

Holiday Trees | Winter Shelter | Teacher School

NEW YORK STATE

# Conservationist

DECEMBER 2010

## *Celebrating* the Falls

**125 Years of Niagara  
Falls State Park**

Disappearance  
**of the Shrike?**  
A study of this unique bird

# Season's Greetings

NEW YORK STATE  
**Conservationist** 

Volume 65, Number 3 | December 2010  
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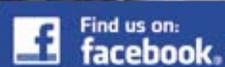
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from the staff at  
*Conservationist*

Susan L. Shafer



See page 10

Susan L. Shafer

December 2010 Volume 65, Number 3

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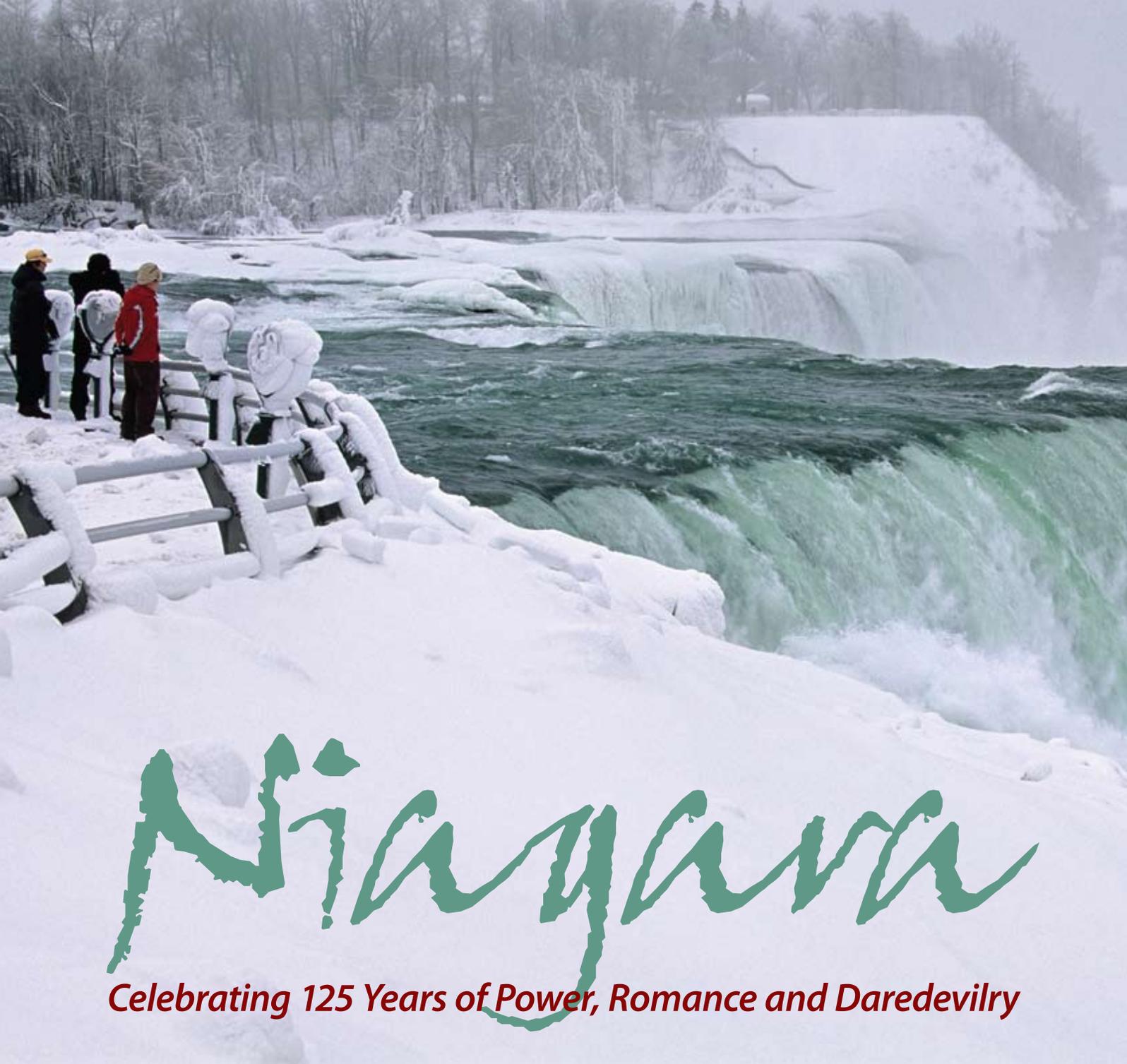
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# Niagara

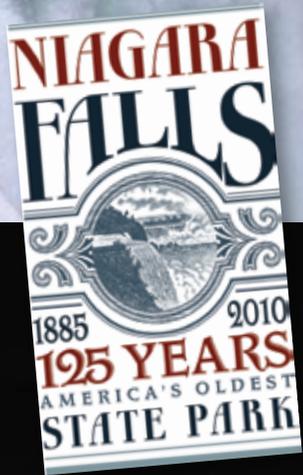
*Celebrating 125 Years of Power, Romance and Daredevilry*

Carl Heilman II

*by Bernadette LaManna*

**A**s we enter the waning months of 2010, we mark the culmination of the 125-year anniversary of Niagara Falls State Park. Although a nip of winter chill now accompanies our celebration, mist from the thundering falls freezes on every twig, branch and lightpost, creating a dazzling display of glistening light. And no matter the weather, visitors will see there is much to observe and do in Niagara Falls, often for free or only a nominal fee.

The Niagara Falls are the most powerful waterfalls in North America. Wider than they are high, the falls' water volume peaks in late spring or early summer, and although they are an important source of hydroelectric power, they are probably best known for their beauty. But if it hadn't been for the efforts of a few concerned citizens, the beauty of this natural wonder may have been lost to the public forever.



In the early nineteenth century, businessmen sought to take advantage of the tremendous power of Niagara Falls. They built factories and mills along the Niagara River, with the waste products from these facilities dumped directly into the river. As industry began to rapidly increase, the natural beauty of the area suffered and became mostly inaccessible to the general public.

Alarmed by the changes going on, a small group of people founded the Free Niagara movement in the late 1860s, focusing on preserving the falls and their environs. Led by artist Frederic Edwin Church, landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted and architect Henry Hobson Richardson, Free Niagara saved the falls from being almost exclusively used for industrial and commercial purposes. However, it took nearly two decades before their efforts resulted in legislation that in 1885 created the Niagara Reservation, New York's first state park, now known as Niagara Falls State Park.

Beginning in October 1901, daredevils—the first of whom was 63-year-old Annie Edson Taylor—have used various

Annie Taylor



devices (or nothing at all!) in which to plunge down Niagara Falls. Some died in the attempt, but a surprising number survived, many with relatively minor injuries. Eventually, those who performed such stunts “without permission” and survived were often heavily fined.

Other daredevils walked across tightropes anchored on either side above the falls. Some of them were blindfolded, performed acrobatics, pushed a wheelbarrow across, balanced on a chair, and, in one

***Looking for something to do this winter?  
Visit Niagara Falls and join in the celebration.***



John Rozell/OPRHP

case, even carried another man on his shoulders. A museum in town is devoted to these “stunters,” and the graves of many of them, including Mrs. Taylor’s, can be found at Oakwood Cemetery in Niagara Falls, NY.

Even though Niagara Falls is known as the “honeymoon capital of the world,” how it became such a popular site for all things romantic isn’t exactly clear. Some suggest the effect of positive ions spraying out of the mist from the falls is responsible. Although numerous traditional venues are available, couples who want to have a unique wedding experience can even get married on a helicopter as it flies above the falls.

Every night from November through early January, white and colored spotlights alternately illuminate the Horseshoe Falls and the American Falls. This feature might be one reason why so many are drawn to the falls, particularly for vacations or special occasions.

The Prospect Point Observation Tower is located within Niagara Falls State Park and provides spectacular views of the American Falls and the torrents below. For an even closer (and wetter) look, visitors can take an elevator to the base of the gorge and then climb the stairs to the Crow’s Nest, an observation deck. Weather permitting, the tower is open year-round, and admission is free from November until April.

More great sightseeing can be enjoyed along the Niagara Gorge Trail System, which extends from Niagara Falls, NY north to Lewiston, NY, a distance of about 14.5 miles. Guided tours are available.



In the early 1900s daredevils began performing stunts at the falls.

A path from Horseshoe Falls connects to the Upper Great Gorge Trail, leading in turn to Whirlpool Rapids. Whirlpool and Devil’s Hole State Parks can be reached by car. However, visitors who choose to travel on foot should dress appropriately and be prepared for rugged and steep trails. The Robert Moses Parkway Trail is a year-round, multi-use, recreational trail. Three miles long, it can be accessed from the Discovery Center and Whirlpool and Devil’s Hole State Parks.



Carl Heilman II

From November through early January, colored spotlights alternately illuminate the American Falls (pictured here) and the Horseshoe Falls.



Neil Satterly

Overlooking the American Falls, with Horseshoe Falls in the background.

Instead of hiking for miles, those who prefer to get their exercise and fresh air in smaller doses can visit some of the dozens of historic structures in and around Niagara Falls that are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. These range from homes, schools and churches to an armory, a hotel and a post office, many of which were constructed before the Civil War.

### ***No matter the weather, there is much to do and see in Niagara Falls.***

The Niagara Falls Visitor Center is open year-round and offers interpretive displays and exhibits, maps and information, a gift shop and eateries. It also houses the Adventure Theater. Admission to the center itself is free. During warm weather, the 1.5 acres of floral gardens outside the center depict the Great Lakes region above the falls with grassy areas shaped like lakes Michigan, Superior, Huron and Erie. In addition, a walkway follows the course of the Niagara River.

Knowledgeable guides share the history of the park on a comfortable, half-hour scenic trolley ride, during which visitors can get off at one or more of the six stops along the three-mile route. Although the trolleys have a vintage look, they run on natural gas and are prominent in Niagara Falls' "Green Park Project," which received the 2006 Clean Air Excellence Award.

The Niagara Gorge Discovery Center showcases the natural and local history of Niagara Falls and the surrounding area. Visitors can enjoy interactive displays, take a virtual elevator

trip into the gorge, experience 12,000 years of the Niagara River in the 180° multi-screen theater, or climb a 26-foot rock wall that resembles the walls of the gorge, complete with fossils and geological formations.

In December and early January, a variety of traditional holiday-related activities and events are scheduled in Niagara Falls and the surrounding area. In addition, the Charles Rand

Penney Collection of prints of Niagara Falls will be on display at the Castellani Art Museum at Niagara University. This collection is the largest of its kind in the world and includes the earliest known painting of the falls—Father Louis Hennepin's "Chute d'eau de Niagara" (1698). Images throughout the collection reflect the historic and cultural changes that have occurred in Niagara Falls since the seventeenth century and illustrate the city's significance to American history.

So if you're looking for something to do this winter, visit Niagara Falls and join in the park's celebration. With a variety of historical and cultural entertainment, there's plenty to do and see.

**Bernadette LaManna** is a contributing editor to *Conservationist*.



Sandra Turner

# Hands-on Nature

New resources help educators connect youth with the outdoors.

by Gina Jack

If you look at any outdoor educator's bookshelf, you're sure to see an array of materials: essentials like Rachel Carson's *The Sense of Wonder* and Freeman Tilden's *Interpreting our Heritage*, modern classics like Richard Louv's *Last Child in the Woods*, plus

*Early childhood is a crucial time...to build on natural curiosity through hands-on experiences.*

field guides to anything and everything under the sun, and even to the sun and the stars themselves.

On my bookshelf, sandwiched between Dr. Seuss's *The Lorax* and Palmer and Fowler's *Fieldbook of Natural History*, are a few other indispensable resources: curriculum and activity guides from Project WILD (Wildlife in

Learning Design), Project WET (Water Education for Teachers), and Project Learning Tree (PLT). I refer to all of them frequently. They are invaluable to me, and to many of my colleagues, as we strive to connect children and youth to the natural world.

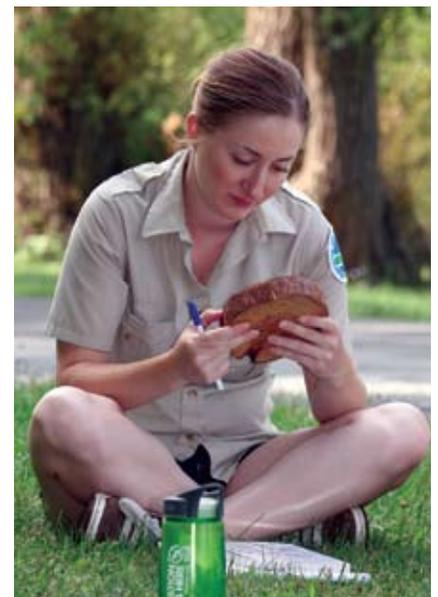
This year I added two new manuals to my collection: Project WILD's *Growing Up WILD* and Project Learning Tree's *Environmental Experiences for Early Childhood*. Both give adults who work with young children (aged three to six years old) the tools to feel comfortable taking them outdoors to explore the natural world. Early childhood is a

crucial time of life for exposure to the outdoors: a time to build on natural curiosity through hands-on experiences.

These and other resources are available to educators simply by participating in a lively hands-on professional development workshop, each focused on a single curriculum and activity guide. Project WILD, Project WET and PLT are internationally acclaimed resources for educators. In New York State, DEC is the agency which coordinates program delivery and offers the workshops. Workshops are free, are generally three to six hours long, and are offered year-round. During the workshops, participants try out some of the activities and learn how to integrate the curricula, aligned to New



Susan L. Shafer



Susan L. Shafer

During workshops, teachers learn about different activities and projects designed to help connect kids to the outdoors. Teachers are even able to test out some of the activities and learn how to incorporate the curricula into present learning standards.

York State curriculum and learning standards, into their existing lessons. These programs meet state and national standards for early childhood education.

The addition of resources for use with younger children extends the range of WILD's and PLT's programs, already acclaimed for their value in developing an understanding of the outdoors and natural processes among youth. Activities for younger students—early childhood and elementary grades—build awareness of the world around them. For middle and high school students, a greater proportion of the activities relate to the effects that people have on their environment and what we can all do to minimize negative effects while promoting the positive.

DEC has been offering professional development workshops for teachers for almost 25 years. In recent years, DEC educators and workshop facilitators trained by DEC have introduced more than 4,000 teachers to these resources annually. With each of these individuals reaching 20 or more students each school

year, the multiplier effect is tremendous. If you are a classroom teacher, youth group leader or daycare provider and are interested in taking part in a workshop, visit [www.dec.ny.gov/education/1913.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/1913.html) for information and a list of scheduled workshops.

**Gina Jack** is an environmental educator with DEC in Albany, and is the editor of *Conservationist for Kids*. She was a Project WILD facilitator in the 1990s in Ontario, Canada, and has been a Project WILD facilitator in NY since 2009.



Susan L. Shafer



Susan L. Shafer

DEC offers Project WILD, Project WET and PLT workshops year-round. The hands-on workshops are free and generally run three to six hours long.

# DEC's Workshops for Educators



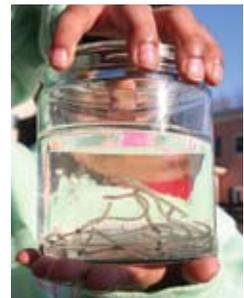
These workshops are for classroom teachers, youth group leaders and daycare providers. Workshops are free (see exception below), and are three to six hours long. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/education/1913.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/1913.html) for complete information.



Susan L. Shafer

**Project WILD (Wildlife in Learning Design):** Project WILD, for teachers of grades K through 12, focuses on building awareness and appreciation of wildlife, leading to responsible human action. *Growing up WILD* provides teachers of pre-school through first grade with activities to introduce students to wildlife and the outdoors. *Aquatic WILD* deals specifically with aquatic wildlife. *Flying WILD*, with a service-learning component, is a bird program for middle school students, and *Science and Civics: Sustaining Wildlife* is for high school students and involves environmental action projects that benefit wildlife.

**Project WET (Water Education for Teachers):** The *Project WET Curriculum and Activity Guide* is a collection of hands-on, water-related activities for teachers of grades K through 12. Through the activities, students learn that water is a shared resource as well as a shared responsibility. Supporting materials from Project WET include a new booklet in their *Kids in Discovery* series, *Discover the Hudson River*, for grades four through six.



Chris Bowser



Rich Clauss

**Project Learning Tree (PLT):** Topics addressed by *Project Learning Tree* range from forests, wildlife and water, to community planning, waste management and energy. The basic manual covers grades pre-K through eighth and takes an interdisciplinary, hands-on approach to learning about the environment with more than 90 lesson plans. *Environmental Experiences for Early Childhood* is geared specifically for teachers of children ages three through six. Seven separate modules are designed for use with high school students, each focused on forests or exploring an environmental issue.

**Teacher Institutes:** For those looking for a longer and more in-depth workshop, DEC's teacher institutes are a sure bet. They are generally three to five days long and follow a particular theme. Throughout, they address how to use the outdoors and environmental education curriculum to meet New York State learning standards for science. Institutes provide more hands-on experience in the field than is possible during the workshops alone. Nominal fees may be charged for DEC's teacher institutes.



DEC photo

# Choosing a Holiday Tree



Gloria Van Duyne

## to cut...

By Gloria Van Duyne

One December years ago, my father said, “Why are you cutting a live Christmas tree? I thought you were an environmentalist.” I’m reminded of this comment every holiday season when I catch bits of other people’s conversations. I’m always surprised by the perception that cutting a real tree for the holidays is bad for the environment. The fact is that trees are a renewable resource, and growing and cutting them in a responsible way doesn’t harm the environment, and in fact provides excellent habitat for many species of wildlife.

I must first admit that I love the tradition of traipsing through the snow with my family to pick out and cut down our tree. Choosing and cutting our own tree is a treasured family tradition. My son Jack pelts my husband with snowballs, and depending on where we go, we sometimes take our collie, who practically explodes from the excitement of an outdoor adventure.

Of course, we can’t simply cut the first tree we like, but must first check out dozens of others to be sure we found the perfect one. And naturally the best trees



Gloria Van Duyne

are at least a half-mile walk away, but that's what makes it fun. And a real tree is the only way to go for us, not only as a great outdoor adventure, but as the better environmental choice when compared with an artificial tree.

In the past, Christmas trees were cut from forests. These days, they are grown on dedicated tree farms, just like corn and lettuce. The trees are planted as seedlings, specifically with the intent to cut and sell them. They will grow for several years before they are harvested, and then the area is replanted to start the next crop. Growers plant more than one seedling for each tree harvested. Currently, there are nearly half a billion trees growing on tree farms across the U.S.

In many ways, tree farms are beneficial to the environment. They prevent soil erosion, slow water runoff, and filter rain and snowmelt as it seeps down through the soil and tree roots. Tree farms also provide habitat for birds and other

wildlife. In addition, the trees capture pollutants that we would otherwise breathe in, and take in carbon dioxide while giving off oxygen.



Susan L. Shafer

The Saratoga Tree Nursery supplies seedlings to many Christmas tree farms across the state.

With increasing development in the state, tree farms provide important open space. Most Christmas tree farms began on agricultural land, either in pasture or row crops, and so maintain the rural character of the landscape. In addition, when you “buy locally” by purchasing a holiday tree from a nearby tree farm, you help reduce your carbon footprint.

I also enjoy the fact that when my family buys our holiday tree, we are contributing to the local economy. Holiday tree sales help landowners pay property taxes, and according to the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, New York ranks 7th in the nation for economic value of Christmas trees produced (\$8.8 million).

So when I hear people discussing the pros and cons of cutting a real tree for the holidays, I simply smile to myself. I feel good about my choice.

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



Susan L. Shafer

Many families choose to purchase real Christmas trees because they can be produced sustainably. Others simply like the fun and excitement of cutting their very own tree.

# ...or not to cut

By Debbie Jackson

While many people have a real tree during the holidays, others choose an artificial one. For some, it's simply a matter of preference or convenience, while for others it's a matter of economics or health. But which is the best environmental choice—a real tree that is used for only one season but can be recycled, or an artificial tree that can be used again and again but cannot be recycled?

Through the years, artificial trees have taken many forms—from the first one made by the Germans of goose feathers dyed green in the nineteenth century, to the early artificial trees in the U.S. made of brush bristles in the 1930s and those pink artificial aluminum trees of the 1960s. Today, artificial trees look just like their natural cousins.

Many people like artificial trees because they require very little care. Once they are set up, there's no watering, and when the holidays are over there is no mess to clean up. Artificial trees can also be less expensive to purchase, especially considering you can

amortize the cost over several years of use. Many artificial trees already come with LED lights attached, thus avoiding purchasing lights separately. And because they are LEDs, they can reduce your energy bill. For those with allergies or asthma, an artificial tree may be the only way to have a holiday tree.

If you're considering purchasing an artificial tree, remember that they cannot be recycled and so eventually end up in landfills. But if an artificial tree is in your future, look for one made in the U.S. instead of China—it supports our economy and helps lower your carbon footprint.

No matter which tree you choose—real or artificial—be sure to dispose of it properly (see sidebar). Because ultimately, we are all responsible for the health of our planet.

**Debbie Jackson** works for DEC's Division of Materials Management.



## Remember to Reuse and Recycle

After the holidays, real trees can continue to provide benefits in a number of ways:

- Many communities have recycling programs in which holiday trees are chipped for mulch to use on gardens. Recycled trees have also been used to make barriers for soil erosion.

- Leaving the tree outside can provide shelter and protection for songbirds and other wildlife through the rest of the winter. You can also decorate it with popcorn, nuts, cranberries and bird food to make a natural birdfeeder.

- The tree needles and branches can be used as mulch under acid-loving plants like rhododendrons and holly.

- Fir tree needles can be stuffed into various sized pillows to keep dresser drawers or your sofa smelling evergreen.

While an artificial tree cannot be recycled, if it is still in usable condition, consider donating it to a local community group such as a school, church, town office or non-profit organization.

Be sure to check out DEC's website at [www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8829.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/8829.html) for more information on how to make your holiday purchasing choices "greener."



Susan L. Shafer

Today's artificial trees look just like their natural cousins.

# Poster Contest



by Jessica Gates of Charles D'Amico High School

To teach people about the importance of wastewater treatment, DEC and the New York Water Environment Association (NYWEA) sponsor an annual art contest for middle school and high school students. The students design posters that demonstrate how wastewater treatment plants protect our waters. By participating in the contest, students learn an important environmental lesson: treating residential and commercial wastewater is essential to maintaining a healthy environment.

Posters entered in the contest must be hand-drawn. DEC staff review the posters and choose five top middle school entries and five top high school entries. NYWEA members then vote for the winning middle and high school posters.

Winners receive a cash prize and an engraved plaque, and the winning posters are then distributed to wastewater treatment plants throughout New York. Other finalists receive cash prizes, and all contest participants receive certificates of appreciation.



by Kate Vanderpool of West Genesee High School



The deadline to submit posters for the 2011 contest is January 7, 2011. For more information about the contest, call Robin Yasinsac-Gillespie at (518)402-8177, or visit DEC's website at [www.dec.ny.gov/education/32108.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/32108.html) or NYWEA's website at <http://nywea.org/poster>.

# GIVE ME SHELTER

## WINTER CAMPING IN ADIRONDACK LEAN-TOS

BY JIM MULLER

***It was our biggest group ever***—ten winter campers! We had chosen Puffer Pond, near Indian Lake, for our overnight destination. It was an easy two-mile snowshoe that terminated at two closely positioned lean-tos which could easily accommodate our group.

As we got closer to Puffer Pond, the younger campers raced ahead to secure the “perfect” lean-to for themselves. But their land-grab backfired as the wind kicked up during the evening and blew snow off the frozen pond and into their exposed shelter. Those of us in the lean-to back from the water’s edge were somewhat shielded by trees and doubly protected by

### **Log lean-tos have long been a part of the Adirondack backcountry camping experience.**

the tarp we hung across the open side of the structure.

Despite the land-grab, harmony reigned as the group shared a single fire after dinner. Under a full-moon night sky, we continued the time-honored tradition of reading the lean-to registration book; a must for lean-to users

as described in *No Place I’d Rather Be: Wit and Wisdom from Adirondack Lean-to Journals* by Stuart Mesinger. Most entries either complained about the bad weather, bothersome bugs and poor fishing, or conversely heralded the great weather, abundant wildlife and beautiful scenery. Not surprisingly, there were very few entries from the winter months.

While spending a cold winter night camping in the woods may not be many people’s idea of fun, for us it’s incredibly exhilarating. And using a lean-to makes it even more enjoyable. For one thing, you don’t have to carry your shelter with you. Also, most lean-tos are spacious, typically having enough room for five

campers. In addition, a lean-to provides a level, dry platform for changing clothes, setting up a stove, mixing food, or just plain sitting.

But lean-tos also have their “challenges.” For instance, lean-tos aren’t particularly warm in cold weather—even if you close off the open side with a tarp as we did. (Of course, what unheated structure wouldn’t be cold in the winter?) Also, lean-tos can house rodents, which can make for an interesting night.

If you do plan on camping at lean-tos, keep in mind that these structures are usually situated in high-use areas, and availability is on a first-come, first-served basis. That means you could hike in only to find the lean-to already occupied. Of course, this is truer of the other three seasons, as winter campers are fewer in

number. In fact, in the 14 years I've been winter camping, I've only once encountered a lean-to in use by other campers. It was on one of my very first winter camping trips—an intrepid Boy Scout troop preceded us into the popular John Pond lean-to in the Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area. So, rather than try to share the lean-to with the whole troop, we retrieved a tent from our vehicle and camped on the other side of the pond.

Fortunately for us, on this trip to Puffer Pond the lean-tos were unoccupied—by both humans and rodents—and they kept us warm enough during our stay. Everyone enjoyed the extra room the lean-tos provided, as well as being able to sleep off the frozen ground.

Anyone who has ever spent time hiking in the North Country knows that a lean-to provides a comforting sight at the end of a long expedition. A lean-to



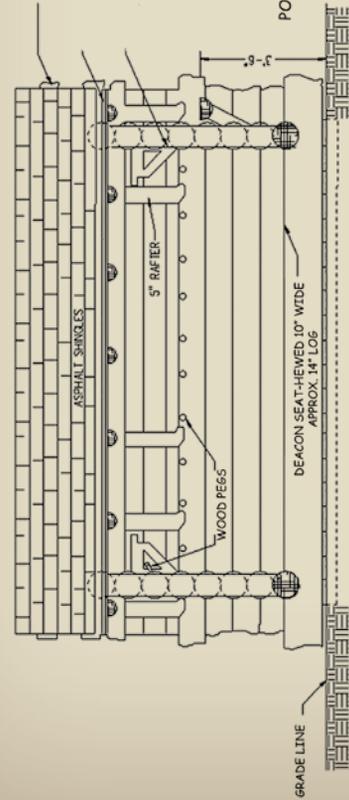
Spacious and dry, lean-tos provide a home-away-from-home for hikers and campers looking for shelter and a place to rest.

Jim Muller

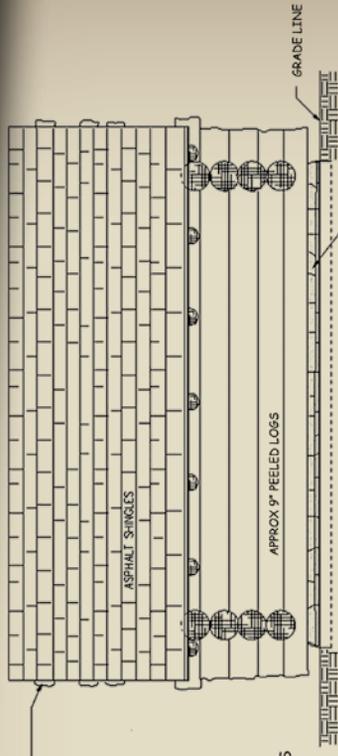


After arriving at the lean-tos, the author took this photo of his winter camping group.

# BUILD AN ADIRONDACK LEAN-TO



FRONT ELEVATION

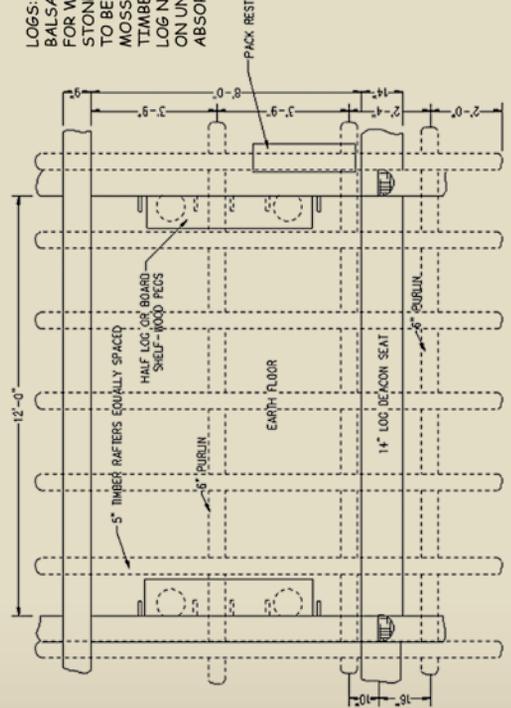


REAR ELEVATION

6" PURLIN  
 ROOF BOARDS-7/8" X 8"  
 SHIP LAP  
 SIDE SHELVES-HALF LOGS  
 OR BOARDS, BRACKETS,  
 LOG BLOCKS AS DETAILED.  
 PACK REST:  
 PLACE ON SIDE OF  
 MAIN APPROACH, WHERE  
 POSITION OF TRAIL WARRANTS  
 IT, PLACE ON BOTH SIDES.

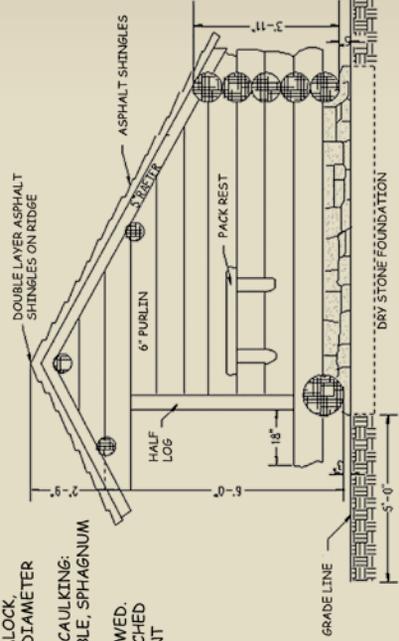
ON A CLOSED FOUNDATION, SCREENED  
 OR METAL LATH SHOULD BE PROVIDED FOR  
 VENTILATION.

WHERE STONE FOUNDATION EXTENDS  
 ABOVE GRADE, BANK WITH DIRT FOR  
 WIND STOP.



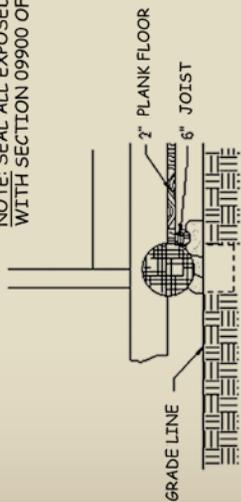
SIDE ELEVATION

LOGS: TO BE OF CEDAR, PINE, HEMLOCK,  
 BALSAM, OR SPRUCE - MINIMUM DIAMETER  
 FOR WALL LOGS - 8".  
 STONE FOUNDATION: OPTIONAL CAULKING;  
 TO BE OAKUM OR WHERE AVAILABLE, SPHAGNUM  
 MOSS, WELL TAMPED IN PLACE.  
 TIMBER ENDS: SAWED OR AXE HEWED.  
 LOG NOTCHING: LOGS TO BE NOTCHED  
 ON UNDER SIDE SO AS TO PREVENT  
 ABSORPTION OF MOISTURE

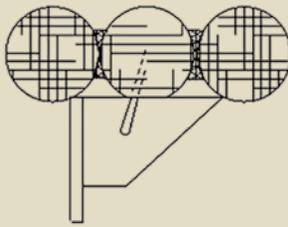


NOTE: ALL LOGS SHALL BE FROM THE SAME MANUFACTURER

NOTE: SEAL ALL EXPOSED WOOD SURFACES IN ACCORDANCE WITH SECTION 09900 OF THE PROJECT MANUAL.



SECTION A-A  
 FLOOR JOIST:  
 4" X 6" SAWED TIMBERS MAY BE USED WHERE ACCESSIBILITY OF SITE MAKES USE PRACTICAL.



20 - 3/4" DIA. X 6" HARDWOOD PEGS 5 EACH SIDE BELOW SHELF. 10 EQUALLY SPACED ALONG BACK TOP LOG.

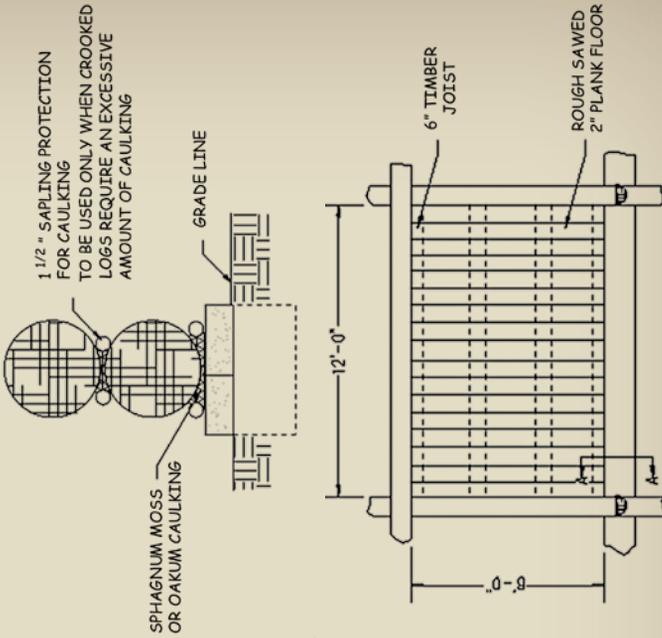
SHELF DETAIL

**SCHEDULE OF MATERIALS**

- 2 1/2 SQUARES ASPHALT SHINGLES
- 280 BOARD FT. 7/8" X 6" OR 8" Y.P. OR FIR SHITPLAP
- 5 LOGS - DIA. 9" X 16'
- 10 LOGS - DIA. 9" X 10'
- 3 LOGS - DIA. 6" X 16'
- 10 LOGS - DIA. 9" X 12'
- 1 LOG - DIA. 14" X 16'
- 7 LOGS - DIA. 5" X 16'

- 50 LBS - OAKUM
- 100 LBS - 10" SPIKES
- 8 LBS - 40D SPIKES
- 10 LBS - 8D NAILS
- 8 LBS - 60D SPIKES
- 10 LBS - 20D NAILS(FLOORING)
- 10 LBS - 3D ZINC COATED ROOFING NAILS

IF FLOOR IS REQUIRED - 4 LOGS DIA. 6" X 12'  
 200 BOARD FT. 2"Y.P. OR SPRUCE PLANKING X 8'



ALTERNATE PLAN

WOOD FLOOR TO BE PROVIDED WHEN INADEQUATE DRAINAGE NECESSITATES



can be a refuge, a retreat, a shelter, a lunch spot, an inspiration point, and a temporary home-away-from-home. New York State maintains a number of lean-tos throughout backcountry areas of the Adirondack Park. These shelters are open to any and all campers, up to the marked capacity of the shelter. However, if you plan on staying for more than three consecutive nights, you must first obtain a free DEC permit.

Log lean-tos have long been a part of the Adirondack back-country camping experience. These open-faced shelters are built mostly by hand using chainsaws and chisels. Whole logs are assembled into the generally twelve- by eight-foot structures using a scribe notching technique that results in a tight fit to protect occupants from the elements. DEC first published the basic plans (reproduced here) for building a lean-to in March 1957. Today, these same plans provide the basis for most lean-to construction in the state.

Not all lean-tos occur in the back-country. John Dillon Park is a wilderness facility comprised of a number of wheelchair-accessible lean-tos equipped with ramps and fold-down wooden sleeping platforms. The park was created through a partnership among International Paper, Paul Smith's College and the State of New York, and is specifically aimed at making the natural landscape of the Adirondacks available to everyone, including people with disabilities. The park is not open during the winter months, but interested individuals can check out [www.johndillonpark.org](http://www.johndillonpark.org) to learn more, and to see about availability.

For us, the lean-tos at Puffer Pond added a nice dimension to our trip, providing much needed shelter from a cold winter's night. And in the morning, we enjoyed the protection afforded us, leisurely cooking a hearty breakfast over a small fire. The meal tasted delicious, enhanced no doubt by the beautiful, frosty, blue-sky winter morning. Using the spacious lean-tos to repack our gear for the hike out, we all agreed that this trip was well worth the effort.



Though it may not have all the comforts of home, a lean-to provides a welcome shelter to sleep, change clothes and prepare food.

### Everyone enjoyed the extra room the lean-tos provided, as well as being able to sleep off the frozen ground.

Before departing, we made our own entry into the log book—keeping the tradition going by recording the weather conditions and the origins of our group. We wondered who would be the next visitors; other winter campers like ourselves? Or would the lean-tos remain empty until spring?

**Jim Muller** is a Leave No Trace master educator. He enjoys canoeing during warm months and camping in the winter. Check out [www.WinterCampers.com](http://www.WinterCampers.com) to view pictures from his winter adventures.

International Paper/Broudy Donohue Photography



Lean-tos at John Dillon Park are wheelchair-accessible and equipped with ramps and fold-down wooden sleeping platforms.



# HELP OUR LEAN-TOS

Log lean-tos have been a part of New York's wilderness landscape for many years. Today, there are nearly 300 of these open-faced structures open to the public in the Adirondack and Catskill preserves. Most are in good condition, but some are in need of repairs, as time and the elements have taken their toll.

You can help preserve these shelters by volunteering through either of two organizations: Adopt a Lean-to or Lean2Rescue.

Adirondack Mountain Club's Adopt a Lean-to program began in 1985 with eight lean-tos. By 2009, the program had grown to include 150 lean-tos. Participants volunteer their time and/or money to maintaining the identified lean-tos and the grounds around the structures. Adopters generally visit "their" lean-to at least twice a year to perform basic maintenance and clean-up, as well as maintain registers and note major repairs needed. Many adopters also choose to assist DEC staff in completing more intensive projects, such as roof

replacement and structural work. Check out [www.adk.org/trails/BC\\_Stewardship.aspx](http://www.adk.org/trails/BC_Stewardship.aspx) for more information.

Lean2Rescue is a group of campers, hikers, hunters, skiers, paddlers, and other outdoor enthusiasts who have restored, rehabilitated and rescued more than 30 lean-tos to date. Started in 2004 by Paul DeLucia of Baldwinsville, NY, the all-volunteer group works closely with DEC to identify and complete lean-to restoration, primarily in St. Lawrence, Herkimer and Hamilton Counties. Work includes anything from roof repairs to building entirely new structures, and most of the work is done using non-motorized tools and vehicles. Lean2Rescue operates year-round, including through Adirondack winters. For further information, check out [www.lean2rescue.org](http://www.lean2rescue.org).

Contact your local DEC office ([www.dec.ny.gov/about/50230.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/50230.html)) to find out more about New York's lean-tos (including locations and rules for using).





# Goodbye to a Pioneer?

Have loggerhead shrikes disappeared from New York for good?

By Paul G. Novak

A warm sun rises slowly over the horizon, illuminating a pastoral landscape on the outskirts of Buffalo, New York. As the sun warms the fresh shoots in the pastures and hayfields, a robin-sized, gray and white bird perched in the branches of a hawthorn bush ruffles its feathers and lifts its head to reveal a black mask and hooked bill. After preening its feathers for a moment, the bird takes to the air in a low, undulating flight, its bright white wing patches and white outer tail feathers visible in the light. The bird is a loggerhead shrike.

The shrike swoops up to a roadside fencepost, lands, and peers down at the surrounding grasses. Moments later the bird's keen eyes spot the movement of a ground beetle on a nearby patch of bare soil. Leaving the fencepost, the shrike flies down and lands near the beetle, quickly capturing it in its bill. Rising from the ground, the successful predator takes flight and flies directly to a hawthorn bush along the roadside. The bird hops amongst the dense branches to the center of the bush where the beetle is fed to its mate sitting on a nest with eggs.

The year is 1869. Buffalo is a small but growing industrial city surrounded by hay and wheat fields, and pastures grazed by sheep, horses and cattle. Much of the state's countryside resembles these rural lands around Buffalo. Statistics maintained by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) for this year show that New York is 90% farmland. The



Shrikes are fierce predators, but lack strong talons necessary to quickly dispatch prey. Instead, they kill large prey like this mouse by repeatedly biting it with their small, hooked beak.

horse and carriage is the primary means of travel for the average rural family. The Ford Model T will not be introduced for another 40 years, and busily traveled paved highways and sprawling suburban development won't become commonplace until after World War II.

A young naturalist observes the shrikes at their nest and passes the information on to an ornithologist who includes the record in an article published in *The American Naturalist*.

More than a century later, as a graduate student in wildlife biology at Cornell

Paul Novak



Active or lightly grazed pastures make good shrike habitat. Shrikes thrive in areas that include suitable perches, nesting sites, good visibility, and either hawthorn or barbed wire.



Here an adult shrike feeds an insect prey item to one of its young.

### What happened to this unique bird in New York during the intervening century?



University, I would find *The American Naturalist* article and include this 1869 observation in a table of breeding records as the first documented breeding for the loggerhead shrike in New York State. Sadly, at the close of my study in spring 1988, I would also record what might be the last nesting record for the loggerhead shrike in the state.

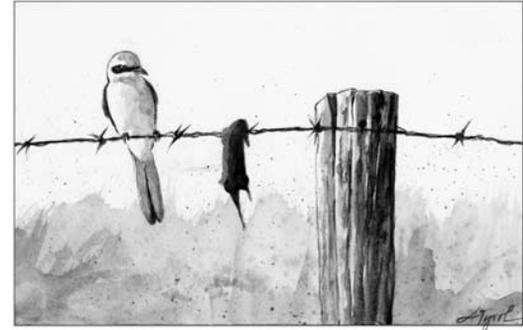
What happened to this unique bird in New York during the intervening century? That was the question I set out to answer in my study, which began in 1986. But the project was not easy. From 1980-1985, just 10 records of confirmed breeding were recorded for this species during the original New York State Breeding Bird Atlas. Despite intensive field surveys, I was only able to locate six nesting pairs during the three-year study,

all in northern Franklin County near the Quebec border. I observed these nesting birds for three summers—finding and checking their nests, watching them hunt, examining remains of prey left

impaled on hawthorns, looking at prey remains in regurgitated pellets, observing them feeding their young, and watching the young birds learn to fly.

Richard Ditch





## About Our Shrikes

Thirty species of shrike are found in the world, but just two species—the loggerhead (*Lanius ludovicianus*) and the northern shrike (*Lanius excubitor*)—occur in North America and New York State.

The breeding range of the loggerhead shrike extends from southern Ontario west to Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Rocky Mountain states, central Washington and Oregon, and south to the southern United States and Mexico. The species is migratory in the northern parts of its range and has become rare in all northeastern and north central states. Ontario still supports a small breeding population in the southern part of the province.

The loggerhead occurs in New York as a very rare migrant in spring and fall, and formerly as a breeding species in summer.

The northern shrike is a winter visitor to New York. It is similar in appearance to the loggerhead, but has a paler head and back, barred under parts, and a larger bill with a more distinct hook.

Unique among “perching birds,” shrikes have characteristics similar to many hawks, including a hooked bill with a tomial tooth (a pointed projection on the outer edge of the upper bill that works a bit like a canine tooth).

Shrikes have the unique and unusual habit of impaling prey items on thorns, barbed wire, and other sharp objects. While this habit may have evolved as a means of handling large prey items, it may now serve a function in food storage, mate attraction, or territorial advertisement.

I also contacted other biologists studying shrikes across the country, and visited shrike sites in Virginia and Ontario. I examined aerial photographs and characterized the land use and vegetation around nest sites, and compared these sites to nearby areas with no shrikes, as well as to areas in Ontario, both with and without shrikes. I read any piece of information I could find concerning loggerhead shrikes, including recently published literature and

nest in isolated shrubs or hedgerows associated with grazed pastures and nearby hayfields as opposed to agricultural lands dominated by row crops such as corn. But many seemingly suitable pastures were searched to no avail; shrikes simply weren't there.

As in other studies, the shrikes in my study generally nested successfully and produced several young, but lost one or more fledglings to various causes. Shrikes

## ...does New York hold a future for the loggerhead shrike, or should we say goodbye to this unique pioneer...?

early anecdotal notes and observations. I then compiled all records and observations of nesting or likely breeding loggerhead shrikes in New York State.

In the end, as is the case with many scientific studies, I had some answers, but even more questions. For example, my studies compared favorably with studies in Virginia, Minnesota and Ontario, and showed that in northeastern North America the loggerhead shrike prefers to

competed successfully with American kestrels for territories and foraging habitat, and one or more banded shrikes returned in subsequent years to the study area. At least one of the birds, a two-year-old adult, was killed by a collision with a vehicle—a potential problem cited in a number of studies. Shrikes are especially susceptible to road-kill mortality because they hunt along roadsides and have a flight pattern that can put them in the path of vehicles.

Richard Ditch

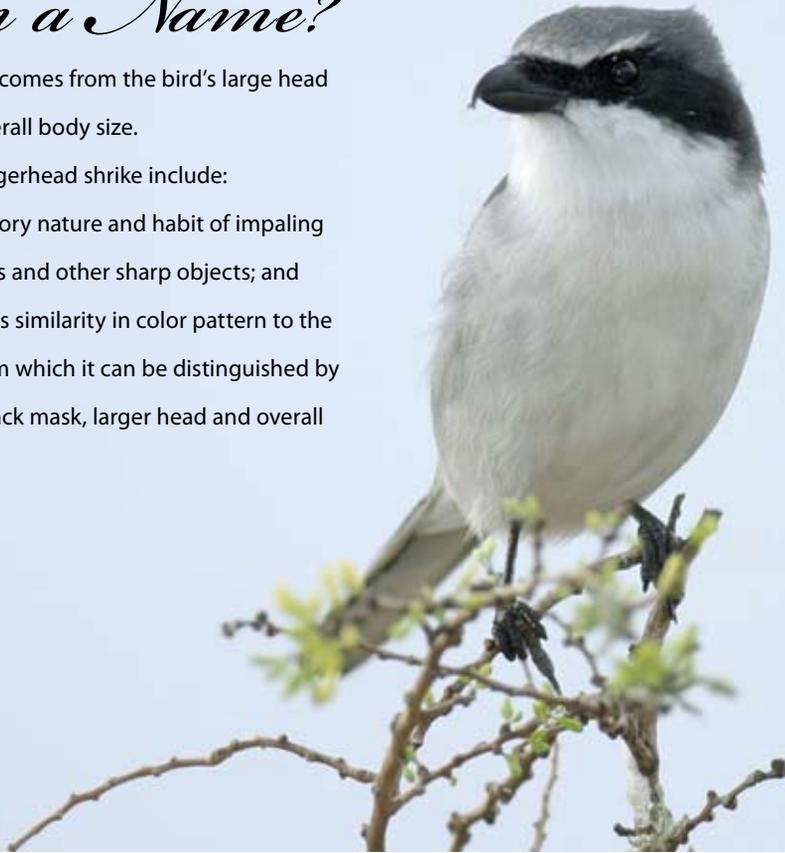


Shrikes sometimes impale prey on barbed wire (see illustration above) or long thorns to attract mates or to advertise their territorial dominance.

## *What's in a Name?*

The name "loggerhead" comes from the bird's large head size in proportion to its overall body size.

Other names for the loggerhead shrike include: "butcherbird" for its predatory nature and habit of impaling prey on barbed wire, thorns and other sharp objects; and "French mockingbird" for its similarity in color pattern to the northern mockingbird, from which it can be distinguished by the shorter, hooked bill, black mask, larger head and overall shorter proportions.



Shrikes have a habit of claiming the highest perch or topmost branch. Watch for them there, and look for their fierce eye and aggressive demeanor to distinguish them from other birds.

The record of loggerhead shrike populations in New York, and most of the northeast, clearly shows a species that expanded its range and prospered with the settlement of the state and the clearing of wooded land for agriculture. The increase, and subsequent decline, in shrike breeding records in the state mirror the changes in farmland, hay and pasture acreage as documented by the USDA.

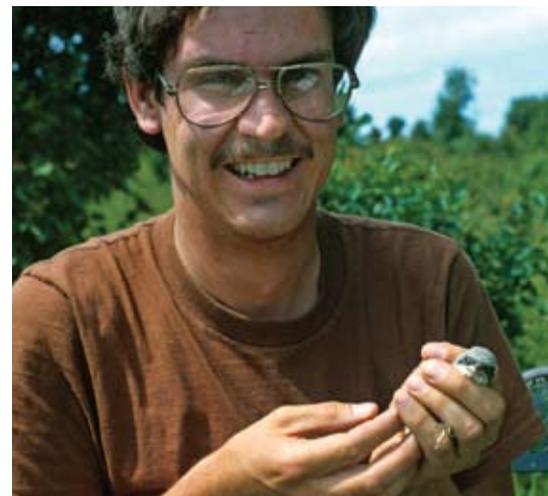
So does New York hold a future for the loggerhead shrike, or should we say goodbye to this unique pioneer that called our state "home" for more than a century? I remain hopeful. USDA figures show that the decline in farmland acreage has slowed, no doubt because we are increasingly recognizing the value of our farmers and farmlands. All around us we hear

the call for growing more food locally, for sustainability, and for preserving the cherished rural character of our communities. And more farmland means more suitable loggerhead shrike habitat.

Directly to our north, a recovery effort was initiated in Ontario in 1997. While land protection and habitat stewardship are critical components of the project, a captive breeding and release effort is also underway, and in the last few years it has begun to show signs of success.

So there is reason for hope. And while I was not able to find a loggerhead shrike near Binghamton this fall, perhaps next year, or in the near future, I will again be thrilled by the sight of a pair of loggerheads raising a brood somewhere in our great state.

**Paul G. Novak** is a wildlife biologist in DEC's Region 4 office.



Courtesy of Paul Novak



AL Hicks

### White Nose Update

Surveys conducted by DEC in 32 caves and mines in New York indicate that white nose disease continues to decimate hibernating bat populations. At the Main Graphite Mine—the state’s largest bat hibernation site, and the largest documented winter colony of little brown bats in the world—populations continue to decline, with little brown bat numbers down from 185,000 before the disease to just over 2,000 now. In addition, northern and Indiana bats are completely gone from the site, and biologists found only one tri-colored (eastern pipistrelle) bat. Further afield, previously uninfected caves are now contaminated, with the disease found as far west as Missouri and Oklahoma. On the positive side, numbers held steady for the second consecutive year in Howe and Haile caves,

though infected animals are still present. Biologists continue to work toward developing a strategy to reduce the impact of the disease. A newly discovered cold-loving fungus, *Geomyces destructans*, invades the skin of bats, and scientists are exploring how the fungus acts and searching for a way to stop it. For more information on white nose disease, visit the USFWS white nose page at [www.fws.gov/WhiteNoseSyndrome](http://www.fws.gov/WhiteNoseSyndrome).

### Counting Turkeys

For the past few years, DEC has conducted a statewide Winter Wild Turkey Flock Survey to monitor trends in turkey populations. The survey relies on volunteers to record the numbers of wild turkeys they spot. Snow and cold temperatures can significantly affect wild turkey populations, particularly

young birds (jakes and jennies). Data collected from the survey helps DEC get a handle on the numbers of wild turkey prior to the spring breeding season. If you would like to participate in the survey this winter, check out DEC’s website at [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/48756.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/48756.html).

Turkeys aren’t the only species that DEC relies on volunteers to count. DEC also runs an eastern cottontail survey and a ruffed grouse hunting log survey in the fall, a grouse drumming survey in the spring, and a summer turkey survey. For more information on these and other cooperator projects, visit DEC’s Citizen Science page at [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/1155.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/1155.html).

### Interim Climate Action Plan Released

The New York State Climate Action Council recently released its Climate Action Plan Interim Report for public review and comment. The Council will identify actions that must be taken to reduce New York’s greenhouse gas emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels by the year 2050. The public is invited to review and comment on the Interim Report through February 7, 2011. For a copy of the report, and instructions for submitting comments, visit [www.nyclimatechange.us](http://www.nyclimatechange.us). The final Climate Action Plan is expected to be released in 2011.

### Mags to the Troops

At the *Conservationist* booth at this year’s State Fair, two recently returned soldiers from the Gulf War were talking to staff about the magazine. While renewing her subscription, one soldier described how she had the *Conservationist* forwarded to her in Afghanistan and that reading the



Courtesy Ft. Drum USO

magazine helped remind her of home and what she was fighting for. She went on to say that she looked forward to receiving each issue, and that after she read it, it was passed around and fought over by the rest of the troops who also loved reading it! This story prompted *Conservationist* staff to donate magazines to the troops. Staff contacted the USO at Fort Drum and ended up sending five boxes of various past issues to be distributed to our troops based in Afghanistan and Iraq.

### New York's Big Game

If you would like to receive information about deer and bear biology, management, research, regulations and hunting in New York, then join the New



USFWS/Steve Hillebrand

York Big Game e-mail list. It's easy to sign up—simply go to DEC's deer and bear hunting page at [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7857.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7857.html) and click on the link under "Big Game Email List."

### Easy to Be Green

A new law that limits phosphorus makes it easier for consumers to be green. An ingredient used in detergents and fertilizers, phosphorus reaches our waters through wastewater and stormwater runoff. When too much phosphorus gets into our ponds, lakes and streams, the effects can be devastating. More than 70 New York waterbodies are experiencing problems due to phosphorus, including Lake Ontario, Lake Champlain, Onondaga Lake, New York City drinking water reservoirs and the Chesapeake Bay Watershed. The new Dishwasher Detergent and Nutrient Runoff Law makes it easier to help keep phosphorus out of our waters by requiring household detergent to be phosphorus-free starting in August 2010, and requiring all commercial detergents to be phosphorus-free by July 2013. In addition, after January 1, 2012, fertilizers containing phosphorus will only be allowed to be used under specified conditions. For more details about the new law, go to [www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/67239.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/67239.html).

### Calling All Writers

The DEC Universal Access Program is searching for writers to share short stories about connecting to nature. The Universal Access Program provides recreational opportunities and access for everyone, including children, seniors and people with disabilities. Anyone can submit a story to the program as long as the text relays positive experiences about connecting to nature in New York. These kinds of stories illustrate that inspiration from nature is universal and that everyone can find a way to enjoy the great

outdoors. Stories must be a maximum of 650 words. Monthly winning stories will be featured on DEC's website, and prizes will be awarded. For more information, see "Great Stories from New York's Great Outdoors" at [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/34035.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/34035.html).

### More Moose

Northeastern New York's moose population continues to grow rapidly. Now numbering close to 800 (up from 50-100



USFWS/Ronald Laubenstein

in the 1990s), the increase is largely due to influx from an increasing population in New England and Canada, as well as from continued reproduction occurring in New York. While this influx is cause for celebration, a growing population can mean a growing concern for motorists. During the course of their day, moose may travel many miles, crossing roads in their search for food, new territory, and mates. And although the peak time for wandering is during their fall breeding season, DEC warns motorists to be alert for moose year-round on roadways in the Adirondacks and surrounding areas. The animals are most active at dusk and are often difficult to see due to their dark coloring and height. For more information about moose, visit DEC's moose page at [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6964.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6964.html).

## Dura Guides™ and Pocket Naturalist® Guides

DuraGuides™ and Pocket Naturalist® Guides

Soft cover \$7.95; \$5.95

Waterford Press

[www.waterfordpress.com](http://www.waterfordpress.com); 602-681-3333

Waterford Press's DuraGuide and Pocket Naturalist Guides make great additions to any outdoor enthusiast's library. Two of several different series released by Waterford Press, both DuraGuide and Pocket Naturalist Guides cover topics from camping to plants, and are pamphlet-sized, fitting into any backpack or deep jacket pocket. They're also waterproof and durable, so you can be sure they'll be around for a while.

The Naturalist Guides cover a wide array of topics and states. Two that are specific to New York are *New York State Wildlife Pocket Naturalist Guide* and *New York State Trees and Wildflowers Pocket Naturalist Guide*. Both include species names, scientific names, measurements, very brief descriptions and colored illustrations. The *Wildlife Pocket Naturalist Guide* is a primer of the basic animals you might see in the Empire State, and includes birds, sportfish like smallmouth bass, mammals such as raccoons and bobcat, and various reptiles and amphibians. The *Trees and Wildflowers Pocket Naturalist Guide* covers a variety of plant species, from trees like the northern red oak, to flowers like the morning glory. Illustrations of tree leaves and plant stems help in identifying each species.

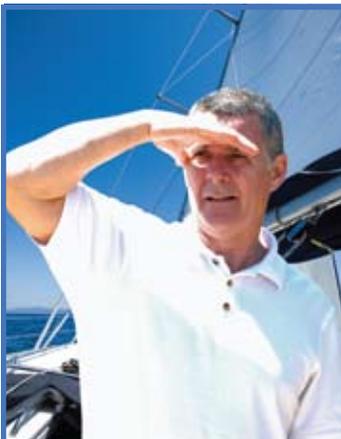
Perfect for taking outdoors with you, DuraGuides are sturdier and more flexible than the pocket naturalist guides. The *Freshwater Fishing DuraGuide* is a great introduction to fishing, and covers information about game fish species,

equipment to bring, and tips about catch-and-release. There is also a section on hooks and bait, as well as casting and fishing methods. Colorful illustrations enhance the guide, making it interesting and informative. However, some of the fish illustrations are not accurate representations of New York's species and so should be used as a general guide. *Freshwater Fishing* also contains fishing etiquette reminders and a discussion of what environments to fish for different species.

Similarly, the *Camping 101 DuraGuide* presents helpful tips and guidelines for campers. It offers a checklist of items to bring along on a camping trip, including camping gear, first-aid items and other optional paraphernalia. Sections on types of campsites, how to build a fire, and favorite camp food are helpful and fun information to make any camping trip enjoyable and successful. There are also sections about weather concerns and potential dangerous animal encounters (such as bears), as well as information on wilderness first-aid.

Though they are not comprehensive and sometimes lack specifics or technical information, the Waterford DuraGuides and Pocket Naturalist Guides will make you want to go out and explore New York's great outdoors. And with such a wide range of topics covered, there's something for everyone.

**Jenna Kerwin** is the staff writer for the *Conservationist*.



With this issue, the *Conservationist* and DEC wish a happy, productive retirement to long-time *Conservationist* art director and designer **Bob deVilleneuve**. A passion for making the page both handsome and understandable has made Bob a respected teacher and mentor, colleague and friend, not only to *Conservationist* staff, but to members of the Division of Public Affairs and Education, and to staff of every DEC division. Bob is fun to work with—smart, wry and committed. And there is also the designer's hand and eye that would reveal even mundane subjects as fascinating, beautiful and significant. For nearly 30 years, this talent has been Bob's gift to DEC and the readers of our publications. The magazine will miss his professionalism, skill, knowledge and humor—and we wish him the best of luck in the next chapter of his life. ---contributed by Mary Kadlecek



# On Patrol

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

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

Carl Heilman II

## Never Bait and Brag—Broome County

On the opening day of the Southern Zone archery season, ECO Andrew McCormick received a call from a person in Kirkwood saying that a man was bragging about trail cam pictures he had of bears near his baited tree stand, and that the man was looking forward to shooting one. The following day, the person called back to report that the man shot two bears that morning. When ECOs McCormick and Rick Warner went to interview the suspect, he admitted to shooting a bear, but stated he had done so legally and was not baiting bears. While conducting the interview, ECO McCormick noticed two bloody arrows in the man's quiver. The ECOs found the dead bear near the suspect's tree stand, along with several piles of cracked corn. Upon closer examination, the officers found only one entrance wound in the bear, and so questioned the man about a second bear. At first the man denied it, but when he couldn't explain that second bloody arrow, he admitted to shooting another bear. He was issued a total of six tickets. Unfortunately, after hours of searching, the second bear was not recovered.

## Poaching Doesn't Pay— Montgomery County

During the fall, Sgt. Keith Isles informed ECO Jason DeAngelis of a complaint call from the Town of Sharon. The caller told Isles he witnessed two individuals shoot a doe from their vehicle. The witness got the license plate, and a DMV plate check revealed the name and address of a poacher that ECO DeAngelis immediately recognized. The poacher and his friend were suspected of taking a deer illegally in September, but the ECO didn't have enough information to prove it. DeAngelis and Isles interviewed both men, and when faced with the witness's deposition and the doe carcass, they admitted to shooting two deer the night before and another on September 19th. The officers seized the meat from the September 19th deer, as well as the rifle used in all three deer jackings. Each of the poachers were issued six summonses and fined \$1,100.

## Holler Back—Hamilton County

At 2:00 a.m. on Sunday, October 10th, the DEC Dispatch Center in Ray Brook received a call from DEC's Lewey Lake Campground reporting that three out-of-town hikers had not returned from a day hike at Watch Hill. Forest Rangers immediately set out searching the area, repeatedly calling out the names of the three hikers. Finally, at 8:30 a.m., the rangers located the missing hikers, all in good condition. They reported that it had gotten dark as they were returning to the campground and since they did not have flashlights, they lost the trail. When asked if they could hear Forest Rangers calling for them, they responded that they had, but stated that, "Growing up in the city, you never holler back." (*Ranger's Note: When hiking, always carry a flashlight or headlamp. Remember that the sun sets earlier in the fall and winter, so plan trips accordingly. If lost, help searchers find you by staying in one place; starting a fire or making noise; and please answer searchers' calls.*)

## Ask the ECO

**Q:** I heard that crossbows are now legal for deer hunting. Is this true?

**A:** Not until Fall 2011. While a bill was passed that allows the use of crossbows for some big game hunting in New York, crossbows may not be used during the 2010 hunting season; you must wait until the fall of 2011. Also, crossbows may only be used during a regular firearms season or during the late muzzleloading and late bow-hunting seasons. For more information on this new law, visit the "Crossbows in New York: FAQ" webpage at [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/68802.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/68802.html).

## Camera Cats

I've been messing around with trail cameras and have been having a ton of fun. I thought you might enjoy some of the shots. For the past five years or so I've been lucky to share a patch of woods with a couple of bobcats during deer season. Most of the time I observe them from my tree stand while they have no idea I'm even around.

Noah Funicello  
Schoharie County



*Thank you for sharing such wonderful photos of bobcats. It is truly amazing what one might capture with a trail camera. It is striking that the environment in the photos appears so different from day to night. You can tell the location has not changed, however, because of the position of the log and other vegetation. Also of note—your photos show a relatively common occurrence, but one that is rarely witnessed: that animals often use the same paths to travel from place to place. Take a look at our August 2008 article “A Shot in the Dark” for similar photos and more information on trail cameras.*

—Jenna Kerwin, Staff Writer

## Hide and Seek



While at my parents' home in Heuvelton, I observed this screech owl in the maple tree in their backyard. I don't think you can get more camouflaged than this!

Don Morley Jr.  
Ogdensburg, St.  
Lawrence County

*This is a great photo of a gray phase eastern screech-owl. You are lucky to have seen this bird; it is so well hidden. The dark vertical feather streaks imitate the fissures in the bark of the maple very well. New York is at the northeastern edge of this species' range, which extends through much of the eastern U.S., and a bit into Canada and Mexico. A red phase is more common on Long Island.*

—Barbara Allen Loucks, DEC Research Scientist

## Hungry Hawk

This photo was taken from my kitchen window. I have seen many hawks over the years, but this is the first time I witnessed one cleaning my feeder for me. It held on with one foot and stuck the other foot in the feeder until it could reach the large chunk of suet I put out the day before. It then tore the suet



into smaller pieces and gobbled it down. Now every time I look out in the morning and see the feeder cleaned I will not blame it all on the squirrels.

Mrs. Irene Wilder  
Oswego

*This is a most interesting and unusual behavior for a red-tailed hawk. Normally, red-tails are seen soaring aloft or sitting in trees or on poles, and eat small mammals. I've been watching birds for 40 years and have never seen one on a feeder, much less eating suet at one!*

—Scott Stoner, DEC Research Scientist

## LETTERS

### Mysterious Creature

I was driving with my wife in a rural area of Cayuga County, near Locke when I came upon a strange-looking animal crossing the road in front of us. It appeared to be a fox, but it had a red belly and black face, back and sides. To top it off, it had a ringtail like a raccoon. It ran across the road like a fox. Has anybody ever seen a fox with these markings?



Eric Dresser

*coloration similar to what you described. (See the attached photo.) I am sorry I cannot be more definitive, but without a photograph to accompany your letter, it is often difficult to provide a positive identification of wildlife sightings.*

—Gordon R. Batcheller, DEC Wildlife Biologist

Willard “Bump” Warner  
Moravia, Cayuga County

*You describe an interesting sight. I am finding it hard to make an educated guess on this sighting, but via the process of elimination, I suspect it may have been a gray fox. The gray fox is a small, almost cat-like animal, and they do have*

### Cicada Correction

In the letters section of the June 2010 issue, we indicated a photo of a cicada was a periodical cicada, *Magicalcadas spp.* We heard from a couple of readers, including Cole Gilbert of Cornell University who informed us that the one pictured is likely in the genus *Tibicen*, which includes the “dog day” cicada of late summer. Periodical cicadas are black with red eyes, and have bright orange veins in their wings. *Tibicen* cicadas emerge every year, but scientists don’t know exactly how long their development requires. Some believe the development requires more than one year.



*Tibicen* cicada



periodical cicada

Dorothy Desautels

Stephen Creswell

Cole also pointed out that cicadas do not, in fact, pupate. The pupal stage is only found in insects with complete metamorphosis, such as flies, bees, beetles, butterflies and moths. Insects in which the immature stages look more or less like the adults and eat the same thing do not have a pupal stage. Instead, over time, the nymphal stages or “instars” get successively larger and more adultlike in proportion.

—*Conservationist* staff

Bill Banaszewski



### Ask the Biologist

**Q:** My neighbor says he no longer has to have his deer checked for chronic wasting disease (CWD). Is that true?

**A:** Great question—and timely, as the deer hunting season is in full swing. CWD is a rare, fatal, neurological disease found in members of the deer family. It is a transmissible disease that slowly attacks the brain of infected deer and elk, causing the animals to progressively become emaciated, display abnormal behavior and invariably results in the death of the infected animal.

New York has completed its fifth year of sampling for the detection of CWD. Despite intensive testing of wild white-tailed deer, no additional cases have been detected in the state since those initially found in the spring of 2005 in central New York.

As a result, DEC adopted new regulations this fall. The twenty-town containment area has been “decommissioned;” successful hunters no longer need to have their deer checked and can transport their harvest outside the area. New York will continue to conduct annual statewide surveillance sampling and testing of deer suspected of being infected. Restrictions on deer feeding, and on the importation of deer and elk from other states and provinces remain in effect. For a list of these areas and more information on CWD, visit DEC’s website at [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7191.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7191.html).

—Chuck Dente, DEC Wildlife Biologist



### Write to us

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# Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

## Ex-hunting Buddy by John Hammer

Last autumn while hunting for deer, I was befriended by a wild ruffed grouse. Each time I went to my hunting property he'd get a little closer and a little friendlier. Soon he would meet me at my truck. He followed me like a puppy while I checked and prepared my tree stands, from the time I arrived until the time I left for home.

One time in particular, I hunted from a tree stand near our usual meeting place. Within minutes he was at the base of my tree. He stayed on the ground under my stand making a lot of "cover noise." I thought that was great because any approaching deer would see the bird and never think a human was nearby. Later, he flew up onto my platform and stayed with me on the stand until the end of the day. That was when I started calling him my "hunting buddy."

But friendship has its limits. The next week I hunted from the same stand "we" occupied the week before. Within minutes he was there on the ground, walking around my ladder, once again scratching the leaves and generally making great cover noise. What could be better?

At about 4:45 he flew up to my stand, which was fine with me. At about 5:00, when deer usually start moving, I stood up and picked up my bow. Almost immediately, he jumped onto my seat, so I pulled out my camera and snapped a couple of pictures. After returning my camera to my pocket, I looked up to find that two deer, a mature doe and a fawn, had just crossed my shooting lane at about 25 yards. I had missed my chance. Dang.

I thought to myself, "Okay; your fault, you were fooling around when you should have been watching for deer. But maybe the deer will come back." Sure enough, within 10 minutes they closed in, but just out of range. I held my bow vertically in front of me and attached my release. That was when my hunting buddy jumped from the seat onto the lower limb of my bow.

At this point I was frantic, and tried to quietly shake my bow to get the bird to fly off without spooking the deer. He wouldn't. So I tipped my bow almost 90 degrees and he jumped back onto the tree stand, landing on my arrow quiver and producing a sound that rivaled the rattles of a 20-year-old minivan. Needless to say, the big doe ran off, but fortunately only about 15 yards.

I knew I still had a chance. If *only* this bird would behave. Sure enough, five minutes later, the doe worked closer again and was in range, but partially blocked by a limb. Once again I held my

bow vertically in front of me, ready to shoot. But when the deer lifted its front leg to take that next step, THE GROUSE FLEW UP AND LANDED ON MY NOCKED ARROW!

From personal experience, I can now tell you—it's pretty difficult to aim with a grouse sitting on your arrow. The jig was up with the deer, as the grouse rattled the arrow around trying to maintain his balance.

So I've given up hunting from stand number 5. It belongs to my ex-hunting buddy now. I'll never get another deer there as long as *that* bird is around.

A lot of things can go wrong while bowhunting. Some of them are within your control, some aren't. I always say, "When it's your time, it's your time, and when it ain't, it ain't." That day was definitely not my time.

The last picture I took shows my ex-hunting buddy and me, walking out at the end of the day's hunt. He apparently had no hard feelings about me dumping him off my bow limb. But I couldn't help but wonder if he wasn't in cahoots with the deer.

A *Conservationist* subscriber for more than 30 years, **John Hammer** is a lifelong hunter. Now retired, he is a Master Forest Owner volunteer with Cornell Cooperative Extension. He resides in Middlesex, Yates County with his wife Linda.



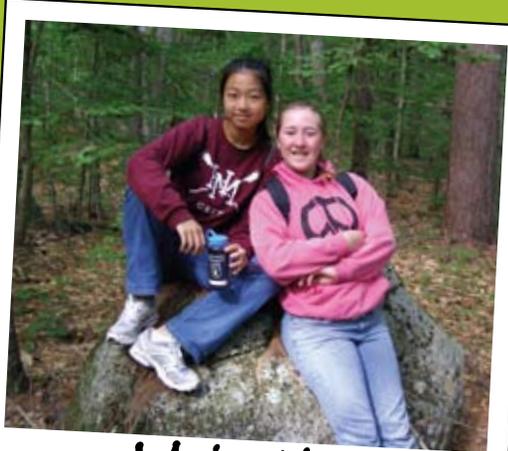
(Editor's Note: Versions of this story have appeared in *Quality Whitetails*, *Ruffed Grouse Society*, *New York Outdoor News*, and *Deer & Deer Hunting*.)

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