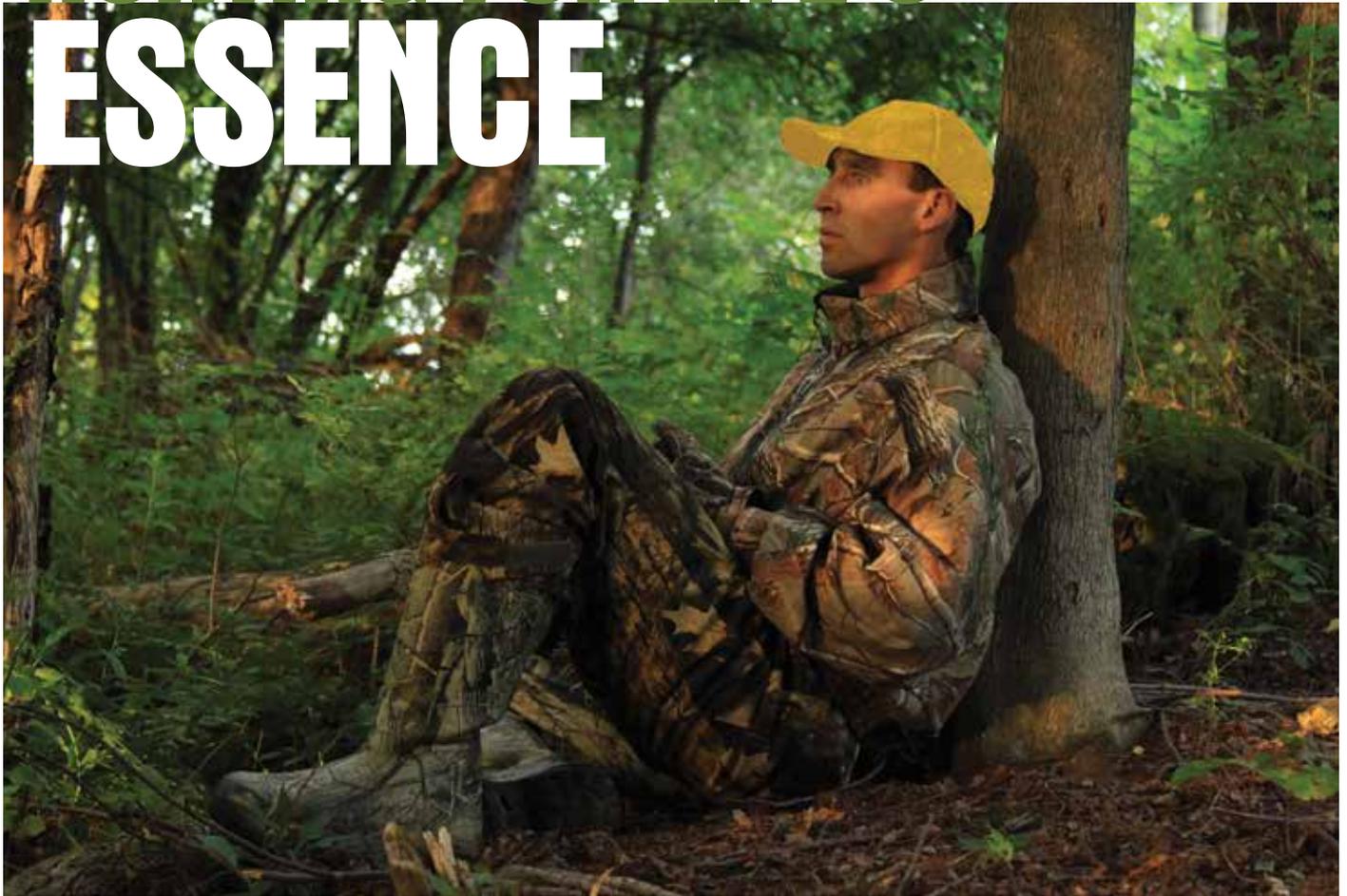
ECO Michael Arp and K-9 Warden were requested by Greene County 911 to assist with a suicidal male subject in the Town of Cairo. After the man had inflicted numerous knife wounds to both his wrists, he fled into a wooded area behind his residence. ECO Arp interviewed the man’s wife and learned the approximate location where he had entered the woods. After tracking him for about 45 minutes and covering approximately three-quarters of a mile, K-9 Warden located the man sitting on a log. He was bleeding heavily from both wrists. The man was escorted from the woods by ECO Arp and Deputy Gurley, and transferred into the care of waiting paramedics.

Ask the Ranger

Q: I’ve heard that target shooting is allowed on state land in the Adirondacks. Is this true? If so, what rules must be followed?

A: Shooting targets on state land is permitted if: you do so in a safe manner; you do not damage trees; and you pick up used targets, spent casings, etc. Possessing and shooting at breakable targets—including, but not limited to, clay pigeons and glass containers—is prohibited on state lands. Unless legally engaged in the act of hunting, no person shall discharge firearms on state lands posted or designated as closed to target shooting.

HUNTING FOR LIFE'S ESSENCE



Christy Shea

By Dr. Eli J. Knapp

One wrong twitch of my arms holding the gun across my lap and I knew that this day's hunt was over. The long-tined, eight-point buck stared holes into my chest. His breath briefly condensed before ebbing away in the icy autumn air. He was so close I could have scratched his glossy coat with a long rake. He sniffed the ground and then jerked his head up, hoping to catch me off-guard. Nestled as I was amidst a cluster of young, knotty beech trees, I must have appeared like a ghastly apparition; a levitating disembodied face.

Had it not been for this likely "second rut" so typical of late-November—when a second surge of hormones removes

**An empty freezer, I've discovered,
does not leave me empty.**

typical caution—this buck surely would have been long gone by now. But I'd found a string of fresh scrapes laid out like a trap line. Hoping he'd return to attend to them, I had awoken early and planted myself in the middle of his route before any light penetrated the ethereal forest. His acute wariness suggested this buck had already encountered several hunters this season. His instincts were at war. As were my own.

While the buck's battle pitted caution against procreation, I was at war with my own inexperience. How could I raise

the barrel and cock the gun undetected? More importantly, why had I let my gun lie across my lap in the first place? I obviously couldn't raise it now. Not with the buck appearing to study the intricate twig patterns on my jacket. My heart beat louder than an amorous ruffed grouse in spring. My arms shook in their puffy sleeves. My eyes watered. I needed calm and patience, two traits that ironically, seemed utterly unattainable. I willed their arrival. But calm and patience—the two traits I most coveted—must be earned. I didn't deserve them yet.

It was a defining moment. Judging from all my deer-less days I'd already logged in the woods, I knew this was the moment of the fall that I'd remember forever. A moment I'd spin into a wonderful yarn. Or a moment that I'd second-guess ad infinitum until another meaningful moment took its place. It's a moment all hunters long for and relish: a wise decision—and some luck—would result in a large harvested deer, deep gratification, and a seemingly perfect culmination to the endless hours I'd spent planning and practicing; an unwise decision, however minor, would result in another year of an empty freezer and ceaseless second-guessing.

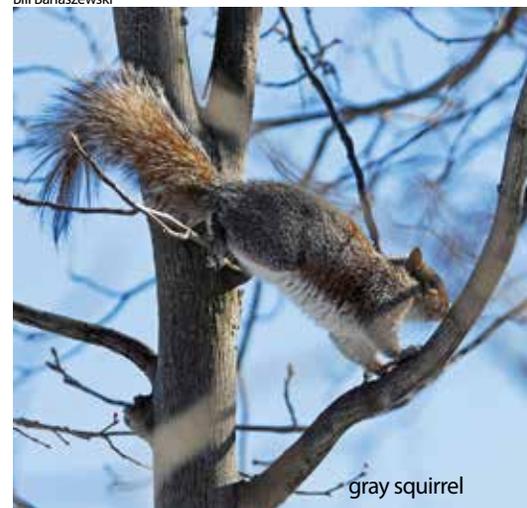
But I knew something else. Even an unwise decision and deer-less hunt could not (and would not) squelch my enthusiasm to wake up early and sit in the frosty woods. An empty freezer, I've discovered, does not leave me empty. It is the paradox of the hunter. And it is why I hunt.

Now even my legs were shaking. This was the largest buck I'd seen in three years and the only one I'd ever had a reasonable shot at. If only I could raise my barrel. Could I shoot from the hip? Focused as I was, scenes from *Tombstone* and *Maverick* flashed through my head as I contemplated squeezing the trigger like Billy the Kid. Tempting. But I had learned enough in my three deer seasons to know that Hollywood and hunting have little in common.

The buck took a few steps and nibbled the ground. I eased off my big winter glove, and caught it in my lap. Ever so slowly I cocked back the hammer. It seemed to take forever but then, finally, "Click." My gun was ready. Half my problem was now solved. My urge to abruptly raise and fire was nearly uncontrollable.

Patience. Patience. I recited the word over and over. What a ridiculous

Bill Banaszewski



gray squirrel

problem this was. A beautiful buck; a loaded rifle. Too close to aim! Of all the problems I'd anticipated, this was certainly not one of them.

The buck turned broadside and scrutinized me anew. A dog barked miles off. The buck's ears followed the sound almost imperceptibly. A gray squirrel, sounding like a mammalian bulldozer, then skittered over the frosty leaf litter.



Jim Clayton



red squirrel

Bill Banaszewski

Again, the buck's ears followed the sound but his eyes stayed on me. A droplet of water from my eyes rolled down my cheek. Even so, I refused to blink and belie my presence.

The buck's anxiety was palpable. Had this been the rut's peak, the desire

to mate would likely have overridden his fear. But the peak had passed and this secondary surge was not enough to knock him senseless. The wind was still but our close quarters had him awash in my scent. He turned showing me his rump. His tail flicked. I studied his ears. Although looking away, his ears remained trained behind him—on me. I made up my mind: once his ears swiveled forward toward a new sound, I would raise my barrel and take the first shot he presented.

Another squirrel scampered. The buck's ears traced it and swiveled forward like massive radar dishes. I raised my gun. But I never fired.

As soon as I raised my barrel, he was off like a rocket. I had raised it too quickly. My patience—born of inexperience—had worn too thin. Yet another lost opportunity to add to my growing collection of misfortune.

An hour later I left the woods, dragging nothing behind me. But oddly, I had a bounce in my step. Nature had bestowed on me a generous gift—experience—that is attained no other way. I realized then and there, as my feet left a faint trail on the crunchy leaves, that when I head into the woods on

a dark November morning, I'm not actually hunting for deer. I'm hunting for stillness, occasionally interrupted by intense, season-defining moments. Life-defining moments. Moments when seconds seem like hours and the sound of my beating heart drowns out even the scolding red squirrels. Moments when my gun barrel shakes, my knees knock, and every leaf crackle sounds like exploding dynamite. In a world of endless noise and obligation, out there, amidst the quivering brown beech leaves, I awake from hibernation and breathe deeply. I am alive. It is these brief moments, so pregnant with possibility, that keep me going out. And coming back more whole.

I'll continue to let most people assume I'm deer hunting when I enter the woods each fall. But I now know otherwise. My quarry isn't something I can load in my truck. It is that rare moment that comes to those who seek it. When I can see my tiny reflection in the bottomless eyes of a large buck, I'm hunting—and finding—life in its essence.

Dr. Eli J. Knapp teaches ornithology, conservation biology, and Swahili at Houghton College.



Linda Knapp



ADIRONDACK LONGSHOT

—Deer hunting leads to unexpected discovery

By Bob Dodds

Hunting in the Adirondacks is unlike anything else. Where else east of the Mississippi can you walk for 20 miles in the woods and never cross a road?

In 1992, my friend Curt Nichols and I were hunting in such a place: the Siamese Ponds Wilderness area, east of Indian Lake. Specifically, we were hunting in the mountains surrounding Puffer Pond.

To access this area, we parked at Kings Flow and hiked back to Puffer Pond on the well-marked trail. At that point we split up and agreed to meet later in the day for lunch and to compare notes.

Being seasoned Adirondack hunters, we knew that in the 'dacks you don't harvest a deer every time you hunt, but

the experience is hard to beat. Our first day (Saturday) was a beautiful crisp fall day; frozen leaves belied our presence to any deer within half a mile. Although it was a great area to hunt in, we fired no shots that day. As we drove back to camp, we saw a nice buck standing right next to the road—perhaps an omen for the next day's hunt?

Sunday dawned as a typical Adirondack day for early November: overcast with temperatures in the low 30s. We parked again at the Puffer Pond trailhead, and started our hike back to ridges overlooking the pond. There are actually two trails to get to Puffer; one goes right up over the ridge (2.4 miles) and the other follows

the Kings Flow south, and then winds its way to the east and heads back to the pond (3.4 miles). We took the shorter trail again and when we reached the top of the ridge overlooking Puffer Pond, we split up and started our slow and cautious “sneak & peak” hunting, which is a popular tactic among Adirondack deer hunters. As luck would have it, I took a nice five-point Adirondack buck later that morning. That's when the real story begins.

I shot my deer on the south side of the ridge leading down to Puffer Pond. I knew that dragging the deer back up the ridge and then back to the Kings Flow parking area was one option. But I also knew that the other trail that led back to

the parking lot was down below me and would be easier to reach with the deer. Then I could go back to the parking lot and pick up my one-wheeled game cart. So I dragged the deer down to the trail and left it under a tall spruce tree so that Curt and I could find it when we returned.

While hiking out, I ran into Curt near the top of the ridge and brought him up to date while we went for the cart. Although it was still quite cold with a threat of snow in the air, we didn't dress too heavily because we knew it was going to be a lot of work to bring that critter out. The temperature dropped a little as we made our way back to the deer and tiny frozen pellets started falling; locals call this "sugar snow," due to its granular structure. Because the individual pellets are round, they tend to roll into low spots or cavities, making for an interesting look to the landscape.

The spruce tree was a good landmark and we had no problem finding the deer. But what happened next was a real surprise. As we pulled the deer out from under the tree, we dragged it over a flat rock about two-by-three-foot in size. We noticed something was carved in the rock; the sugar snow had filled in the etchings, making some letters obvious. Curiosity got the better of us, and we tried to figure out what it said. Using our pocket knives to sharpen some sticks, we then scraped moss and debris out of the writing. It took a while to figure it out: an "N" was backwards, and what we thought was a "D" with a tail, turned out to be a lower case "g." The inscription read "JOE KING 1870."

A chilly breeze reminded us we still had work to do; it was getting late. We

needed to get the deer loaded onto the cart and out of that wilderness area, so we left the "Joe King" rock and started our long pull back to the parking area. It was my fourth trip of the day. Although the deer probably dressed out at no more than 140 lbs., it felt like it weighed at least 240. By the time we finally got back to the parking area and loaded the deer in the van, we were both exhausted. It was a great hunting trip, with a great story that probably would have ended there, but 15 years later something interesting happened.

In the spring of 2007, Curt and I were having supper with our wives and another couple, the Cummings. As hunting stories go, the Puffer Pond hunt is one of our favorites and Curt and I told it to the Cummings. After we kicked it around

When I spotted a rather large spruce tree standing all alone next to the trail, I started searching on my hands and knees.



Courtesy of Bob Dodds

After a successful hunt, the author (pictured here with a deer from another day) discovered an interesting engraved stone.



Finding the “Joe King” rock after 15 years was a difficult task. Here is the author (right) with his friend, Curt Nichols, with the engraved stone.

awhile, Curt asked, “I wonder if we could find that rock again?” Everyone agreed that if anyone could find it, it would be me, but I had my doubts. After all, a lot of time had passed. Vegetation had probably grown over that rock and peoples’ recollection of things that happened 15 years prior are always a little fuzzy. But it was a fun challenge, so on a nice summer day, Curt and I, our wives Melinda and Sue, and our friends the Cummings pulled into the Kings Flow parking lot and started our hike to Puffer Pond.

Since we were all wearing shorts and lightweight hiking shoes instead of hunting clothes and boots, it was a much easier hike than it was 15 years earlier. We gathered at Puffer Pond and then it was up to me to see if I could find the “Joe King” rock. When I started walking down the trail, nothing really jogged my memory and we all began to realize that this was like looking for the proverbial “needle in the haystack.”

But then we found a dry creek bed coming down the mountain,

and something did kick in for me. I remembered it wasn’t dry 15 years ago; that fall, there had been a lot of rain and the creek was running high. I recalled that I didn’t want to drag the deer across that stream, so instead I went straight down the ridge beside the creek. I felt that if my memory was correct, the rock must be right on the other side of the dry creek bed. When I spotted a rather large spruce tree standing all alone next to the trail, I started searching on my hands and knees. As I uncovered a large flat rock, I let out an excited yell: “I found it!”

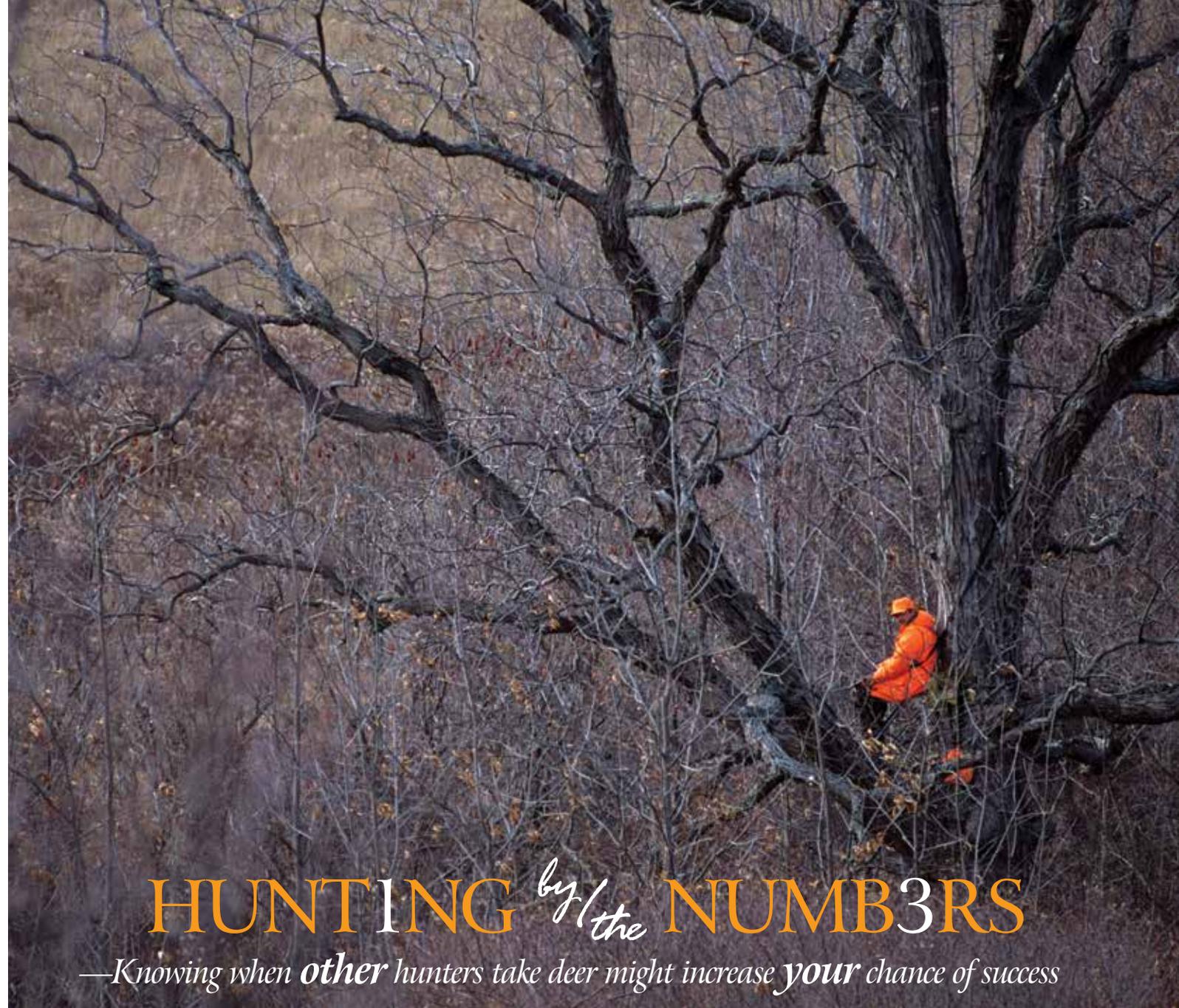
With whoops and hollers, everyone descended on the rock, exclaiming that it was really unbelievable. Curt had brought a bag of sugar to duplicate the sugar snow effect of 15 years ago. Once more, we cleaned out all the moss from the letters and numbers, and filled them with sugar. It looked just like it had on that snowy day.

The King name is well known in Indian Lake, and local historian Bill Zullo had a lot of information on the family. It turns out that this Joe King was born in 1865,

and died in 1954 at the age of 89. So it was unlikely that he carved his name in a rock in the wilderness in 1870 when he was only five years old. His father, Napoleon, on the other hand, was a logger who moved to Indian Lake from Canada. Bill and I believe that Napoleon was back there at Puffer Pond in 1870. He was probably logging and possibly stripping bark for the tanneries that were located in North River and North Creek, and one day had some time to kill and engraved his son’s name on the rock. Zullo also said that the Kings Flow, where the Puffer Pond trailhead starts, was named after Joe King.

What do you think the odds are of finding a “Joe King” rock in the middle of the Adirondack wilderness? Probably greater than the odds of shooting a nice Adirondack buck!

A native of Hillsdale, **Bob Dodds** and his wife Melinda had a camp in Indian Lake for fourteen years. They have traveled throughout the U.S., and the Adirondacks is still one of their favorite places in the country.



HUNTING *by the* NUMB3RS

—Knowing when *other* hunters take deer might increase *your* chance of success

Bill Banaszewski

By Dave Nelson

Twenty years ago, my co-worker and non-hunter friend, Annie, and I used to participate in office banter about hunting and trapping season dates, why they differed, and whether it mattered how and when an animal “got dead.” Of course it matters to the animal, but I always maintained that it also mattered to a *hunter*, and especially to a novice hunter like I was in my 20s.

I am what Tovar Cerulli eloquently describes in his book, *The Mindful Carnivore*, as an “adult-onset hunter.” That is to say I didn’t grow up hunting.

No, far from it. A child of academicians, I lived in small college towns. While I thoroughly enjoyed exploring the creek and small woodlot behind our village home in northern Chautauqua County, beyond the woods lay a school and more houses. I didn’t experience the “out the back door and into hunting Shangri-La” that some others in the conservation profession did.

Nor did I have a hunting mentor in the family. My grandfather was an ardent fisherman from the Midwest. But he didn’t hunt.

As a child, I loved the outdoors; I suppose I can attribute some of that to family car/tent camping trips throughout the American West. I’ve been bird-watching most of my life, and I was always fascinated by wildlife. I thought I wasn’t *supposed* to be interested in hunting (though I was), because I liked nature so much. In fact I never missed an episode of *Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom*; watching it was my Sunday night ritual. Forty years later, I can still recite the program’s closing lines.

And so it was that in college I met Dale, who came from a hunting family, and who offered to show me the ropes. He didn't have to ask twice. I took a hunter education course and got my license.

For a couple of years I went to his family's pastoral dairy farm in Grandma Moses country around Thanksgiving, and tagged along with Dale on the hunt. We'd hunt the morning, come in at noon for "dinner" (a word reserved for the *evening* meal in my family), and hunt again in late afternoon. At the dinner table, we were asked questions about what we'd seen on morning watch, and Dale's grandpa would look off into a distance only he could see and tell us tales of deer hunts of yore. It was as close to a Norman Rockwell scene as I ever got.

In New York, regular deer season in the Southern Zone opens on the third Saturday in November, which can be more than a week before Thanksgiving. So we were beginning our hunt a week and a half into the season.

Little did I know at the time that by missing Opening Day, the first week, and the first weekend of the deer season, we were really stacking the deck against us. What I didn't know then (and do now), is that while the hunting season was less than half over, more than three-quarters of the buck harvest had already occurred.

Deer are pretty smart; they quickly figure out when the hunting season is open, or they don't survive. Those that make it through the first few days of season change their behavior and movement patterns. So if you wait until the second week of the season, like I used to, your hunting experience is quite different: many of the more obvious deer are already taken, and others are on high alert.

With apologies to Annie, I find the timing of the deer kill fascinating. For example, let's look at some reported take figures from the 2013 Southern Zone regular deer season.



In my lifetime, deer populations have risen significantly, and so has the deer take.

- 37.2%—more than a third—of the reported buck take during regular season occurred on opening day (Saturday)
- 48.4%—almost half—of the buck take occurred on the first two days (Saturday and Sunday)
- 20.5%—one-fifth—of the does and fawns reported taken during the regular season were taken on opening day (Saturday)

And the numbers are even more significant for 2012. That year, 52.8% of the legal bucks were taken opening weekend. Think about that for a moment: *more than half of the bucks taken during the regular season were taken opening weekend*. Simply put, if you can't or don't hunt opening day or the next day, you've cut your chances in half. That's pretty amazing considering the southern zone regular deer season is 23 days long.

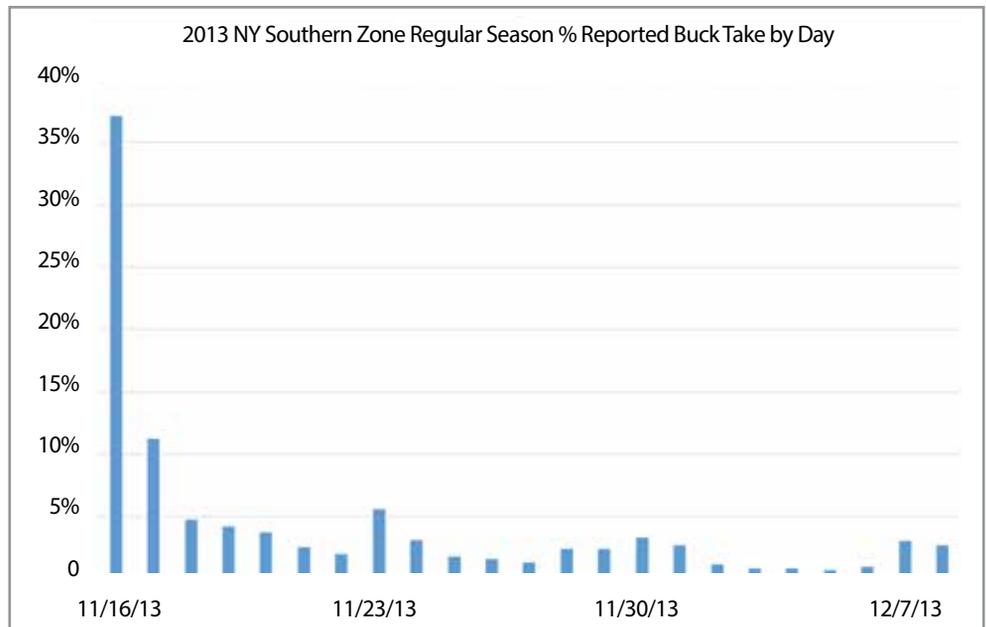
Now let's take a look at use of deer management permits (DMPs), tags for antlerless deer (does and fawns). In the 2012 season, 30.8% of DMPs were filled opening weekend. Fully *half* were filled *the first week*.

The numbers speak for themselves—if you want to increase your chances of taking a deer, particularly on public land, you'd do better to hunt the first part of the season. That's okay by me; in my family there are a couple of days that are sacred (yes dear, our anniversary) and the Southern Zone opener is one of them. A co-worker once jokingly referred to the regular big game opener as a Holy Day of Obligation, and that moniker stuck with me. You'll see those words on our calendar at home.

As a longstanding tradition, deer hunting in upstate New York is a constant. But some things do change over time. In my lifetime, deer populations have risen significantly, and so has the deer take. Remember the term, "party permit?" For those who aren't familiar with it, years ago hunters had to share one deer management "permit" between several members of their hunting "party." Today, one hunter can now get several deer management permits in addition to his or her buck tag.

Bowhunting serves as one good example of a changing trend. Participation in bowhunting has increased over time, as has season length. Percentage of the take attributable to bowhunting has increased as well. This trend underscores my main point about when deer are taken: each year, more are already taken by archers before the regular big game season begins.

When it comes to outdoor recreation, each person has their own motivations, interests, and priorities, and that's to be expected. If I want a wilderness hunt, I go to the Adirondacks. I backpack in, and I sleep in a tent. The rewards there are great; they are measured more in peace



In New York's Southern Zone, much of the reported buck take occurs during the opening weekend of hunting season.

and solitude, stars and snowflakes than they are in venison. If, on the other hand, I want a deer, I hunt on my own property in the Southern Zone.

While hunting the early season is important, that's not the only thing I've learned about deer hunting through 30 years of trial and error (or what kind people might call "experience"). If you are a relative newcomer to the sport, here are my top five tips that might help you:

5) Find a good spot. Near a deer trail. In good deer habitat. If possible, get to know your good spot, and I mean really know it. Deer are creatures of habit, and if you have the luxury of hunting a place over several hunting seasons, at different times of day and in all kinds of weather, you'll get better at "learning the woods" and predicting deer behavior. Which direction do they come from? At what time of day? And so forth. If your spot isn't producing, try somewhere else. One of my favorite spots, for example, overlooks a deer "escape route." This spot is most productive early in the season when other hunters are about. It's not as good later in the season when fewer hunters are out.

4) Sit still. For a long time. Then sit still even longer. Even if you get cold (which you will), stay still. However, don't sit still late in the season or if the deer aren't moving. But early in the season, I find it most productive to sit still and let other hunters push deer to you.

3) Ask friends what they've learned. Listen. Read. Read some more. You needn't be an expert. Rather, learn a little from every hunter you meet.

2) Help others who are new to the sport. As my friend Dale did, share your passion with a friend. If he hadn't, I might not have enjoyed 30 years of deer hunting and tasty venison.

And my number one tip? The most important piece of advice I can offer is simply this: Have fun. Whether you hunt the early season or over snow, that's what it's all about.

On Opening Day, *Conservationist* Editor **Dave Nelson** can be found shivering in a tree stand overlooking a good spot in rural Albany County.



Remembering Martha

—Celebrating the once-abundant passenger pigeon

By Jeremy Taylor

On September 1, 1914, a river of feathers ran dry. Martha, the last living passenger pigeon, had died. Martha's passing at the Cincinnati Zoo marked the first time that we knew exactly—down to the hour—when a species went extinct.

Once estimated to number 3 to 5 billion strong (and some suggest as many as 9 billion), the passenger pigeon's extinction was largely facilitated through market hunting for human food and the technological advances of the railroad and telegraph. Telegraphs allowed gunners to rapidly spread word about the location of flocks of the birds, and the railroads provided a means to both reach the flocks and to send the carcasses to cities for processing and distribution.

Flocks of passenger pigeons numbering in the millions or even billions once blocked out the sun for hours or days at a time, taking on the appearance of a vast feathered river moving across the sky. A colonial nester, the massive nesting colonies sometimes covered dozens or even hundreds of acres of forest. Large colonies of passenger pigeons could be found throughout the eastern and central United States, and into eastern Canada. A large colony once located near Tupper Lake was said to contain "hundreds of thousands of pigeons." For a fascinating overview of the passenger pigeon in NYS and the Adirondacks, see: "Extinction: Passenger Pigeons in the Adirondacks" in *Adirondack Almanack* (www.adirondackalmanack.com). Once thought to be one of the most common birds in the world—at one time, one in four birds in North America was thought to be passenger pigeons—the population went from billions to none over the span of roughly 50 years.

Passenger Pigeons in NY

In New York State, passenger pigeon bones have been found in several archeological sites; passenger pigeons also played an important role in the lives of the Seneca and other indigenous groups. With the expansion of the railroad westward, Buffalo became a center of the passenger pigeon trade.

You might be surprised to learn that there are more than a dozen locations throughout the state where specimens of passenger pigeons can be seen on display. Some are permanent displays; others are special displays put together for the centenary of Martha's passing. Below is a list of some places that have pigeons on display.

Adirondack Museum (Blue Mountain Lake)—One passenger pigeon is on permanent display, on loan from the Pember Museum. Visit www.adkmuseum.org or call (518) 352-7311 for more information.

American Museum of Natural History (NYC)—Passenger pigeons are on display in the "Birds of NY" exhibit on the third floor, as well as in the Theodore Roo-

Courtesy of the Adirondack Museum



Passenger pigeon on display at the Adirondack Museum

sevelt rotunda and John Burroughs exhibit on the first floor. Visit www.amnh.org or call (212) 769-5100 for more information.

Buffalo Museum of Science (Buffalo)—At present, there are some specimens on exhibit in the "Digging into Western New York's Past" gallery. In addition, a planned February 2015 display covering extinction will feature passenger pigeons. Visit www.sciencebuff.org or call (716) 896-5200 for more information.

Cazenovia Public Library

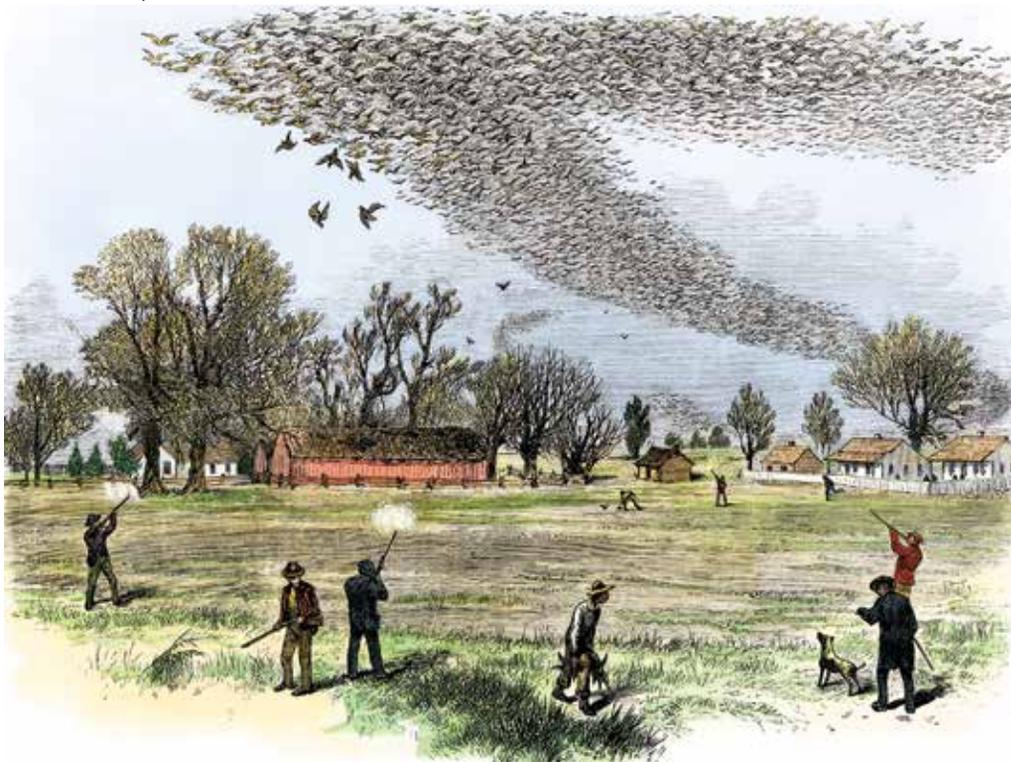
(Cazenovia)—One passenger pigeon is on display in the museum portion of the library. Visit www.cazenoviapubliclibrary.org or call (315) 655-9322 for more information.

Hamilton College (Clinton)—One mounted bird is on display outside a second floor classroom of the Taylor Science Center. Visit www.hamilton.edu or call (315) 859-4011 for more information.

Hobart and William Smith Colleges (Geneva)—A display of passenger pigeons is located on the second floor of Eaton Hall. Visit www.hws.edu or call (315) 781-3000 for more information.

NYS Museum (Albany)—An exhibit entitled "The Passenger Pigeon—From Billions to Zero" runs through February 2015, and features mounted birds, eggs, bones and historical artifacts. In addition, a series of public talks regarding the passenger pigeon are also planned. Visit www.nysm.nysed.gov or call (518) 474-5877 for more information.

* photo credit: Donald E. Hurlbert, Smithsonian Institution



Patterson Library (Westfield)—There is one passenger pigeon on display in the art gallery portion of the library. Visit www.pattersonlibrary.info or call (716) 326-2154 for more information.

Pember Museum of Natural History (Granville)—Two passenger pigeons and some eggs are on permanent display; an exhibit on the centenary is currently featured. Visit www.pembermuseum.com or call (518) 642-1515 for more information.



Passenger pigeon exhibit, Pember Museum

Rochester Museum & Science Center (Rochester)—Currently displays a total of 18 real and 24 replica passenger pigeons, in addition to eggs, nets, and other artifacts. Visit www.rmssc.org or call (585) 271-4320 for more information.

Roger Tory Peterson Institute (Jamestown)—Three passenger pigeons are on display as part of a special exhibit to mark the centenary. Visit <http://rtpi.org> or call (716) 665-2473 for more information.

Staten Island Museum (Staten Island)—There will be a special display at the front entrance for the centennial of the passing of Martha. In addition, the museum plans to include a passenger pigeon in the upcoming (September 2015, tentatively) “Remember the Mastodon” exhibit focused on extinction and biodiversity. Visit www.statenislandmuseum.org or call (718) 727-1135 for more information.

Trailside Museums and Zoo (Bear Mtn. State Park)—Two mounted specimens are on display in the Nature Study Museum. Visit www.trailsidezoo.org or call (845) 786-2701 for more information.

Vanderbilt Museum (Centerport)—There are two passenger pigeons on permanent display. Visit www.vanderbiltmuseum.org or call (631) 854-5579 for more information.

Wells College (Aurora)—There are two passenger pigeons on display on the third floor of the science building, Stratton Hall. Visit www.wells.edu or call (315) 364-3266 for more information.

A native of Greene County, **Jeremy Taylor** has been an avid birder since first being introduced to the hobby as a child. He is Editor of *Conservationist for Kids*.

Adult male passenger pigeons (right) had bluish slate plumage; females (left) were duller and more brownish.



Courtesy of New York State Museum

For Further Reading

The story of the passenger pigeon has been documented in two newly released books: *A Feathered River Across the Sky* by Joel Greenberg, and *A Message From Martha* by Mark Avery (both are 2014 releases from Bloomsbury Publishing), as well as the upcoming Princeton University Press release of Errol Fuller’s *The Passenger Pigeon*. Their plight is also documented in the film “From Billions to None,” planned for fall 2014 release, which is part of the larger Passenger Pigeon Project, <http://passengerpigeon.org>. Past *Conservationist* articles on passenger pigeons can be found in the April 1953, February 1975, and April 1996 issues.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service / Steve Hillebrand



Boars Not “Fair Game”

The hunting or trapping of free-ranging Eurasian boars in New York is now prohibited. (Hunting can be done at hunting preserves until 2015.) Since 2000, these boars have been reported in many counties across the state, causing serious damage to crops and the landscape. DEC has been working with the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Wildlife Services program to remove any Eurasian boars reported in New York, but eradication is expensive and time-consuming. Boars often join together to form a sounder (groups of 20 or more), and shooting individual animals sometimes results in scattering the rest of the group. Since hunting can interfere with trapping and eradication efforts, new regulations prohibiting hunting will aid in removal efforts. If you see a wild boar, send an e-mail to fwwildlf@gw.dec.state.ny.us with “feral swine” in the subject line.

Duck Stamp Turns 80



This year marks the 80th anniversary of the Federal Migratory Bird Hunting and Conservation Stamp (a.k.a. “Duck Stamp”), a landmark initiative for wetlands and waterfowl conservation. Receipts from stamp sales go directly to the purchase of wetland habitat into the National Wildlife Refuge System. Since 1934, the duck stamp program has generated more than \$900 million to conserve nearly 6 million acres of wetlands across the U.S. While hunters are required to purchase a duck stamp each year to legally hunt migratory waterfowl, the stamps are popular with birders and collectors as well.

Artwork on the stamps feature the winners of the annual stamp-design contest sponsored by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. A similar process is used for Junior Duck Stamps, which were instituted in 1989. Stamps go on sale on July 1st every year. Visit <http://1.usa.gov/XvyTQV> for more information about Federal Duck Stamps.

2013 Hunting Season Wrap-Up

New York’s 2013 black bear hunting season saw the third highest bear harvest on record, with 1,358 black bears taken. (Hunters took a record 1,864 bears in 2003 and 1,478 in 2009.) Last year, more than 600 bear hunters participated in the NYS Black Bear Cooperator Patch Program, in which hunters report their bear harvest to DEC in exchange for a cooperator patch and letter informing them of their bear’s age. Additionally, deer hunters took approximately 243,550 deer, including a record number (approximately 55,300) of bucks aged 2.5 years or older. These older bucks, which many hunters desire, accounted for 48 percent of harvested adult bucks statewide in 2013. Visit <http://on.ny.gov/1qO08gh> for complete harvest details.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service / Traylo, Waverley



Step-by-Step

In partnership with DEC, the Adirondack Mountain Club recently completed building two sets of stone stairs at Tinker Falls in Onondaga County. The new stairs will help prevent erosion, and will make it easier and safer for hikers of all experience levels to access the falls. One set of steps leads to the top of the falls; the other set leads to a flat rock amphitheater under the falls. For more information, check out the press release (<http://on.ny.gov/1thLW5o>) on DEC's website.



Tinker Falls

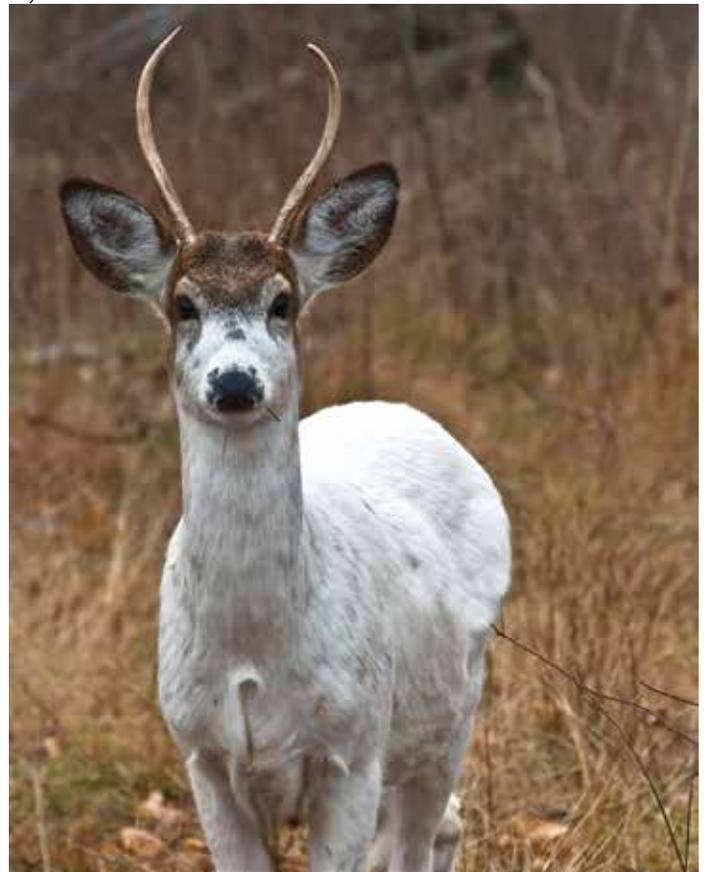
Black Bear Website

DEC continues to encourage the public to visit the “Understanding Black Bears” curriculum and educational website. This free site contains a wide array of educational resources that teach people about black bear history, population management, living in bear country, and more. New York teachers and students may especially enjoy the interactive learning via computer games, puzzles, movies and more. Visit <http://on.ny.gov/1q00zY1> for more information, including a link to the website.

No CWD

Recently, DEC reported that there are no known cases of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in New York's deer population. More than 2,500 samples of deer were tested and found to be free of the fatal disease, which is now found in 22 states. The last confirmed case of CWD in the State was in 2005. While NY appears to be CWD free, DEC still encourages all hunters, as well as the public, to help prevent the spread of the disease. Hunters going to CWD-positive states (like neighboring Pennsylvania) are not permitted to bring back whole carcasses, but can bring back meat and cleaned skull caps and capes. Everyone is asked to report any sick or abnormally acting deer to their nearest DEC office (<http://on.ny.gov/1IAeo06>). Visit <http://on.ny.gov/1B1Jd0W> to learn more about CWD.

Rory Holmes



Ask the Biologist:

Q: I thought you'd be interested in this photo I took of a white buck. Can you tell me what causes this coloration, and is it a problem for the animal?

Rory Holmes

Montgomery, Orange County

A: What a great pose! This buck is exhibiting signs of leucism, a condition whereby melanin (a pigment found in skin, hair, feathers, etc.) isn't properly deposited throughout the deer's coat. This is different than albinism, which is the total absence of melanin. Animals with this condition will have red eyes.

Many people report seeing “marbled” fawns. This is called skewbald and occurs when the normally uniform brown parts of a white-tailed deer's coat become mottled with white. People often mistakenly refer to this coloration as “piebald,” however piebald refers to black and white colorations; skewbald refers to white and non-black colorations.

Unfortunately, wildlife that exhibit such color variations oftentimes have a harder life, as the animals are easily spotted by predators and so generally suffer higher mortality rates. For more images of unusually colored animals, check out the “White Album” on our Facebook page (<http://on.fb.me/1mIVjIP>).



Montezuma Storm

Aaron Winters (Rochester, Monroe County) sent along this great image of ducks against the fall sky at Montezuma Wildlife Refuge.

Colorful Chipmunk

I thought I'd send along this photo of a chipmunk in the leaves.

Laurie Dirks

Ontario, Wayne County

—It looks like we're not the only ones enjoying this season!



In Fall Light

I took this image of a northern harrier at the Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge in Ulster County.

Scott Stoner

Albany County

—A great capture, Scott. The orange lighting really says "October!"

✉ LETTERS

Fall Flight

I love fall in the Northeast and wanted to share this photo, taken at Beaver Lake Nature Center in Baldwinsville.

Kevin Baker

Baldwinsville, Onondaga County

—This is a great “autumn” shot. The fall foliage really stands out! For places to go to spot the colorful pigments of the season, check out “Colors of Fall” in our October 2010 issue (<http://on.ny.gov/1q19Ejs>).



Hiding in the Forest

I live at the foothills of the Adirondacks, just inside the blue line, and I recently took this photo of an eastern newt.

Sierra Luck

Mayfield, Fulton County

—What a great “up-close” image! This is the immature phase of an eastern red-spotted newt, called a red eft. While adult newts live in water, efts are land dwellers and are usually seen on moist forest floors, especially in the fall. Eastern red-spotted newts secrete poisonous toxins, and the eft’s bright coloration serves as a warning to predators.

Contact us!

E-mail us at: magazine@dec.ny.gov

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

One Great Dog by William G. Weckesser

It is said that while a hunter may have many good dogs in his lifetime, he will be lucky to have one great dog. This is the story of my great dog, Max.

I first met Max in 1964 when he was eight weeks old. He was given to me by a friend who raised field trial beagles. At the time, I did not know that the small tri-colored bundle of energy possessed such a great nose, and would have superior instincts.

My brother and I took Max hunting for the first time in the fall of 1965. Shortly after arriving, Max started a rabbit in a thick, brushy area. The rabbit (as rabbits often do) ran his circle with Max only losing him for mere seconds, probably at the “check.” At first, it got by us unseen, but my hound kept on it. The second time around, it again made it past us. As it started the third circle, I moved to the top of a small ridge where I knew there was a small open area; my brother stayed where we were. The rabbit crossed the opening and I had him.

When Max returned, I showed him the rabbit. As he looked up at me, I swear he was thinking: “Look, if you guys are going to make me bring every rabbit around three times before you shoot it, I’m going to have to find another family to hunt with.”

Over the next eight years Max got better and better. We grew close, and I could always tell by his voice whether he was running a rabbit or on the track of a pheasant or grouse. (I took many that he flushed.) In Max’s tenth season, I had my 14-year-old son, Will, with me. Despite the fact that Old Max had lost his hearing and his eyes were getting cloudy, he brought the first rabbit around and I shot it. The second rabbit Max chased made a perfect circle and my son got his first rabbit.

Afterwards, we lost Max in a swamp; he couldn’t hear me calling. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, he came back, wet and muddy, but tail still wagging. It broke my heart to realize that I could never take him out again. Though, it seemed fitting: I shot the first rabbit Max ever ran, and my son, the new hunter, shot Max’s last.

As I sit here writing this at the age of 74 and thinking back on 60 years of hunting in Rhinebeck, Dutchess County, I have this desire to rabbit hunt one more time. I would like to go in an area with a decent cottontail population, with someone who has a

good hound. The wonderful voice of the dog would remind me of Max. I would smile, knowing I got what I wanted: A good dog, a rabbit, a nice circle, and memories of Old Max, the greatest hound I ever hunted with.

I am hopeful that a few more deer will fall to my arrow or shotgun slug, but I doubt I will ever take another rabbit.

William G. Weckesser is a lifelong Dutchess County hunter.



Max after a fine day afield.

2013 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 for each category receives original art of his or her deer by artist Michael Barr of Corning.



Largest Archery Deer:

Taken in: Erie County
Score: Net 156-6; Gross 169-0
Typical
Points: 10
Taken by: John C. Moore



Largest Gun Deer:

Taken in: Monroe County
Score: Net 177-0; Gross 183-7
Typical
Points: 10
Taken by: Matthew Gallina

Courtesy Big Buck Club

Courtesy Big Buck Club

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



From the Walkway over the Hudson by Wells Horton

See page 2

Subscribe today!

Call 1-800-678-6399

Visit online:

www.TheConservationist.org



Find us on facebook

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