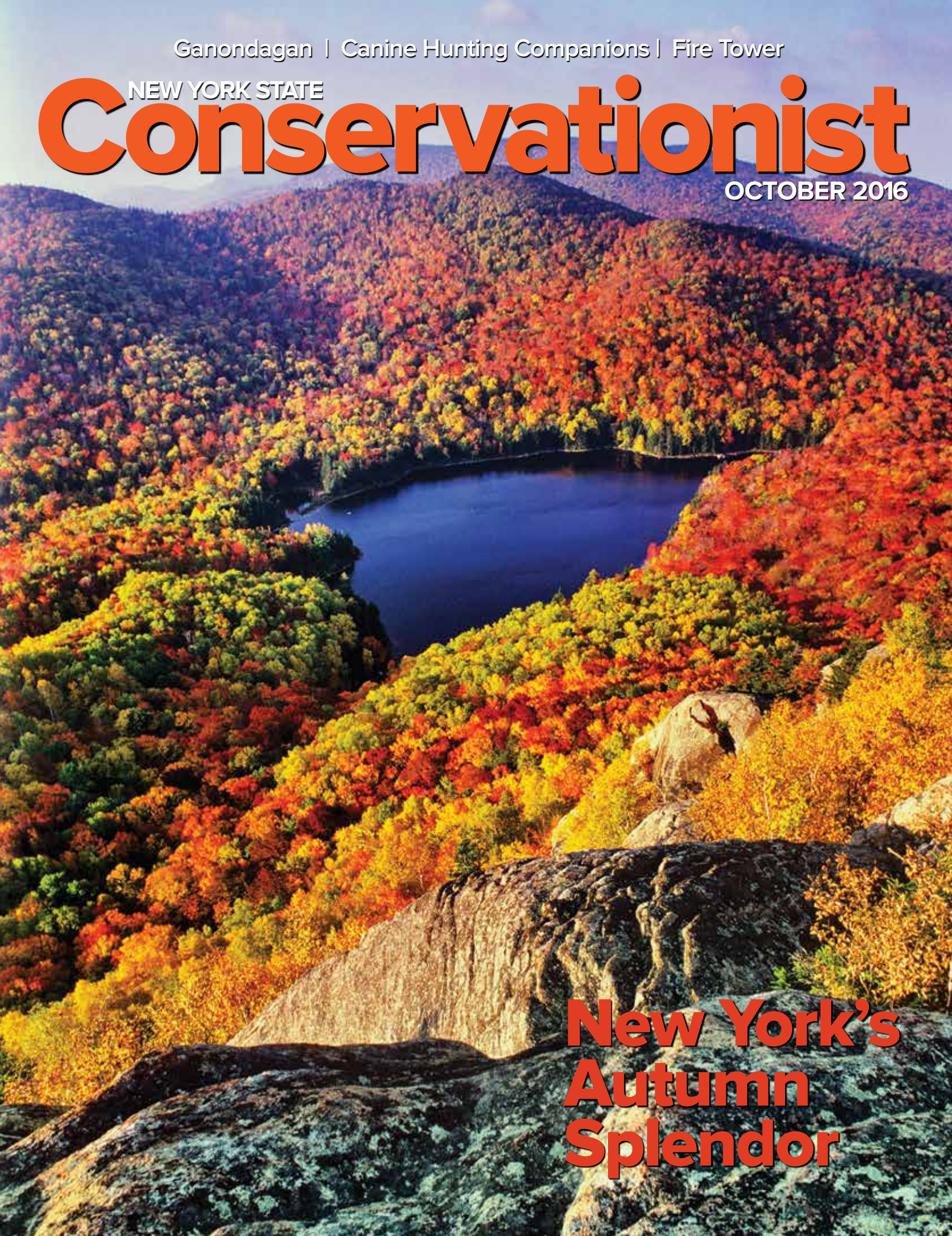
Ganondagan | Canine Hunting Companions | Fire Tower

NEW YORK STATE

# Conservationist

OCTOBER 2016



## New York's Autumn Splendor

# Lark in the Park 2016!
# Come Celebrate the Catskills

## From October 1 through 10, 2016 the 13th annual Lark in the Park offers exciting outdoor events in the Catskills.

Join in the fun by paddling on a reservoir, cycling on the Catskill Scenic Trail, hiking to a Catskill fire tower, fishing a world-class trout stream, 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**.

CATSKILLS LARK IN THE PARK

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.

The Zuni Olla Maidens dance troupe from Zuni Pueblo, New Mexico, performed a Pottery Dance at the opening of the Seneca Art & Culture Center at Ganondagan.

October 2016 Volume 71, Number 2

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**Front cover:** Peaked Mountain Pond in Adirondacks by Carl Heilman II
**Back cover:** Trail camera picture by Mike Raykovicz (if you look closely, you can see the author in a tree stand in the upper right)

Kayaking on Tooley Pond

Carl Heilman II

# The Joys of Autumn

Autumn in New York reminds people just how beautiful nature can be. It's the perfect time to get outside, take delight in the fresh, crisp air, and be inspired by the changing colors reflected in the fall foliage.

New York State offers an abundance of ways to enjoy nature's spectacle, including: paddling or fishing on a lake or pond; hiking or camping in the Adirondacks, Catskills, or a nearby forest; cycling on a bike path; horseback riding on a woods trail; picnicking at a local nature preserve; taking a drive on a rural road for some leaf-peeping; or simply strolling in your neighborhood or a nearby park. No matter your preference, New York has something for everyone.

Be sure to make plans to enjoy the fall season—and remember to bring a camera or cell phone to capture (and share) your experiences.

Adirondack railroad near Thendara

Carl Heilman II

Wetlands on Lyon Mountain

DEC photo

Autumn wood ducks in western NY

Aaron Winters

Whiteface Mountain fall foliage

Jim Clayton

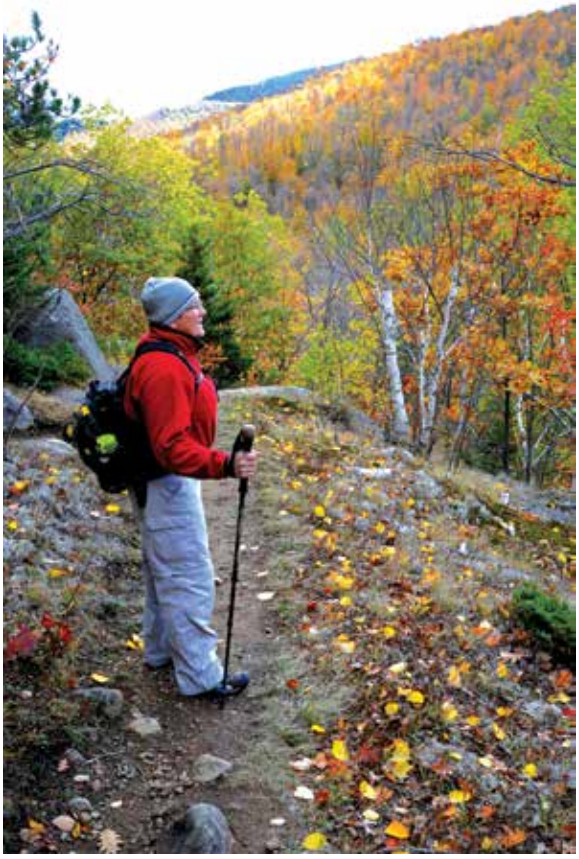
Sunset Rock, Catskills

Francis Driscoll

Five Ponds Wilderness Area

Wayne Jones

Hiking on Owls Head, Adirondacks



Jim Clayton

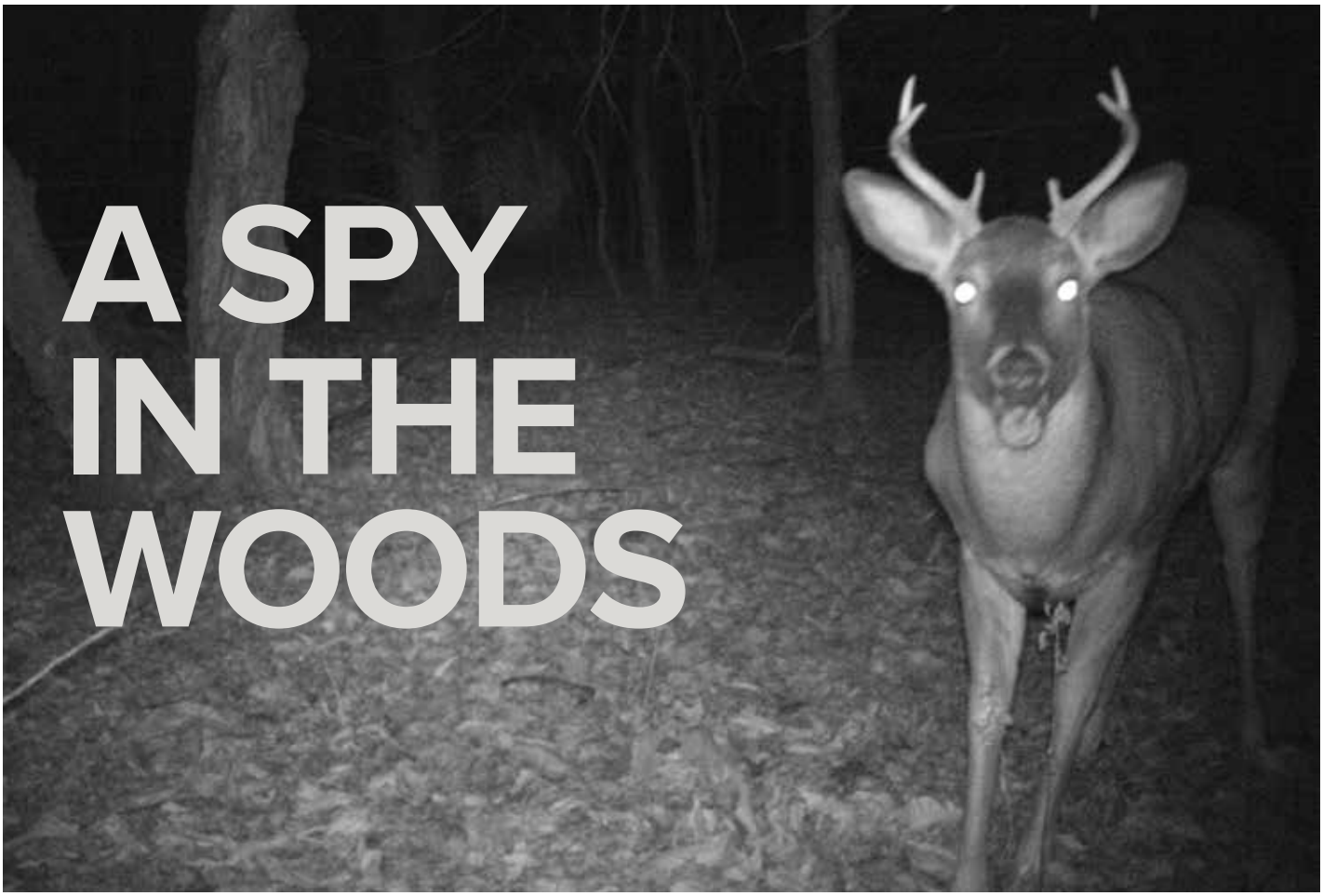
Sunset from Bullhead Mountain

Wayne Jones

For ideas on places to visit during the fall season, check out the following websites:

**DEC: www.dec.ny.gov/62.html**
**State Parks: www.parks.ny.gov/**
**I Love NY: www.iloveny.com/seasons/fall**

# A SPY IN THE WOODS



Trail cameras let a hunter know what shows up before he/she arrives or after he/she leaves. This six-point buck fed on some windfall apples shortly before I arrived at my stand.

By Mike Raykovicz

Photos provided by author

There's little doubt modern technology has had a significant impact on many of today's outdoor enthusiasts. Consider hunters, for example: I doubt few would go afield without their GPS unit, scent-suppressing clothing, waterproof boots, or even their smartphone.

Recently, trail cameras have entered this technological realm. For hunters and other outdoor lovers, trail cams can play an important role in the enjoyment of nature or the outcome of a hunting season.

Trail cameras are constantly producing amazing wildlife pictures that outdoor enthusiasts of all sorts would otherwise miss. A black bear feeding along the edge of a cornfield, a fisher hunting for a meal, or a previously unknown large antlered buck are not unusual subjects for a trail camera to capture. Placed near an outdoor bird feeder or in a flower garden, a trail camera can produce excellent close-up images of feathered visitors or other small animals. Consequently, trail cameras are not looked at as just some technological add-on, but as an essential piece of outdoor equipment.

Contrary to what some might think, deer are not frightened by a trail cam; in fact, deer are often curious when they spot one.

This image of a wild boar proves these invasive animals are now part of the Southern Tier landscape.

This mature coyote was hunting mice and voles in a field in midafternoon.

It's widely believed North American hunters pursue more white-tailed deer than any other game species. Consequently, countless hours are spent scouting the haunts of the wily whitetail. However, family commitments, school activities, little league games, and job responsibilities can limit the time many hunters can spend scouting. For those with limited time, trail cameras can provide the edge they need once hunting season begins.

Trail cameras allow hunters to effectively and unobtrusively scout a hunting site without leaving a lot of game-spooking scent. These silent sentinels dutifully monitor and record any intrusion into their assigned watch areas and they do it faithfully. In addition to photographing game, some trail cameras provide additional and, sometimes, extremely important information. Time of day, temperature, and even moon phase can all be recorded on images taken by these devices.

Today's trail cameras record what they photograph either directly to an internal memory or to a removable media card. In addition, almost all current camera models come with infrared (IR) or black light sensors. Both technologies allow the camera to take photos under low-light or even no-light conditions. Those with black-light technology emit no visible light at all, which makes them even stealthier than their infrared counterparts. Nighttime IR photos are black and white, and may have less detail and clarity. If the infrared flash is designed for maximum range, the images may be overly white, or the animal's picture may be blurry. If it is designed for best image quality, range will be sacrificed. Most cameras will take acceptable IR images of subjects up to 80 feet away.

Many of the more advanced trail cameras are capable of taking bursts of video and writing it to a media card, just as digital cameras do. Those with removable media cards allow their owners to check the captured photos in the field or to take them home to be printed as photos or e-mailed to friends or hunting buddies.

## Basic trail camera models take excellent color daytime photos and acceptable black-and-white pictures at night.

New technology can be a daunting undertaking for some people, but to their credit, trail-camera manufacturers have simplified the operating process. Even neophyte camera users can be assured the camera they buy can be easily set up and that it will operate with minimum preparation. All trail cameras currently available rely on digital technology to capture images, and the images can be checked as frequently or as infrequently as the owner wishes.

These five longbeards were seen feeding on insects in a hayfield.

Trail cams sometimes capture behavior few people see. This young doe is visiting a scrape made earlier by a buck and leaving her scent on the branch above the scrape.

As an added convenience, higher-end models incorporate a small viewing screen that allows the user to immediately check any captured images without removing the media card.

Like other digital cameras, the resolution or picture quality of the camera is measured in megapixels. The more megapixels a camera offers, the better the picture quality. However, for the person who only wants to view or e-mail his/her photos, just about any resolution will suffice. On the other hand, a camera with a resolution of 3.5 megapixels is capable of producing high-quality photos up to 8 X 10 inches in size, without sacrificing photo quality. Keep in mind that the higher the resolution at which the photo is recorded, the fewer the number of photos that can be stored in the camera's built-in memory or on the media card. Conversely, the lower the camera's resolution, the higher the number of photos that can be stored. Media cards with 1 or 2 Gigabyte (GB) storage capacity can store hundreds of images and provide all the photo storage capacity most users are likely to need, but because of the video capability of most modern cameras, the trend is for cards of 16 GB or greater.

This young tom turkey was looking for the rest of the flock.

These two young bucks are seen feeding just before they entered a farm field.

I've enjoyed using my trail camera so much that I decided one wasn't enough. I now own five of them. Having five, I find it helpful if all the cameras use the same battery size. That way I only have to carry the one size along with me. (Note: Most trail cameras are powered by eight to twelve AA batteries.) Also, the majority of cameras use an SD media card to record images. For the sake of convenience, I make sure all my trail cams use the same type of card.

Before making a purchase, be sure to ask about trigger speed and recovery. Trigger speed is the amount of time elapsed from when a camera first senses motion until it captures a photo of whatever triggered the motion. Recovery is how quickly a camera can store the first picture and be ready to take a second photo. These two features can be important if animals walk by in groups. You wouldn't want to miss a pack of hunting coyotes or a flock of feeding turkeys, or a doe and fawn or sow bear and cubs, for that matter.

A game camera represents a substantial investment, and can be a tempting target for thieves. For this reason, security is an important consideration. Trail cameras have become much smaller and less conspicuous in the last few years; some even come with a password or numeric code protection. Most come with a means to secure the camera to a tree or post using a user-supplied cable and lock.

In addition, manufacturers offer their products in camouflage patterns so they are hard to detect. Regardless of the model chosen, a hunter or nature lover can sleep at night knowing his/her hunting area or property is being monitored, and that may be almost as good, if not better, than being there.

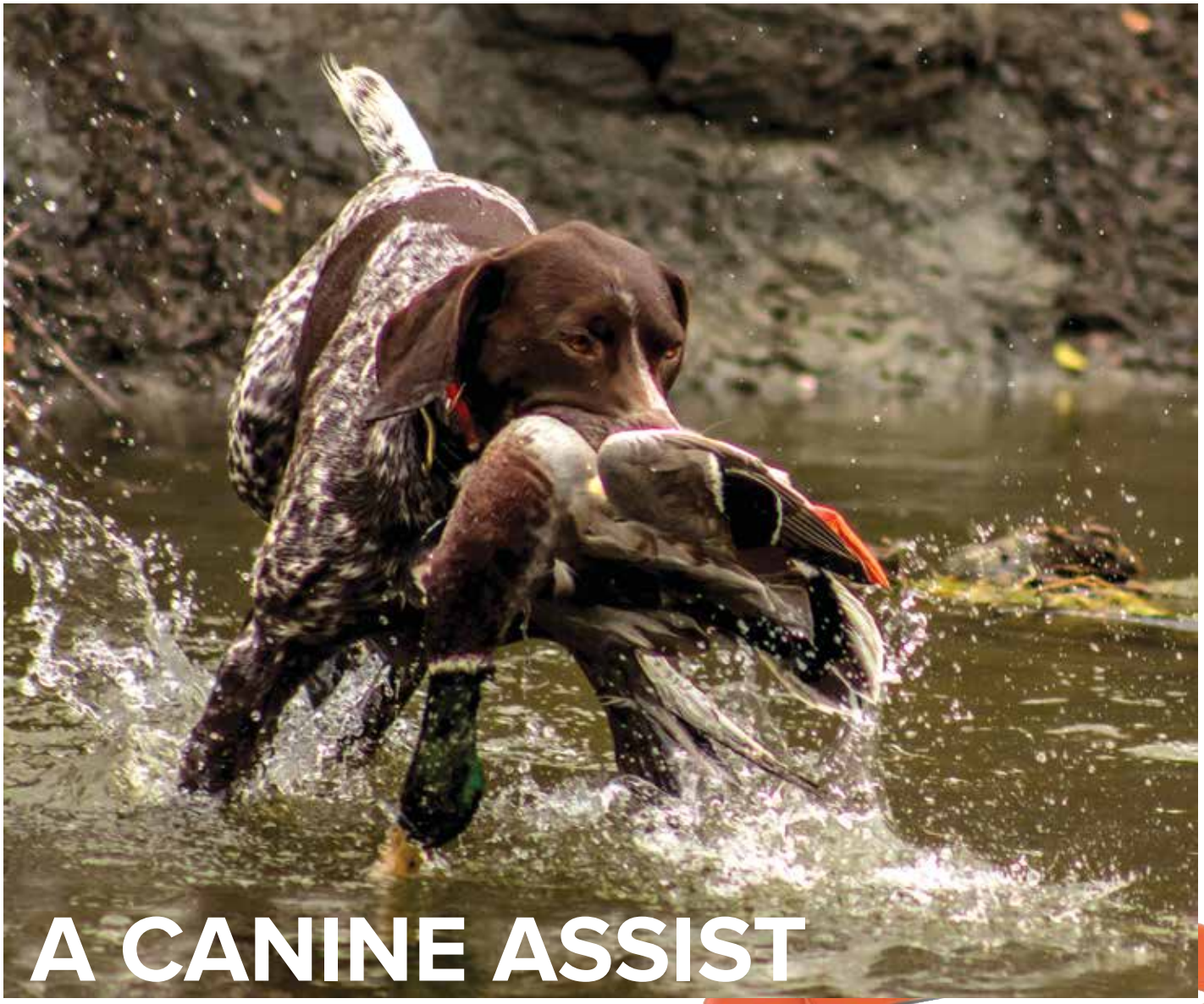
Basic trail camera models take excellent color daytime photos and acceptable black-and-white pictures at night. Higher-end models produce high-resolution images complete with meteorological data and computer mapping features, but they can cost several hundred dollars. For the most part, the less expensive models will serve you well, especially if you only want to know what kind of game or other critters are in the area. If you want to record color video clips or want the highest resolution images possible, then you'll want a trail camera with more features. Speak to a knowledgeable salesperson and rest assured: regardless of which model you choose, things won't go bump in the night without an image attached to them.

Trail cameras, like the one above, store the photos they take on an SD card. Because of the video capability of many cameras, they now take an SD card of 16 GB or higher.

Avid hunter and outdoor columnist **Mike Raykovicz** contributes frequently to the *Conservationist*, and when he's not writing, you can find him in the deer woods.

David Kuritzky with a woodcock he has just accepted from his German shorthaired pointer, Bling.

German shorthaired pointer, Aspen, retrieves a jump-shot mallard.



# A CANINE ASSIST

## ...and a bounty conserved

**By Perry Masotti**

Photos by author

For a hunter like me, who likes to pursue upland birds, waterfowl and rabbits, New York State offers a wide variety of habitat and a bounty of game species. No matter the quarry, when I go afield, I usually bring along one of my most helpful tools—my dog.

"Elk" is my young German shorthaired pointer. Last November, Elk and I were hidden in the grass and trees at the edge of a beaver swamp waiting for geese. It was about five minutes before sunset and I wondered if the geese would come. Suddenly, in the distance I thought I heard honking; they were coming. As they passed by, I fired and dropped two. Elk watched all of this with excitement. He looked at me, then at the geese in the swamp, and waited for me to send him for the retrieve. I said his name and off he went, plunging into the water to bring both birds back to me. It would be a great dinner.

Waterfowl hunting opportunities abound in New York. Puddle ducks—such as mallards, teal, and wood ducks—frequent small beaver swamps, the Hudson River and the Finger Lakes, while diving ducks can be found on the St. Lawrence River, Lake Ontario and on many other waters in the state. If a goose dinner sounds good, you can find abundant Canada geese on large and small waters, or in cut corn fields anywhere in New York.

I also like to hunt upland birds, and last fall visited the Thousand Islands area. A very light, wet snow started to fall. The foliage had peaked and dropped a month earlier and carpeted the forest floor. There are white birch, aspen and cherry trees there, as well as wild grapes and other plants ruffed grouse like to eat. Some of the woodcock had not yet headed south. With the woods to myself and the day ahead of me, I felt like a king. Elk and my other German shorthair, Aspen, worked the area: crossing paths, separating, and then crossing again. Elk was tracking, then suddenly stopped on point. A grouse burst from its hiding spot and gave me a trailing shot. As the bird fell, Elk was immediately on it—lowering his nose to the ground, tracking and then retrieving the grouse. Another great meal.

In young forests, especially, I often find good numbers of ruffed grouse, known as the King of Gamebirds. Since woodcock also inhabit these same areas, you never know what you might encounter. You might walk up to your dog on point expecting a woodcock, only to be jolted by the loud flush of a grouse. Or, you might expect a grouse, but have the smaller woodcock speed out, twittering as it goes. Both can leave you shaking your head, muttering to yourself.

My dogs often wear a collar that beeps when they go on point so I can find them in the thick cover. While on another hunt at the edge of the same strip of forest where Elk retrieved the grouse, my dog Aspen's point beeped, so I climbed over fallen trees and vines to get to him. Unseen forked branches grabbed at my ankles, but I found my way to my dog. As I approached, I heard the telltale sound of a woodcock rushing away. I took a shot just before the bird disappeared behind some evergreen trees. Aspen couldn't see the bird and I wondered "Was it hit?"

Aspen with a Canada goose.

Jacquie Kuritzky hunts with Bling.

Like all responsible hunters, I always follow up after a shot, and I sent Aspen in the direction I thought the bird went. He quickly searched a strip of high swamp grass about 30 yards wide, then headed for the section of young, thick trees next to the grass. In just half a minute, Aspen came bounding back with the bird in his mouth. I was proud of him and glad to recover the bird.

On an early December morning, my good buddy Vinny and I went waterfowl hunting in a swamp near a stone quarry in the lower Hudson Valley. It was only 10 degrees and we were up to our waists in icy water, pressed up against some oak trees to conceal ourselves from any ducks that might come by. Elk sat on his tree platform, wearing a neoprene camo vest and scanning the sky. Out of nowhere, two black ducks came in fast and hard to our decoys. The hen flared away, but I got the drake. I gave Elk the command, and off he went, swimming the 35 yards to the duck. It was a fine, banded bird. The 3 AM wakeup to travel and set up decoys was worth the effort.

Another fun bird to hunt is the ring-necked pheasant. New York State has an active pheasant-rearing program that provides ample opportunity for hunters to take one of these colorful birds. Pheasants are a gateway game species in New York; many young hunters got their start on these exciting birds. For many hard-working people with limited free time and for some youngsters, it may be the only small game they get to hunt. Using a dog to flush and retrieve pheasants is a great way to increase your chances of enjoying a savory pheasant meal.

Hunting dogs make excellent companions for taking cottontail rabbits and snowshoe hares as well as birds. I have been fortunate enough to bag a number of rabbits while out hunting grouse and woodcock, but only when they have first been pointed by my German shorthairs. On one such occasion, I was walking on a woods road after failing to locate any grouse on the adjacent public land when I realized that Aspen was not heeling with me. I turned back to see him pointing at a brush pile next to the road. I walked up slowly, not really knowing what to expect, when suddenly a cottontail ran from its hiding spot and I was able to bag it. Aspen made the retrieve and proudly carried the rabbit back to the truck. The walk seemed shorter because of our success and our pride in working together.

I benefit from having dogs with pointing, tracking and retrieving bred into them. Although these behaviors are rooted in the dog's biology, they must first be released by exposure to situations that cause these "instincts" to emerge. Training makes them stronger and more reliable. I find training my own dogs to be very satisfying, and many others do as well. There are also many organizations that can help a person train his or her dog.

Elk points a woodcock in central New York.

Always trust the dog. A German shorthair with a north country grouse.

A dog with good tracking instinct, sharpened by training, can amaze you. A few years ago, I was hunting in a wildlife management area near Lake Champlain. My old dog, Speck, pointed a grouse on the edge of a swamp, and when it flushed past me I was certain I hit it. In my mind, I was sure of where it had fallen. Three times I started Speck on that spot. He just quickly ran past it without tracking and went into the swamp. Frustrated, I finally just let him work his way. After a brief point beep and a short flutter of wings, he emerged with the bird in his mouth and delivered it to my hand, just as he'd been trained to do. I should have known better: always trust the dog!

There is an old saying: "The best conservation tool is a well-trained dog." I could not agree more. I love hunting with a dog—for the joy of it, and also because a human-and-dog team will find and recover more game. Train that dog and you'll see just how rewarding it can be. Plus, you'll eat like a king!

Longtime hunter **Perry Masotti** raises and trains German shorthairs in southeastern New York.

Ganondagan Historic Site Manager G. Peter Jemison (center) is wearing a Seneca Gustoweh (headdress) and a traditional Seneca outfit for social dancing at Ganondagan's 25th Annual Native American Dance and Musical Festival. He is joined by (l-r): John Block (Seneca), Nicole Hill (Seneca), Breezy Crouse (Seneca), and Heath Hill (Oneida).

# HISTORY & CULTURE COME TO LIFE

## —The Seneca Art & Culture Center at Ganondagan

**By G. Peter Jemison**

Photos provided by author

October 24, 2015 was a picturesque day: the yellow aspen leaves fluttered in the wind and a clear blue sky shone above the light gray cedar façade of the new Seneca Art & Culture Center at the Ganondagan (ga·NON·da·gan) State Historic Site in Victor, NY, just south of Rochester. Dancers and singers in traditional Seneca dress stood opposite the front door, waiting for the celebration to begin.

After almost two decades of discussion, planning and fundraising, the Seneca Art & Culture Center was opening to the public. The exciting day began with a traditional Ganönyö:k (Thanksgiving Address), and then hundreds of people made their way into the building. Throughout the day, a constant line of people waited to enter the gallery to view the exhibits.

Inside the auditorium, people sat in theater-type seating, elevated above the floor, to watch the Allegany River Indian Dancers social dancing program and Smoke Dance demonstrations. A curtain behind the dancers darkened the full-length windows that frame the natural landscape and outdoor plaza, where a tent and picnic tables invited visitors to eat their lunch outdoors.

As site manager, it was an amazing day for me, as well as for the community and the many people who supported the Center. As I made my way down the corridor, people stopped to shake my hand, tell me "This is a dream come true," and offer me their congratulations. It was like a dream, but now it was real.

Having witnessed the construction, I could finally breathe a long sigh of relief. Still, I wanted to fulfill my promise to thank the supporters who had helped make this day a reality. The sponsors—including architects, construction managers, and New York State Parks officials— worked tirelessly to develop this amazing facility, and all deserved to be congratulated.

The popular Lacrosse Exhibit at the Art & Culture Center illustrates the history of the Iroquois Nationals lacrosse team, including their team not being allowed to participate in World Championship tournaments abroad when host countries refused to recognize the team members' Haudenosaunee passports.

Sid Hill (Onondaga) surveys one of the exhibits at the new Seneca Art & Culture Center. Hill is the Tadoda:ho or traditional leader of the Six Nations Haudenosaunee (Iroquois Confederacy), and chairs all meetings of the Grand Council of Chiefs.

Later, an audience filled the auditorium to watch the Iroquois Creation Story, a film that is a testament to what can be achieved through a creative, cultural collaboration that combines photography and animation, Dance Theater, a vibrant musical score, and narration. Seneca, Tuscarora and Mohawk dancers and voice actors gave it true authenticity. The award-winning film continues to be included in film festivals across the U.S. and abroad. It is shown throughout the day in the Orientation Theater of the Center, and the gift shop sells copies of the film.

The Center is divided into two areas: the western half features an auditorium/multipurpose space, a caterer's kitchen, a "green" room, a projection booth, and the gift shop, as well as storage for tables and chairs, restrooms and drinking fountains. The east side off the main entry hall includes the gallery, Orientation Theater, two classrooms, archival space, and offices. A clean energy, geothermal system heats and cools the building.

The auditorium is the centerpiece of the complex, providing versatile state-of-the-art space for a host of events. The sound system can be equipped for a single speaker, a banquet or a musical performance, and lighting features create a variety of moods. The rollout, theater-style seating is elevated, and the sprung floor is ideal for various types of dancers. When the mechanical seating is not needed, round tables with chairs can be set up for school groups or be arranged for a wedding reception. When needed, a movie screen drops down in the front of the auditorium.

Exhibits are an integral part of the Seneca Art & Culture Center. A special exhibit highlights the Iroquois National Lacrosse Team, which contains photographs, equipment, medals and jerseys to describe the development of the team since it was formed in 1983. Powerful graphics in vivid team colors—yellow and purple—create a visually stunning exhibit.

Semi-permanent exhibits contain important and rare artifacts from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Two stand out: the first is a rare parchment document signed and issued by King Louis XIV in 1687. This is the actual commission given to the Marquis de Denonville to attack the Onöndowa'ga:' (Seneca Nation). This extraordinary document, loaned to the Center by the Ontario County Historical Society, fascinates visitors when they learn it is the original. We consider it a privilege to exhibit and care for such a rare object. The second notable exhibit is an exceptional burden strap (a sling attached to a backpack that transfers weight for carrying heavy loads, e.g., canoes) that is woven with basswood under-bark, embroidered in colorfully dyed moose hair. This lovely artifact, on loan from the Rochester Museum & Science Center, was woven sometime between 1775 and 1780 by a Seneca woman living at Cattaraugus. It is a very fine example of tapestry-like weaving.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME?

**The Seneca word "Ganondagan" literally means "town on a hill surrounded by the substance of white." The white refers to blossoms that turned into an edible fruit, which the people lived on when they first settled here.**

**To the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois), the color white signifies peace, so Ganondagan is also referred to as the "Town of White" or "Town of Peace." The message of peace is associated with Ganondagan because oral tradition indicates these lands may be the burial place of Jikonsaseh, also known as the Mother of Nations, the first person to accept the message of peace that united the previously warring Haudenosaunee nations.**

Ganondagan and the Seneca Art & Culture Center rely on the support of many people and organizations. The Friends of Ganondagan manage and staff our gift shop and support the special events offered on-site. Three heirloom products of the Iroquois White Corn Project are sold in the gift shop, which also carries crafts produced by Haudenosaunee artists, and features books and music written by or about the Haudenosaunee, including many unique and one-of-a-kind items.

Ganondagan is a rare and fascinating historic site and national landmark, and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Located on the site of a seventeenth-century Seneca village, Ganondagan has 569 acres of beautiful landscape, a fully reconstructed Seneca bark longhouse, hiking trails, a mountain bike trail, and now the Seneca Art & Culture Center.

The addition of the Center expands opportunities for people to learn about the Seneca Nation and our state and country's history, and enjoy exhibits that showcase the story of Seneca and Haudenosaunee contributions to art, culture and society for more than two centuries. It's a great place to visit for an unforgettable experience.

**G. Peter Jemison** (Heron Clan, Seneca) is the Historic Site Manager for Ganondagan State Historic Site.

## IF YOU GO

The Ganondagan State Historic Site is open year-round from dawn until dusk.

Located at 7000 County Rd 41 in Victor, NY, the Seneca Art & Culture Center is open Tuesday-Sunday from 9 AM to 5 PM (call to confirm).

The Seneca Art & Culture Center closes for about a month between mid-January and mid-February to allow us to observe our midwinter ceremonies and plan for the coming season. During this time, we refresh our exhibits, and replace artifacts with new loans. In addition, we will create programs for children to enjoy when they are on winter and spring breaks.

For more information, call (585) 924-5848 or visit: **www.Ganondagan.org**.

# On Patrol

Carl Heilman II

*Real stories from Conservation Officers and Forest Rangers in the field*

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

## Piebald Poached—Suffolk County

ECO Jeff Hull received a call about two men caught trespassing while hunting on Smithtown Park property. Officer Hull arrived at the site, found a dead piebald deer and recovered evidence that included an arrow, bait and a tree stand. ECOs Hull and Marcia Goodrich interviewed the men, and when the evidence was produced, one man confessed to having taken the deer over bait from the tree stand. He received a summons for trespass, hunting over bait, and failure to tag a deer, and was charged with a misdemeanor for taking a wild deer except as permitted by the Fish and Wildlife Law. The meat from the deer was donated to a local charity.

## "High" Peaks?—Essex County

In early August, Ray Brook Dispatch received a report of a 20-year-old dehydrated hiker located between Big Slide and the Brothers Mountains who had no water and was losing consciousness. Lt. Charles Platt dispatched Rangers Chris Kostoss, Rob Praczkajlo, Mark St. Claire and Scott VanLear to rescue the subject. When rangers reached the man, they rehydrated him. They also believed he might have been under the influence of drugs. Rangers escorted the man down through the John's Brook Valley and turned him over to a waiting ambulance for further treatment.

## Blue Heron Rescue—Orange County

ECO Matt Burdick was notified about a great blue heron entangled in fishing line near the Ramapo River fishing access site in the Town of Tuxedo. Officer Burdick found the distressed bird and contacted a DEC-licensed wildlife rehabilitator. Working together, they captured the heron and removed the line. The rehabilitator took possession of the injured bird and transported it to a veterinarian for treatment.

## Technology Leads to Arrest—Washington County

On opening day of the Northern Zone deer season, Lt. John Ellithorpe received a text message and photo of a man posing with a 10-pt. buck. He was described as a convicted felon for whom it was illegal to possess a firearm. A criminal history check confirmed the man was a convicted felon. Lt. Ellithorpe and ECO Matthew Krug got a local address for the man and found the deer there. When they interviewed the man, he first claimed a friend had killed the deer but eventually admitted to taking the deer himself. He surrendered his rifle, which was hidden in a crawl space. He was charged with unlawful possession of a firearm, illegal taking of a deer and failure to tag a deer. The rifle and deer were seized as evidence.

## Fishing in the Wee Hours—Oswego County

ECO Matt Harger received a complaint about fishing violations on the Oswego River, in particular, fishing outside legal hours during the annual salmon run. Officer Harger conducted a 2 AM patrol and observed multiple individuals fishing in waist-deep water. With the assistance of ECO Greg Maneeley, eight individuals were ticketed, and one of them also received a ticket for throwing an empty beer can into the river.

Crowds hiked to the summit of Stillwater Mountain to celebrate the restoration and reopening of the fire tower.

# FINDING STATION 77

## —A piece of history is restored at Stillwater Mountain fire tower

**By Andrea C. Pedrick**
Photos provided by author

The first Saturday in July, Jim Fox stood in the sunshine at the base of Stillwater Fire Tower on top of Stillwater Mountain in Herkimer County, greeting people as they left the one-mile trail behind them and joined him on the summit. The mood of people in the long line making its way out from under the canopy of trees was jovial. Smiles were wide. Fox was the greeter, but the Stillwater Fire Tower was the center of attention.

Slowly, the crowd moved toward the fire tower. They paused to admire its magnitude—a structure that stands 47 feet tall. They put a hand on the railing and began to climb its eight staircases to the cab on top. Once in the cab they witnessed the spectacular views of the High Peaks—first seen from the tower more than 130 years ago—and the entire Maple Ridge Wind Farm. Most people in attendance volunteered their time to rehabilitate the tower. Perhaps silently they applauded themselves for the work they did or acknowledged to themselves that this was their legacy for generations to enjoy.

Located within the Independence River Wild Forest at the western boundary of the Adirondack Park, Stillwater Fire Tower was originally built out of wood in 1882 for the New York State Adirondack Survey. Conducted by Verplanck Colvin, the survey mapped the lakes, ponds, peaks and mountaintops of the wilderness region. Today's metal structure was built in 1919. For nearly 70 years, the tower was staffed with fire observers until it closed in 1988.

Throughout the years, the structure deteriorated to the point where it was not safe for public use. In August 2015, Jim Fox and the members of the Friends of Stillwater Fire Tower (FSFT)

entered into a stewardship agreement with DEC to restore the tower. DEC provided and transported most of the materials, and in conjunction with the landowner, Lyme Adirondack Timberlands, coordinated access. FSFT did the yeoman's work on the tower. Over the course of a year, they replaced all the steps and landings, installed safety fencing on all eight staircases, replaced the cab's floor and windows, and scraped, wire brushed and painted the entire tower.

The gathering at Stillwater Mountain that Saturday morning was to recognize the completed restoration work and mark the official opening of the tower to the public. Fox estimates 250 people visited Stillwater Fire Tower that day, including residents of Herkimer and Lewis counties, Stillwater seasonal residents, DEC staff, and admirers of Verplanck Colvin. Known as the "Colvin Crew," this group, formed in 1997, consists of about 140 professional surveyors who conduct recoveries of Colvin's survey sites.

Colvin established survey markers on the summits of many of the Adirondack High Peaks which he used to survey the wilderness via triangulation (measuring angles to a location from existing points to calculate distances). The triangulation station on Stillwater Mountain is station number 77; it reads, "S.N.Y. Adirondack Survey: Verplanck Colvin Supt. 1882."

"Colvin was self-taught," said Michael Contino, DEC's Region 6 Real Property Supervisor. "It took him 28 years to complete his surveys, but he literally placed the Adirondack Park on the map. The work surveyors do today is credited to Colvin. We are following in his footsteps. His work is our Adirondack heritage."

Unfortunately, at some point the brass bolt for triangulation #77 was pried out of its granite holster and taken from Stillwater Mountain. However, in 2013, a man using a metal detector in the small town of Allamuchy, New Jersey found it.

"When I brought it home, I realized it was nothing I'd seen before," said Kyle Kristiansen. "1882 was visible on the bolt, but the rest was covered by a thick layer of corrosion. I'd decided to keep the bolt in its current condition, but a couple of months later I got this itch that I had to clean it off. I was glad I made that decision because I could read the words on it."

Kristiansen turned to Google for more information and eventually made contact with the editor of the Adirondack Almanack to confirm its real home and discuss returning it to New York. Kristiansen eventually traveled to Stillwater and climbed the mountain to see the stone where Colvin and his team had set the bolt.

"It was an amazing moment in itself," said Kristiansen. "But when I actually stepped back in time and visualized the effort it took Colvin's men to painstakingly survey the uncharted and unforgiving, yet beautiful land of the Adirondacks, it honestly filled me with a joy and happiness I've never felt before. To climb Stillwater and see the hole where the bolt was set, realizing

After being found in NJ, the long-lost brass triangulation bolt was brought home to the site for the reopening of the fire tower. The bolt is now housed for safekeeping at the Ranger School in Cranberry Lake.

Jim Fox is congratulated by Harry Peck, as the two men reflect on the historical significance of the Station #77 triangulation bolt being returned to the Adirondacks.

The view from the cab of the Stillwater Mountain fire tower.

that I had found and returned it to its rightful home, was simply the best feeling of my life."

The bolt was held in safekeeping until that Saturday in July. During his congratulatory remarks, Fox mentioned the importance of Stillwater Mountain to Colvin's work and to the surprise of the assembled group presented the Colvin #77 brass bolt.

"It was pretty amazing," said James M. Vianna, of Stillwater, the assistant superintendent to the Colvin Crew. "I had the opportunity to actually place it back in the hole. It fit like a glove. It's the first time I have ever heard of an original bolt being found and placed back. As a land surveyor, I love history."

Seeing the bolt brought tears of joy to many people at the event, including Fox's right hand man, Harry Peck of Stillwater. "This is amazing, Jim! Simply amazing," said Peck who repeatedly congratulated Fox with a slap on the back. To mark the historical significance, Fox and Peck posed for a photo with the bolt at the summit (see above).

The Friends of Stillwater Fire Tower did more than just rehabilitate the historic structure; they solved a puzzle and helped facilitate the return of an important piece of Adirondack history to the area.

"This spring, I heard from three different sources at different times, that 'Oh yeah, I heard that Station 77 was on Stillwater Mountain. And they put a replacement marker in its place.' But nobody seemed to give me any verification that it was true," said Fox. "I was looking for documentation. Enter Peter Nelson and Colvin Crew surveyors Mike Webb and Jim Vianna, who revealed that an unknown list of Primary Triangulation Stations was found in Colvin archives currently stored in the DEC central office in Albany. DEC surveyors Doug Hazelden and Rick Palmer scrutinized the list, verifying that Stillwater Mountain was the original location of Station 77."

After the July ceremony, the original Stillwater Mountain Adirondack survey maker was brought back down and is now housed at the Colvin Crew museum at the Ranger School in Cranberry Lake. A replica of the brass bolt was recently reset on the mountain.

DEC plans to place a kiosk at the location to highlight the significance of the work of so many people over the years in the region. The beauty of the area speaks for itself, and the restored fire tower is the perfect place to see that beauty and an important piece of Adirondack history.

**Andrea C. Pedrick** is a citizen participation specialist in DEC's Watertown office.

# Visit a Fire Tower

You don't have to live near Stillwater Mountain to visit a fire tower and experience part of New York's history while enjoying panoramic views of lush forests and landscapes. There are numerous fire towers open to the public across the state.

New York once had hundreds of fire towers, primarily used to search for signs of smoke, an indicator of a potential forest fire. By the 1960s, however, air surveillance made the towers obsolete, and the last few active towers closed in the 1990s.

Community-initiated campaigns, supported by DEC and others, saved and restored dozens of fire towers which are now recreation destinations for hikers and history buffs of all ages. Here's a list of some of the restored towers:

**(NOTE: According to a landowner agreement, the Stillwater Fire Tower is closed to visitors from the second Tuesday in October to December 20th.)**

## Adirondacks

Azure Mountain Fire Tower, Santa Clara, Franklin County
Blue Mountain Fire Tower, Blue Mountain Lake, Hamilton County
Goodnow Mountain Fire Tower, Newcomb, Essex County
Hurricane Mountain Fire Tower, Essex County (restoration in progress)
Kane Mountain Fire Tower, Caroga Lake, Fulton County
Mt. Adams Fire Tower, Hamlet of Tahawus, Essex County
Mt. Arab Fire Tower, Piercefield, St. Lawrence County
Owl's Head Mountain Fire Tower, Long Lake, Hamilton County (observation cabin closed)
Poke-O-Moonshine Mountain Fire Tower, Keeseville, Franklin County
St. Regis Fire Tower, Franklin County (restoration in progress)
Whiteface Mountain Fire Tower; on display at the Adirondack Museum, Blue Mountain Lake

## Capital Region

Beebe Hill Fire Tower, Austerlitz, Columbia County
Dickinson Hill Fire Tower, Grafton, Rensselaer County
Hadley Mountain Fire Tower, Hadley, Saratoga County
Hunter Mountain Fire Tower, Hunter, Greene County
Spruce Mountain Fire Tower, Corinth, Saratoga County

## Catskills/Hudson Valley

Balsam Lake Mountain Fire Tower, Hardenburgh, Ulster County
Mt. Beacon Fire Tower, Hudson Highlands State Park, Beacon, Dutchess County
Ninham Mountain Fire Tower, Carmel, Putnam County
Overlook Mountain Fire Tower, Woodstock, Ulster County
Red Hill Fire Tower, Denning, Ulster County

## Central NY

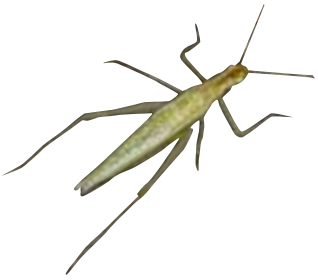
Bald Mountain (Rondaxe) Fire Tower, Old Forge, Herkimer County
Berry Hill Fire Tower, Chenango County

## Western New York

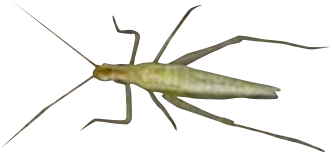
Summit Fire Tower, Allegany State Park, Cattaraugus County

For more information on fire towers in New York, visit
**www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/100900.html**

Mary Ann Ronconi



# TRILLING INTRUDER



**By Mary Ann Ronconi**

An unholy shrieking noise suddenly fills our old farmhouse, almost as if a switch has been flipped. A high-pitched, constant, ear-splitting, one-note ringing trill. It reminds me of a stuck doorbell, but there is a problem: we do not have a doorbell. I don't believe in ghosts, but my doubts begin to waver on this unusually mild, late-fall day, in this, the season of spooks.

The auditory phantasm has no predictable duration; nor does it come from the same spot, changing location with ghostly invisibility. The frenzied screaming first emanates from the back hall, a small, dark space lit only by windows in adjoining rooms. It seems to be coming from a box of cider bottles sitting on the trapdoor to the cellar. I step on the door and it stops. I don't move. It starts again. I take all the bottles out of the box and move them and the box off the door. It stops. And then resumes. Over there now, by the door to the bathroom, where a piece of molding is loose. Near the top of the molding, a long screw goes into drywall. As I move the molding back and forth, the screw goes in and out of the wall and the crazed ringing rises and falls following the movement. But that is nuts. No screw moving easily in and out of a plastery hole screeches like a terrorized banshee.

Then it stops.

When my husband, Richard, comes in, I tell him about the maddening noise. Whatever is making it is clearly invisible. I lead him into the haunted hall. As if on cue, deranged ringing begins again. And then stops.

The evening proceeds normally until the phantom shriek starts up again in the kitchen, disrupting our dinner. This time it seems to be coming from a brown paper bag of tarragon I'm drying. Richard moves the bag and that stops it. We relax in blessed peace, spending the rest of the evening with the accustomed hum of the dishwasher and the chatter of the television. At the usual hour, we head upstairs to bed. All is calm.

In the middle of the night, I wake up as I often do. If it is quiet, I go back to sleep. But this night it is not quiet. The spook is at it again with renewed vigor and amped-up volume. Concern over hearing loss is not entirely unreasonable. The shrill blast comes from below, from the dining room. There must be a way to stop it. I get up and go downstairs. Whatever is responsible for this much noise must be sizable—and therefore visible. Surely I can find it.

Ha! The screamer is behind a little wall hanging. I take it down. Nothing. The unhinged ringing now comes from behind a chest against the front wall. I move it. Not there either. I give up. If I want to sleep I have to find a bed beyond the reach of this demonic chant.

When I get to the back stairs, nearly 50 feet from the source of the ghostly screaming, it still fills the ears. Only when I close the door at the bottom of the stairs do I finally seal it out. At last, in the guest bedroom on the second floor at the farthest end of the house with multiple doors upstairs and downstairs closed between me and the shrieking, I have escaped our spook. I crawl into a cold bed where I spend a quiet end of the night.

The next morning, peace has returned. We spend most of the day outside, harvesting the super abundant crop of apples and fragrant yellow quinces. If the demon sings in the house, it does so without an audience…until we come in at the end of the afternoon.

Does it hear us? Does it detect the vibration of our footsteps? Loud and maniacal, it soon greets us from the dining room, no doubt coming from behind a platter leaning against the wall. When I move it, the phantom singer stops, but then launches into a treble crescendo in a different spot. Finally, Richard spies it. "There it is, up there!" I look around half expecting to see a shadowy ghoul leering down at me. But no. There is only something small and grey clinging to the window frame.

A species of tree cricket

www.bugwood.com

Mary Ann Ronconi

The visitor's nighttime song reverberated from one end of our old farmhouse to the other.

Richard climbs on a chair to catch it, but it eludes him and drops down in front of me on top of the chest. Fortunately, I have a dishtowel in my hand and catch the eardrum vandal in its soft folds.

We marvel at its size: less than an inch long. How could anything so small make so much noise? Ask Mother Nature. With spindly back legs made for jumping, we guess it is some kind of cricket, but it's a far cry from the sturdy black ones we're used to seeing. It must be a male, the "music maker" of the species. He "sings" with his wings to attract a mate. Looking at this guy's wings, it is hard to believe. They are transparent, flimsy-looking things. Still, I can attest, they stand up to hours of sawing, one over the other, to broadcast a far-reaching love song.

In an exemplary display of goodwill toward the shrieking home invader, we carry him to the front door and release him into the unseasonably warm day. He lands on the grey stone stoop only a few feet away from us. He's barely visible.

That was the last we heard of him, leaving us to wonder if he took our kindness as an affront to his talents, rather than a liberation. Or was he silenced by despair that his late-season, last-ditch concertizing attracted only two humans, not the hoped-for female of his species? Perhaps he had just sung his heart out.

*Author's note: A bit of internet research helped us identify our perpetrator as a male tree cricket, a hard-to-see, but vociferous member of the family Gryllidae (true crickets), subfamily Oecanthinae (tree crickets), and genus* Oecanthus *(common tree crickets).*

**Mary Ann Ronconi** lives and writes on an old farm and apiary in the Helderbergs of Albany County.

# THE PATH LESS TRAVELED

## ...to Becoming a Hunter

Robin Kuiper

**By Dan Decker, Michael Quartuch and Rich Stedman**

"New York State is open for hunting!" With this official state proclamation, residents and visitors are invited to enjoy the variety of hunting opportunities that can be found in New York. We have generous hunting seasons for many game species prized for food and recreation. We have an excellent record of hunting safety. We have millions of acres of public land. And we have a centuries-long tradition of hunting, which has cultivated a strong base of hunters in the state.

While New York has bountiful hunting opportunities, like most other states in the nation we have experienced a slow decline in hunter numbers. Although nearly imperceptible from one year to the next, after 20-25 years, the cumulative effect warrants attention. Since the early 2000s, trends in hunting participation have been analyzed closely and measured carefully by wildlife agencies and leaders of the hunting community.

Why the concern? Because a significant decline in hunter numbers has many societal impacts. Perhaps foremost, we depend on hunters to control wildlife populations that if left unmanaged, could reach pest proportions in some circumstances—white-tailed deer being a prime example.

Hunters also contribute to wildlife management through their hunting license fees and special federal taxes they pay on firearms and ammunition. The monies collected are used for research and management of the state's wildlife, such as deer, turkey, bear and migratory birds—species enjoyed by hunters and nonhunters alike. Without this revenue, public wildlife agencies would either need equivalent support from general tax coffers, or have to cut back on such key programs. Financial considerations aside, the decline in hunters may indicate the waning of a tradition that helped keep society mindful of the need for stewardship of wildlife and habitat.

## Previous Studies of Hunters and Hunting

DEC was one of the first state wildlife agencies to detect declines in hunter numbers, when enrollment in the mandatory Sportsmen Education (SE) program dropped in the 1980s. DEC wildlife managers wanted to identify why the flow of new hunters was slowing.

Working with Cornell University's Human Dimensions Research Unit (HDRU), DEC historically sponsored studies of New York hunters that verified the traditional path to hunting was paved by family encouragement—typically fathers, uncles or grandfathers teaching their sons, nephews and grandsons to hunt. (Editor's Note: see *Dad's Happy Place* on page 32 of this issue, for example.) The studies showed that family support was important to form a "social world" where all aspects of hunting culture were reinforced; individuals who enjoy the support of family members, especially those initiated into hunting during childhood, are more likely to continue hunting over their lifetime.

The research indicated that it took a community to recruit and retain hunters, and while not always the case, normally a rural community was involved. Both new and seasoned hunters generally lived in rural areas or their families had rural roots and ongoing connections to rural locations where hunting was an important part of the local culture.

Matt Lindler, NWTF

A young hunter excited to get into the field.

**In addition to caring for wildlife, attention to the hunting community itself is needed to keep it vigorous in the years ahead.**

This research showed that individuals from nonhunting families who began hunting as adults often were challenged by the lack of access to places to hunt. In addition, there was an absence of hunting companions—friends or family members to share their hunting experiences with, to learn from, and to join in the retelling of memorable past hunts.

Hunters who followed a "traditional path" into the activity and were embedded in the rural-based hunting culture tended to value hunting as part of their identity, and to stick with hunting as a lifelong activity. Yet, this "traditional" pathway has not produced enough hunters to replace those lost to attrition.

Individuals following a "nontraditional path" into hunting (they typically were raised in non-hunting families, lived in urban or suburban areas, and had little or no exposure to hunting as kids) were less likely to become committed, long-term hunters, and often dropped out of hunting within a few years of starting. While there are exceptions to this general pattern, overall, hunting never really became part of their identity.

## Circumstances Change

During the last two decades, state wildlife agencies like DEC and sportsmen's organizations have made concerted efforts to attract new hunters—especially young people and adult women. Manufacturers and retailers of hunting clothing and equipment have targeted these population segments as well. It seems this effort has paid off to some extent: for example, both the percentage and number of women hunters has increased slightly in recent years.

Convergence of two other trends has raised hopes of drawing new people into the hunter ranks. One is the expansion—in some places an explosion—of deer populations across New York and in many other states. Simultaneously, interest in local foods (the "locavore" movement) has emerged with considerable fanfare (see: *The Mindful Carnivore* by Tovar Cerulli; *The Rise of the Hipster Hunter* by Emma Marris).

At a time when deer are abundant in many places, we also have people seeking to meet their animal protein needs locally. This seems like a perfect recipe for people who otherwise might not have considered hunting deer to do so for both food procurement and conservation purposes.

A group of prospective hunters receiving training in safe handling of crossbows.

Robin Kuiper

## Recent Studies of Hunter Recruitment

What is happening now with hunting participation? Anecdotal evidence suggests that we may now have more people expressing interest in hunting who do not come from hunting families. They may be entering hunting as adults through "nontraditional" pathways.

Recent research conducted by the Cornell HDRU examined the degree to which nontraditional pathways are contributing to hunter recruitment. During the winter of 2015, Cornell researchers surveyed 2014 sportsman education (SE) course graduates who were considered "nontraditional path" hunters. These were adults who had little social support for hunting, lacked any hunting experience, were female, or were racial/ethnic minorities. Of these 3,600 people, 42 percent responded to the survey. The results revealed some interesting things about them:

- Four out of five were Caucasian;
- Women and men were in nearly equal proportion;
- Their mean age was 36 years;
- Social support was important for those taking a nontraditional path to hunting, with close friends, spouse/partner, and co-worker leading the list of influences in the new hunters' venture into the sport;
- Companionship with significant others and friends, enjoyment of nature, procurement of meat, and contributing to wildlife management were identified as important reasons to hunt; and
- Impediments encountered largely reflect knowledge that traditional path hunters would usually acquire over years of involvement in the hunting community starting in childhood. They include:
  - ► Complexity of hunting regulations in New York;
  - ► Access to areas for shooting practice and hunting;
  - ► Costs associated with hunting; and
  - ► Deficiencies in hunting knowledge and lack of experienced companions to help out with equipment purchases, field skills, and preparing game for consumption.

## Future of Hunting?

Attracting the next generation of hunters will require concerted efforts. We anticipate relatively few nontraditional path hunters will stick with hunting over the long haul unless they lay down firm roots in the hunting community. Special attention may be needed to keep them involved.

If the primary constraints to hunting participation can be overcome, people may remain hunters for a long time—perhaps for life. It follows that if nontraditional path hunters are retained as active hunters, over time their numbers would swell as a proportion of the hunter population, becoming significant in a couple decades, and serving as social support for other potential hunters. Addressing the challenges to hunting identified in the study might be a worthwhile endeavor to achieve this outcome.

Basically, nontraditional path hunters need what traditional path hunters normally grow up with—skill development, access to land, and general social support for their hunting activity such that their identity as hunters becomes well-established.

Long-recognized benefits of hunting such as companionship with significant others/partners and friends, enjoyment of nature, and procurement of meat rank high on the list of benefits sought by nontraditional path hunters, just like traditional hunters. Fortunately, contributing to wildlife management also is cited by four out of five nontraditional path hunters as a reason they hunt.

photo courtesy of NWTF

The National Wild Turkey Federation (NWTF) is one of several sporting organizations making concerted efforts to attract new hunters into the fold.

photo courtesy of Palumbo family

The traditional path into hunting often involves mentoring within the family.

Perhaps local, state and national sportsmen's organizations, DEC, and even individual hunters or traditional hunting families can figure out how to engage nontraditional path hunters in ways that nurture their hunting interest. Attending to this need of nontraditional path hunters would seem to be a valuable undertaking, considering their potential contributions to conservation and to keeping hunting alive.

Thanks to natural resource stewardship efforts undertaken by DEC and other agencies, land trusts, and private landowners, New York has bountiful hunting opportunities. In addition to caring for wildlife, continuing to address the needs of the hunting community will help keep it vigorous in the years ahead.

**Dan Decker** is a professor in the Department of Natural Resources and director of the Human Dimensions Research Unit (HDRU) at Cornell University, where he has studied hunters, hunting and other wildlife management topics for more than 40 years. Born and raised in the Catskills, Dan enjoys hunting and fishing.

A post-doctoral research associate in Cornell's HDRU, **Michael Quartuch** has focused on studies of factors affecting hunter recruitment and retention.

Avid hunter and angler **Rich Stedman** is a professor in the Department of Natural Resources and associate director of the HDRU at Cornell University.

Note: The authors worked with a team from DEC's Bureau of Wildlife, including Kenneth Baginski, Gordon Batcheller, Charles Dente, Melissa Neely, Michael Schiavone, and Michael Wasilco.

Dennis Wischman

## Grouse/Woodcock and Bowhunter Logs

Ruffed grouse and American woodcock are widely distributed across New York State. Both prefer early successional habitats like young forests, shrublands and old orchards and fields. As New York's forests grow older, these preferred habitats are disappearing, resulting in a decline in grouse and woodcock numbers since the 1960s.

A DEC survey asks hunters to record their daily grouse- and woodcock-hunting activities in a "hunting log," including the number of grouse and woodcock flushed, the number of hours hunted, the number of birds killed, and whether a dog was used to hunt. The primary purpose of the log is to monitor the number of birds flushed per hour. Grouse and woodcock share many of the same sites, so the information hunters provide helps us monitor populations of both of these game birds as habitats change.

The 2016-17 Ruffed Grouse and American Woodcock Hunting Log is available online for printing or download. If you would like to join our mailing list to receive survey materials, call 518-402-8886 or email Grouse Log. (Please leave the words "Grouse Log" in the subject line.)

Participation in the New York Bowhunter Sighting Log allows hunters to collect and contribute information on wildlife they see while bowhunting. DEC staff summarize the logs and calculate a sighting index (the number of sightings per 1,000 hours) for each species within each of DEC's Wildlife Management Units. Scientists analyze these data to determine long-term population trends for select wildlife species. As data accumulate, we are better able to track population changes and improve our ability to make management decisions for a variety of species. For more information or to participate, visit DEC's website at: **www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7193.html**

## Zero Hunting Fatalities in 2015

Last year's hunting season was one of New York's safest. Only 23 hunting incidents were reported—the third lowest number on record. This is the first year without a hunting-related shooting fatality in New York since record-keeping on hunting statistics began in the mid-1950s.

The decline in hunting-related accidents is due in part to the efforts of DEC's volunteer Sportsman Education instructors. These trained, DEC-certified instructors teach safe, responsible and ethical outdoor practices. For more information on the Sportsman Education Program, visit DEC's website at: **www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7860.html**.

NYS OPRHP

## New Nature Center

The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation recently announced the opening of the Humphrey Nature Center in Letchworth State Park. The center contains interactive exhibits, a butterfly garden, classrooms and a stone amphitheater. Exhibits will focus on the park's history, environment, geology and ecosystems. The Humphrey Nature Center was built to be sustainable by relying on solar power for energy, using both LED and natural lighting, and employing a cistern to collect rainwater for the butterfly garden. Much of the nature center's funding came from the New York Parks 2020 Program and private donations. The center is open 10 AM to 5 PM daily and is free with admission to the park.

## Electric Car Solar Charging Station

DEC is leading the charge to get more electric vehicles on New York's roads. We're making it easier for drivers in western New York to use sunshine for fuel with the late-October installation of a new solar carport (like the one pictured here) at our Reinstein Woods Environmental Education Center in Depew, Erie County. The system consists of a solar panel that will power a battery that then dispenses energy to vehicles, providing solar energy even when the sun isn't shining. The system will be open to the public at no cost and can charge two vehicles simultaneously, helping to lower our collective carbon footprint.

Provided by Envision Solar International, Inc.

## Free Fishing on Veterans Day

DEC has designated Veterans Day, November 11, an annual free fishing day in New York State. No license is required to fish in any of the state's 7,500 lakes and ponds, or 50,000 miles of rivers and streams during state-designated free fishing days. On this new date, saltwater anglers may also fish in marine waters or for migratory marine fish species without enrolling in the Recreational Marine Fishing Registry. Anglers are reminded that all other regulations remain in effect.

Susan Shafer

## E-newsletters

Hudson RiverNet is an electronic newsletter produced by DEC's Hudson River Estuary Program. It focuses on the program's core mission to ensure clean water, protect and restore fish and wildlife and their habitat, provide water recreation and river access, adapt to climate change, and conserve New York's scenery. RiverNet is only one of many free online newsletters. For information about the various newsletters and how to subscribe, visit DEC's website at: **www.dec.ny.gov/public/65855.html**

## Diving In

Rather than throwing this pumpkin in the trash, we decided to leave it out to feed the backyard wildlife. One very happy squirrel feasted on it for several days, down to the last bite. I think it was as much fun for us as it was for him.
Laura Bass-Penn, Centereach

*Great shot! Gives a whole new meaning to recycling.*

## Raise and Release

We recently released some 200 brook trout and 500 Atlantic salmon into the Mad River behind the Camden Middle School. The 6th-grade students raised the fish in the classrooms for many months, from eggs to 2-3" fingerlings. Each of the students got a drinking cup containing a few fish, and then the students poured the cup and its contents, gently, into the river. The excitement was contagious.
Paul Wenham, Fish Creek Atlantic Salmon Club

*Thanks for sharing this photo! Trout in the Classroom has been a very successful program for more than 30 years, and we always enjoy seeing photos of happy students taking part in the release of the fish they raised. You can learn more about this program in the April 2016* Conservationist.

## Turkey of a Different Color

I often have a flock of wild turkeys visiting my backyard, but one morning there was a surprise: the flock of 50-plus birds included one that was a smoke phase. On-line research revealed that only 1 in 100 birds will be smoke phase, and 95% of the time they are hens. After 24 years of hunting, this was a first for me.
Chris Ceresko, Manorville

*You are right, the smoke phase of the wild turkey is not very commonly seen, so we are pleased that you shared your photo with us. While many folks believe this pattern comes from the cross between a wild and a domestic turkey, that is not necessarily the case. This coloration occurs naturally, though uncommonly, in wild turkey flocks.*

## An Apple a Day

I thought I'd share this photo I took in Green Lakes State Park, Onondaga County. I watched the buck for a while as he munched on apples and rubbed his face on the branch.
Lewell Troast, Jr., Chittenango

*Thanks for the great shot. The buck was likely leaving its scent on the branch to advertise his presence to other deer in the area.*

## Three-Legged Coyote

I discovered this picture of a three-legged coyote on my trail cam. It looks healthy; it must be able to catch prey without too much difficulty.
Rick Donofrio, Rochester

*What a lucky shot! We agree, the coyote does appear to be healthy and in good overall condition, except for the missing leg. It's hard to say what caused the missing leg, whether it was a birth defect, or the result of an old injury. As has been seen with domestic dogs, four-legged animals can often adapt fairly well to a missing limb, and are able to lead pretty normal lives.*

## NY's Great Fishing

Amelia Whalen of Witherbee caught a record-breaking freshwater drum from Lake Champlain in Essex County on June 4, 2016. The fish measured 36.5" and weighed 29 lbs. 14 oz., breaking the previous state record set in 2014 by more than 3 pounds. Amelia entered her winning catch in DEC's Angler Achievement Awards Program, which verifies and tracks state-record fish. To learn more about the program, or to enter a fish, visit: **www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7727.html**.

Bob Matson of Richmond, VA sent us this photo of his 14-year-old daughter, Nikki, with the 8 lb., 25.5" bullhead she caught in her grandparents' pond in Tompkins County. Grandpa was an avid fisherman and had stocked the pond years ago, but due to his declining health, he hadn't fished the pond in years. Recognizing an exceptionally large fish, Bob tried to find an official scale, but Nikki decided she wanted to make dinner for her grandpa. It was a great meal.

*(Note: If Nikki and her dad had been able to certify the weight and length, she would now hold the new record for brown bullhead in NYS. The current record is 7 lbs., 6 oz. and 22.2" long. Maybe there's another lunker in that pond!)*

## Ask the Biologist

**Q:** I thought this was a part of an old leaf until it started to walk. I found it on an outdoor sink at Canadarago Lake. What is it?—Beth Rice

**A:** This is a hag moth caterpillar (*Phobetron pithecium*), sometimes called a monkey slug. Its name comes from the pairs of long and twisted processes along the body, which are said to resemble "disheveled locks of a hag." The caterpillar feeds on foliage of a variety of trees and is most commonly found in August and September. Urticating setae (barbed spines on the caterpillar's processes) are a defense mechanism that cause burning and irritation, sometimes severe, when touched.
—Jerry Carlson, DEC Research Scientist

**Contact us!** magazine@dec.ny.gov

# Dad's Happy Place

by Lori Simpson

My father was born and raised in Brooklyn, and lived most of his adult life on Long Island. While he lived in the bustling suburbs of one of the largest cities in the world, he loved heading upstate to his quiet Catskill retreat. Not that the city and the fast-paced lifestyle weren't a part of him; he thrived in it! But he was always most at peace in the mountains, where he took the time to slow down, and reflect on his life and family. He loved the mountain breezes, the chattering of animals in the woods, and the quiet; but most of all, he loved deer hunting. These are the things that drew him to the Catskills for more than half a century.

Dad began hunting in his early teens, with his father and his four brothers. Each fall, they would embark on a trip to the mountains, excited by the prospect of getting a buck or a doe. It was a time of enjoying nature, fraternal bonding and making memories.

Years passed and, in time, Dad was able to buy his own cabin and 170 acres on the side of a mountain. He called his cabin and land his "happy place." It truly was. Each fall, he and his brothers would meet at the cabin, joined by their sons and eventually grandsons as well. They cherished those few days each year when they lived together like pioneers, hunting, sharing chores and gathering by the fireplace at night to recount the day's adventures. The best times were when one of the young men would bag his first deer and revel in the admiration of his elders.

In March of 2014, our world changed when my father was diagnosed with cancer. That fall, he told me that for the first time in 55 years, he would miss the annual hunting trip. He longed to be at the cabin with his brothers, but it wasn't meant to be. That would be his last hunting season, and he could not take part. He faced the disappointment as he faced everything in his life—with courage and acceptance. Five months later, on April 30, 2015, Dad passed from this world.

He loved the mountain breezes, the chattering of animals in the woods, and the quiet; but most of all, he loved deer hunting.

I now live in Michigan with my husband and four children. For years, we have enjoyed many nature hikes: through the woods, in open fields, and on the shores of a lake or the banks of a river.

My father is gone, but his gift—his love of the outdoors—lives on in each of us. When we walk in the woods and hear the rustle of dried leaves beneath our feet, or the wind in the trees, or see a deer standing in a field, my thoughts return to my father.

Lori Simpson grew up on Long Island and has many fond memories of spending time on its shores and in the Catskill Mountains.

# 2015 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 Gun Deer**
Taken in: Jefferson County
Score: Net 170-4/8;
Gross 176-7/8
Typical
Points: 11
Taken by: Robert K. Law

**Largest Bow Deer**
Taken in: Wyoming County
Score: Net 154-3/8;
Gross 160-7/8
Typical
Points: 13
Taken by: Callin A. Wade

**FOR MORE INFORMATION:**

NYSBBC, Records Office
147 Dog Tail Corners Rd., Wingdale, NY 12594
email **mosbuck@aol.com**; or
visit their website at: **www.nysbigbuckclub.com**.

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