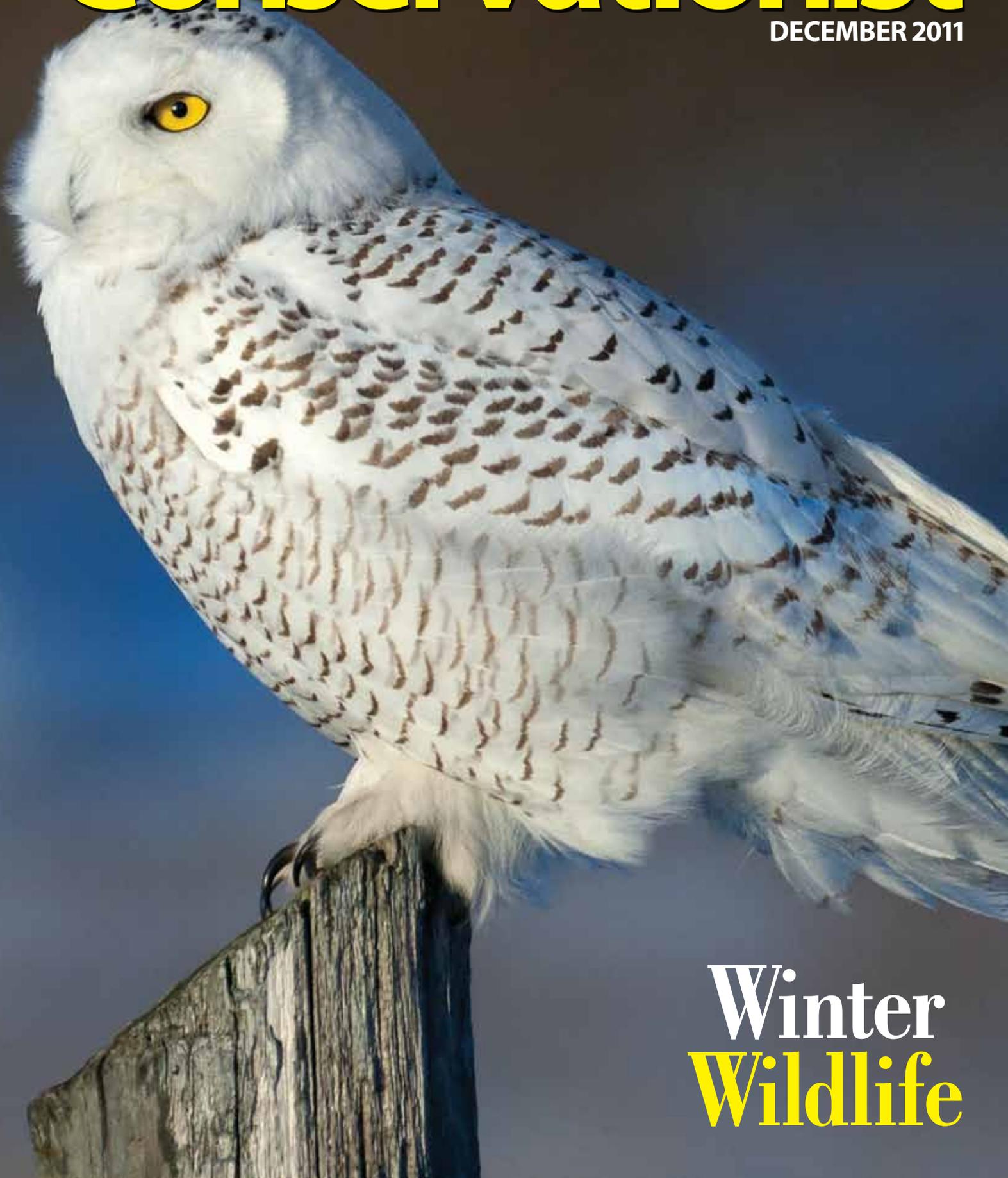


Citizen Science | Sea Grant at 40 | Getting Kids Outdoors

NEW YORK STATE

# Conservationist

DECEMBER 2011



Winter  
Wildlife



Dear Reader,

As the winter takes hold around us I am reminded of some of the great outdoor experiences I've enjoyed this past year as Commissioner. I'm not referring to recreational pursuits, but to time spent observing DEC staff working on natural resource projects, and especially those involving connecting children to our environment.

For example, in this issue you will learn about the many ways children and families can join in Citizen Science efforts, where your observations can inform our scientists and others about the state of the environment from habitats to wildlife counts to water quality. I recently joined a group of students from a local school who participated in the "Day in the Life of the Hudson River" program and took water samples to perform experiments on water quality and collected data on river currents and plant life along the river bank. I cannot describe how excited the children were to connect with the Hudson River and unravel its mysteries. I know it's an experience they will never forget, and in some cases it will influence their future career paths.

And this past summer I was fortunate to spend a glorious day at one of DEC's four environmental education camps. The early teen campers were engaged in boating, hiking, archery and fishing, having the time of their lives (and mine!). But these activities were more than just outdoor recreation, there was a twist. Hikers learned about survival in the woods, boaters learned about safe paddling, and fishing came with lessons on native species and aquatic habitats. Even lunch was a learning experience about the importance of minimizing food waste and sustainable food production.

One of DEC's goals is to connect children with nature in a way that fosters science education and environmental stewardship. A week-long experience for a youngster at a summer DEC environmental education camp can bring a lifetime of rewards. Please see the inside back cover of this magazine, or visit [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov) for more information on our summer camps, including how you can sign up your children or sponsor a camp scholarship.

I also hope you enjoy the parent's perspective shared by a DEC staff member on getting kids outdoors in "Beware: Nature Ahead." And our "Winter Wildlife" photo essay shows that watching wildlife is a year round activity.

Wishing all of our readers a safe and enjoyable holiday season,  
Commissioner Joe Martens

P.S. If your gift-giving list includes folks who enjoy nature discovery and learning about our environment, please consider sharing the gift of nature through a *Conservationist* subscription!

# NEW YORK STATE Conservationist

Volume 66, Number 3 | December 2011  
Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of New York State

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EDITORIAL OFFICES  
The *Conservationist* (ISSN0010-650X), © 2011 by NYSDEC, is an official publication of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation published bimonthly at 625 Broadway, 2nd Floor, Albany, NY 12233-4502. Telephone: (518) 402-8047

Manuscripts, photographs and artwork will be accepted if accompanied by SASE. Please write to the above address with an author's query or to request a Contributor's Guide. The publisher assumes no responsibility for loss or damage of unsolicited materials.

**TO SUBSCRIBE:**  
\$18 per year, \$24 for two years, \$30 for three years. Outside the U.S., add \$27 per year with a check drawn on a U.S. bank. All orders must be prepaid.

Please allow 6 to 8 weeks for new subscriptions or changes of address. Periodical postage paid at Albany, NY, and additional mailing offices.

Send check or money order payable to:

*Conservationist*  
NYSDEC  
625 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12233-4502

or call: **1-800-678-6399**  
Visit the Department's website at:  
[www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)

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POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:

*Conservationist*  
NYSDEC  
625 Broadway  
Albany, NY 12233-4502

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# WINTER WILDLIFE



## Excerpts from *Wildlife Images of the Adirondacks*

by Eric Dresser

*a*s a young boy fishing with my father, a seed of appreciation for the outdoors was planted. A fishing trip with my dad was more than fishing. He would always find the time to stop and point out wildflowers, birds, insects, and anything else that caught his observant eye. He taught me to do more than just look; he taught me to see.

Fishing trips in the Adirondacks were always my favorites. It wasn't because the fishing was better there; it was because of the places we went. Places like Raquette River, Saranac River, Black River and Taylor Pond to name a few. Places where you could find true wilderness. Places where you may not hear a vehicle for the entire day. Places where the landscape was rugged and spellbinding.

Vivid memories of the Adirondacks continued to draw me back to the area as I grew older. On one particularly memorable trip, my nephew Jeff and I were camping on Moss Lake. As the orange glow of another breathtaking Adirondack sunset faded, I told Jeff, "We had better get to sleep because we have to pack up early tomorrow morning and head back to everyday life."

The next morning we woke to the sound of thunder echoing off the hills in the pre-dawn light. We scrambled to get everything packed while it was still dry, and got our last gear into our backpacks just as a few sprinkles started. Then it happened.

As the thunder got closer and louder, two loons started their mournful yodeling. I was thinking, "It doesn't get any better than this," when a group

of coyotes chimed in. It was a magical serenade, and a perfect example of the Adirondacks' mystical draw.

I've been photographing the wild residents of the park for nearly four decades. And whether I'm successful in capturing on film what I set out to photograph, it's experiences like the one described above that inspire me to return time and time again.

Here are a few of the images I've been lucky enough to capture during my frequent visits to the Adirondacks. I'm often asked what my secret is for getting such interesting close-up shots. The best advice I can give is to spend as much time as possible out-of-doors. For, whether you are observing or photographing wildlife, luck is the product of persistence.

*Top: A horned lark.*

*Left: Also called a varying hare, the snowshoe hare changes from brown in the summer to white in the winter.*



*Red fox near the entrance of its den.*



*River otters investigate my blind from a spring hole in the ice.*

*Bold and brazen, the red squirrel is the most plentiful squirrel in the wilderness areas of the Adirondacks.*



*With its breeding season winding down, this whitetail buck lost one antler a week after this photo was taken.*



*American wigeon, Utowana Lake in Hamilton County.*



*Pine grosbeak eating crab apples, Champlain Valley.*

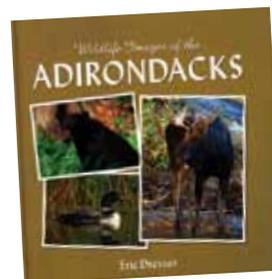




*I photographed this springtime beaver north of Nelson Lake near McKeever.*



*A pileated woodpecker looking for a meal.*



Editor's Note: The images presented on these pages are just a sampling of the fantastic wildlife photos found in Eric's new 144-page book *Wildlife Images of the Adirondacks*. To view the other beautiful, colorful pictures from every season, order his book from North Country Books at [www.northcountrybooks.com](http://www.northcountrybooks.com) or by calling 800-342-7409.

**Eric Dresser** is an internationally published photographer who has been photographing wildlife in the Adirondacks for nearly forty years. Visit his website [www.NBNP.com](http://www.NBNP.com) to view more of his work.

*(left) Loud in color and in voice, this blue jay was photographed near a bird feeder.*



# Bringing Science to the Shore



## NY Sea Grant celebrates first 40 years

By Barbara Ann Branca

Paul Focazio

Paul Focazio

Courtesy of NYSG



In Montauk, twilight gives way to dawn. Eager surfcasters throw their lines at first light. Nearby, the inlet dock is humming with activity as a fishing boat heads out before sunrise. The captain is reassured knowing that his crew is prepared for whatever weather comes their way—the entire crew practiced donning life-saving immersion suits at last summer’s Safety-at-Sea workshop, organized by New York Sea Grant (NYSG). As one crew member put it, “I’d rather learn how to put it on in June on the dock than in February during an emergency at sea.”

Later that same morning, about 400 miles away in the middle of Lake Ontario, enthusiastic educators work side-by-side with environmental researchers, taking samples, monitoring water quality, and checking for native and invasive species during a weeklong research cruise. Once back in the classroom, teachers will show the next generation how best to conserve our aquatic resources.

These are just a few examples of how NYSG has helped recreational and commercial anglers, researchers and educators, and businesses and municipalities, during its 40 years in existence.

### New York Sea Grant is Born

It was the sixties. Our nation was in the throes of social upheaval paired with unprecedented scientific advances. Rachel Carson’s *Silent Spring* had begun raising awareness about the environment. Many proclaimed Lake Erie to be dead. Our nation’s technological machinery was moving at breakneck speed ever since President John Kennedy challenged Americans to put a man on the moon by decade’s end.

But compared to the space race, ocean exploration hadn’t left the starting gate.

That’s when things changed. At the 1963 meeting of the American Fisheries Society, keynote speaker and University of Minnesota professor Althehan Spilhaus first proposed “sea grant colleges,” analogous to land grant colleges. “The same kind of imagination and foresight should be applied to the exploration of the sea,” wrote Spilhaus in a 1964 issue

of *Science*. In 1966, the National Sea Grant College Program was developed by Congress with a goal of initiating and supporting education, research and outreach programs to impart useful information to people working with marine resources, the scientific community and the general public.

By decade’s end, a number of states became eligible for funding under the National Sea Grant College Act—states with coasts along the Atlantic

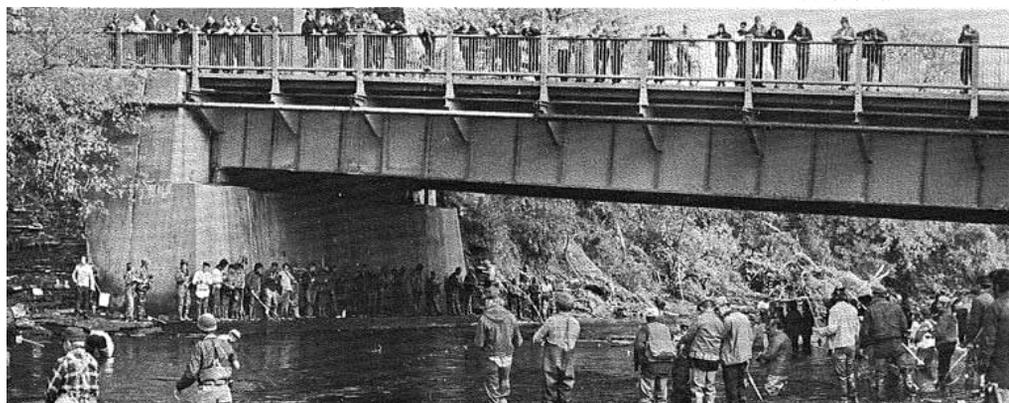
and Pacific Oceans, and our continent's inland seas, the Great Lakes. New York is unique in that it borders the Atlantic Ocean, two of the Great Lakes (Erie and Ontario) and also contains the interconnecting river systems of the Hudson, Niagara and St. Lawrence. In 1971, New York State received its first grant under the new National Sea Grant Program: \$600,000 to explore development of the state's thousands of miles of coastlines along the ocean and Great Lakes. Dr. Donald F. Squires at the State University at Stony Brook headed the program, and started a long tradition of choosing the best research projects and disseminating results through a specialized extension staff.

Over time, New York's program evolved as a cooperative program of the State University of New York (SUNY), Cornell University (the state's federally designated land grant college), and the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, with offices and personnel across the state. Today's goals revolve around the themes of healthy coastal ecosystems, sustainable coastal development, safe and sustainable seafood, and hazard resilience in coastal communities.

Courtesy NY Sea Grant



Dr. Donald F. Squires oversaw the start of New York's sea grant program.



Anglers line the banks of the Salmon River in the 1970s.

### Research to Application: The Sea Grant Paradigm

Since its inception, New York Sea Grant has brought high-quality research to the end user with a useful application—or as we call it, “bringing science to the shore.” For example, projects from the '70s examined ice cover with regards to navigability on Lake Erie, and the impacts of hard structures such as breakwaters and power plants along the shorelines. Funding was also used to study the fisheries throughout the state and to comprehensively survey the New York Bight for the first time.

From some of the state's leading academic institutions, Sea Grant brought

together researchers trained in related fields: fish biologists and physical oceanographers, coastal engineers and toxicologists, geochemists and social scientists. Then a cadre of trained “extension staff” disseminated the research results to angler groups, managers, government officials and educators.

Extension staff are often some of the first to hear about emerging issues from stakeholders and first to respond with important technical information and resources. In the 1980s, when the threat of invasive zebra mussels in New York's Great Lakes became apparent, New York Sea Grant Extension “got ahead of the issue” and led workshops



Nordica Holchuck

Go to New York Sea Grant's website [www.nyseagrant.org](http://www.nyseagrant.org) to read about cutting-edge research on topics from algae to zebra mussels. Use the online searchable research database or scan the latest outreach activities on social media websites like Facebook or Twitter.



throughout the region, informing stakeholders how they might prevent and reduce negative impacts to the resources they valued.

More recently, Dr. Paul Bowser of Cornell's College of Veterinary Medicine has been conducting research on viral hemorrhagic septicemia (VHS), a potentially deadly virus that threatens Great Lakes fish. He worked closely with NYSG's fisheries specialist Dave MacNeill to bring information about the virus to anglers and aquaculturists. Together they won the first-ever Research to Application Award given by the national Sea Grant Association for their coordinated efforts in spreading the word about the virus.

Along the Salmon River in the 1970s, Sea Grant "agents in hip waders" assisted anglers that were lined up almost shoulder to shoulder in pursuit of the newly established salmon fishery. Since then, Sea Grant continues to sponsor research on trout and salmon that DEC uses to better manage these valuable fisheries.

The U.S. Geological Survey (USGS), in close collaboration with DEC, is also a key player in conducting fish assessment to measure population trends of important prey fish. Most NYSG-sponsored research on the lower Great Lakes would not be possible if it weren't for the large research vessels operated jointly by USGS and DEC. NYSG plays a key role in developing effective communication strategies and

identifying ongoing research needs. The three groups are strongly committed to ensuring healthy and sustainable ecosystems and working together to bring accurate, science-based, practical information to resource users so they better understand fisheries management and can make informed decisions.

Over the years, NYSG research has moved steadily towards an ecosystem approach. In Lake Ontario, for example, understanding the relationships within the food web is key to maintaining a healthy ecosystem. The top predator trophy fish, Chinook salmon, consume smaller bait fish, alewife, which in turn consume small planktonic invertebrates. But when species from other environments began invading the Great Lakes—there are currently about 180 invasive species—the ecosystem began to change: More food energy was taken from native organisms by prolific invaders such as zebra and quagga mussels. In response, NYSG funded research on all parts of the ecosystem and worked with various stakeholders (anglers, managers, recreational divers, boaters, and those concerned with a safe supply of drinking water) to build an understanding of the lake's complicated dynamics.

### Establishing Partnerships

For many New Yorkers, fishing and boating go hand in hand. Working with a host of agency, industry and community partners, NYSG's recreation/tourism specialist Dave White brought a pilot boater-education project to fruition over the last two years. A fully equipped "Discover Clean and Safe" boat visited nearly a dozen ports in the Great Lakes during the summer of 2011, demonstrating to boaters the latest in required, safe, and environmentally friendly boating gear. The 2011 campaign also stressed "Don't pick up hitchhikers," which educated boaters about

Paul Czarnecki



Over the years, NYSG has funded research on Lake Ontario's ecosystem, including its fish communities.

the destructiveness of aquatic invasive species, as well as provided information about water quality, the changing food web, and safety and security on the water.

The Discover Clean and Safe Boating campaign also reached the Hudson Valley, a region known for its majestic views, historic landmarks, and unique tidal estuary that is a living laboratory where freshwater from the north mixes with saltwater coming up from New York Harbor. Sea Grant has long supported cutting-edge research on once-plentiful sturgeon that inhabit this area. Researchers studying DNA of sturgeon dorsal fins have identified the genetic markers that differentiate Hudson River sturgeon from those in other estuaries along the Atlantic. The techniques developed have helped determine which populations are threatened or endangered and has aided in rebuilding stocks. Other NYSG research runs the gamut from geosciences (how sediments are carried in the river) to the social sciences (surveying those characteristics that make the region a tourist destination).



Kara Lynn Dunn



One of NYSG's missions is to ensure seafood safety, including training businesses in the safest and healthiest ways to store and display finfish and shellfish.

### Ensuring Seafood Safety

Part of Sea Grant's mission is to ensure a safe and sustainable seafood supply. A large portion of the nation's seafood comes through New York. Fish caught at Montauk, the Great Lakes, or flown in from anywhere in the world are sold at New York City's Fulton Fish Market.

NYSG seafood specialist Ken Gall is an internationally recognized educator in training seafood business owners and inspectors on ways to keep seafood fresh. Through workshops and over the internet, he's trained more than 5,700 people in such practices as displaying finfish and shellfish in separate counters because of their requirements for different temperatures to remain fresh.

Clams from Great South Bay, scallops from Peconic Bay and lobsters from Long Island Sound are all critical marine resources whose numbers have dwindled—and scientists aren't sure why. NYSG research strives to address such questions. Studies of brown tide and its devastating effects on commercially important species such as hard clams and scallops have been an

important part of Sea Grant's coordinated research agenda. Beneficial collaborations with other agencies and stakeholders have resulted in an increased understanding of the brown tide algae.

### A Look Ahead

Moving forward, New York Sea Grant is addressing concerns about changing weather patterns and their

impact on our coastal communities. At the southern tip of Manhattan, the Stony Brook University Storm Surge group is examining trends in storm surge and the area's vulnerability to flooding events. They've created new models and developed innovative ideas on how to protect the shoreline and its coastal communities. In another example, to help deal with the damage associated with "nor'easters," NYSG worked with its partners to develop a website that helps government officials, coastal managers, and emergency personnel better prepare for predicted storms.

What's in store for the next 40 years is anyone's guess, but New York Sea Grant will surely be up to the challenge! The program's dedicated research will aid in the development of new and innovative technology to ensure healthy coastal ecosystems, coastal development and sustainable seafood practices for the benefit of all New Yorkers...which is exactly NYSG's goal—to put research to good use.

**Barbara Ann Branca** is New York Sea Grant's communications manager.



# On Patrol

Carl Heilman II

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

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

### Hide and Seek—St. Lawrence County

While on ATV patrol, ECO Scott Atwood located a tree stand overlooking an area baited with corn, apples and acorns. ECO Atwood and ECO Munn patrolled the area again on opening morning of deer season three days later and found an ATV parked on the trail near the stand. The ECOs also saw fresh footprints and a bag of gear at the base of the tree. They also saw fresh footprints heading away. ECO Atwood and Munn followed the prints and found a man hiding behind a large pine tree. When asked what he was doing, the man replied, "Nothing, just standing here." After being questioned, the man admitted to hunting over the baited area and said he left the tree stand when he heard the approaching ATVs. He was ticketed for hunting deer with the aid of a bait pile, and failure to carry his hunting license and tags while hunting.

### Off-Duty, but On the Ball—Orange County

While on a November vacation at Stewart State Forest, ECO James Davey was preparing to waterfowl hunt when several shots rang out. It seemed someone was starting early. As the morning progressed, the off-duty ECO watched a group of hunters shoot at anything with wings, including songbirds, which are protected by federal law. As Davey packed up for the morning, he saw the group shoot a great blue heron—another protected species—as it flew low over the marsh. ECO Davey contacted Ray Brook Dispatch, explained what was taking place, and requested a uniformed ECO. In his canoe, Davey approached the group, identified himself, and collected hunting licenses. The group denied doing the shooting, blaming it instead on other hunters who had already left. Davey paddled around the area, located three teal ducks, one out-of-season woodcock and the heron all within fifteen yards of their position. He ordered the group to pack up and return to their truck. ECOs Kristina Shephard and Mike Buckley then arrived and issued the men tickets for shooting before legal hunting hours, taking woodcock out of season, and taking a protected bird.

### Marijuana Peddlers—Suffolk County

Recently, Forest Rangers Michael Thompson and Kevin Slade were on patrol in the Peconic River Headwaters Natural Resource Management Area when they observed an individual riding a bicycle into an unusual area of the interior of the property. The rangers followed the subject on foot and observed him meet with another bicyclist waiting along the trail. Rangers Thompson and Slade waited for the subjects to leave the woods, and after about forty minutes, the rangers stopped the bicyclists and interviewed them. They discovered one of the two was growing marijuana plants in the woods. He was arrested and all eleven plants were confiscated and secured.

### ASK THE ECO

**Q:** Can I hunt on property that is not posted?

**A:** Just because you don't see any posted signs, don't assume that you can hunt on the property. As specified in the Environmental Conservation Law, posted signs can legally be as far as 660 feet apart (that's over two football fields). Some signs might fall off or be torn down, so you may not see them. According to the law, property is still posted for a period of one year even if the signs are torn down by unauthorized persons. Even in the absence of any posting, a hunter may be liable for trespass as it is defined in the Penal Law. It's your responsibility as an ethical hunter to find out who owns the property and ask permission to hunt, whether the property is posted or not. Check out [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/8371.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/8371.html) for more information.



Susan L. Shafer



James Clayton

Susan L. Shafer

# Discover... CITIZEN SCIENCE

By Bernadette LaManna

*Have you ever watched birds at a birdfeeder? Heard a chorus of spring peepers in April or bullfrogs in June? Enjoyed the blooming of a magnolia or a dogwood tree? Been fascinated by the sight of a horseshoe crab on the shore, or simply seen a ladybug and tried to remember the words to the nursery rhyme? Perhaps you've observed these things, and maybe even stopped momentarily to look or listen a bit more closely, but haven't given it much more thought. Well an entire world of scientific discovery awaits the casual observer interested in taking their sightings to the next level. But observers beware—you stand to learn a lot by becoming a citizen scientist!*

Citizen scientists are people who volunteer to survey, measure, monitor or observe the natural world around them, and record and share their findings. It's rewarding work that provides valuable assistance to professional scientists and researchers who may have limited means for collecting data. By participating in these projects, citizen scientists become more engaged with their natural surroundings, and better environmental stewards in the process.

In New York, numerous citizen science opportunities exist for both adults and children. Some projects are seasonal, while others can be conducted year-round. Electronic devices make many projects easier to do, and several programs—such

as the Citizen Science Alliance's "Zooniverse"—rely solely on using the internet (and sometimes a camera).

Whether it's counting wildlife, observing the effects of climate change, or even monitoring weather trends, there's likely a project that suits your interests. Take a look at the following list and see what project calls to YOUR inner scientist. Keep in mind, though, that this is only a sample; there are many others.

You can also search the web where you'll find a number of other interesting projects, including an ongoing "roadkill" project, but you'll have to visit Ireland to participate in that one!

### Wild Turkey: Winter Flock Survey and Summer Brood Survey

The winter survey monitors trends in turkey abundance across the state. Volunteers record the number of wild turkeys they see from January through March. This information helps DEC assess the size of the wild turkey population prior to the spring breeding season. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/48756.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/48756.html). The summer survey estimates the average number of wild turkey poults (young of the year) per hen. During August, DEC staff and volunteers record the sex and age composition of all flocks of wild turkeys observed during normal travel. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/48732.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/48732.html).

### Project FeederWatch (and Project NestWatch): Winter and Spring/Summer

If you like watching birds, you can help the Cornell Lab of Ornithology collect information to monitor the state's bird populations. In Project FeederWatch, volunteers make note of the kinds and numbers of birds that visit their feeders. In NestWatch, volunteers record a variety of information including species, nest location and the number of eggs and young. Visit [www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/pfw) (FeederWatch) and <http://watch.birds.cornell.edu/nest> (NestWatch).



Susan L. Shafer

### New England Cottontail Survey: October through February

Rabbit hunters in Rensselaer, Columbia, Dutchess, Putnam and Westchester counties are needed to help DEC gather information about the distribution of New England cottontails. New England cottontails look nearly identical to eastern cottontails and can only be reliably identified by genetic testing

of tissue, by fecal samples, or by examining the shape and structure of the skull. Hunters can help by providing DEC with the skulls of the rabbits they harvest. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/67017.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/67017.html).



Bill Banaszewski

### Bobcat Observation: Year-round

DEC needs more information on bobcat populations in most of central and western New York. If you spend a considerable amount of time outdoors in these areas, you can help by keeping track of any bobcat sightings and reporting your findings. For information, e-mail or call DEC at [fwwildlf@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:fwwildlf@gw.dec.state.ny.us) or 518-402-8920.

### Christmas Bird Count: December/January

Perhaps the largest, and longest-running citizen science project, National Audubon Society's Christmas Bird Count is conducted throughout North America. For more than 110 years, volunteers have braved winter weather to take part in the count. Data collected allows researchers, conservation biologists and other interested individuals to study the long-term health and status of bird populations, including the impacts of environmental threats like climate change and habitat loss. In 2010, more than 61 million birds were counted! Visit Audubon's website at <http://birds.audubon.org/christmas-bird-count>.

### FrogWatch USA™: Late January through August

Managed by the U.S. Geological Survey and the National Wildlife Federation, FrogWatch USA allows volunteers to help herpetologists (biologists who study amphibians and reptiles) track frog and toad populations. Anyone can be a frog-watcher, you just need to live near a frog breeding site (i.e. marsh, swamp or pond) that you can easily visit several times a week, including at night. See April 2008 *Conservationist* ([www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/43775.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/43775.html)) or visit [www.nwf.org/frogwatchUSA](http://www.nwf.org/frogwatchUSA).



### Amphibian Monitoring: Spring through Summer

Help the Hudson River Estuary Program and the Cornell University Department of Natural Resources identify and map places where salamanders and frogs cross roads by reporting when and where you see migrations of these amphibians. This one is really pretty easy—all you need to conduct a “road survey” is to look through your car’s windshield on a rainy night. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/lands/51925.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/51925.html). Through the North American Amphibian Monitoring Program, you can lend an ear to help biologists monitor populations of vocal amphibians such as frogs and toads. In New York, the program is coordinated by the Hudson River Estuary Biodiversity Monitoring Program, which helps train volunteers to identify the unique calls of local frog species. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/50247.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/50247.html) or [www.pwrc.usgs.gov/naamp/](http://www.pwrc.usgs.gov/naamp/).

### Ruffed Grouse and Woodcock Hunting Log: Fall through Late Winter

Hunters can help biologists monitor populations of these two game species by keeping a log of the number of hours spent hunting grouse and/or woodcock, the number of birds flushed, the number of birds taken, and whether a dog was used to hunt. The log’s primary purpose is to monitor the number of birds flushed per hour. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/9351.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/9351.html). DEC also runs a Ruffed Grouse Drumming Survey in



DEC photo

which hunters record the number of drumming male grouse they hear while turkey hunting in spring. See October 2010 *Conservationist* ([www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/69004.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/69004.html)) or visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/48169.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/48169.html).

### Horseshoe Crab Survey: May through July

Help collect data and acquire biological information about horseshoe crabs in New York's marine district. The data—spawning abundance, size, sex and whether or not the animal sports an identifying “button tag”—is used to assess the status of horseshoe crabs and assist with the management and conservation of this significant species. See June 2011 *Conservationist* ([www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/74680.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/74680.html)) or visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/36195.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/36195.html) or Cornell's NY Horseshoe Crab Monitoring Network site [www.nyhorseshoecrab.org](http://www.nyhorseshoecrab.org).

### American Eel Project: Late March through Mid-April

Join scientists, students and community volunteers in collecting juvenile American eels (glass eels or elvers) on several Hudson River tributaries. Volunteers check nets one or more days per week for these juvenile fish which are then counted, weighed and released. Other environmental data is also recorded. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/lands/49580.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/49580.html). To see a video, visit [www.dec.ny.gov/dectv/dectv151.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/dectv/dectv151.html).

### River Herring Monitoring Program: April and May

Volunteer to visit designated Hudson River tributaries twice a week during the spring and observe them for the presence or absence of river herring. Participants are also asked to record the date, time, location, tide stage, weather conditions, and stream conditions for each site. Data is collected for 65 Hudson River tributaries that span more than 150 miles. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/41545.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/41545.html).

### Project Budburst: Spring

By reporting the first leafing, first flower and first fruit ripening of targeted native trees, shrubs, flowers and grasses in their local area, volunteers can help scientists learn about the prevailing climatic characteristics in a region over time. BudBurst Buddies, a “spinoff” of Project Budburst and which runs year-round, is specifically designed to get children involved. Kids pick a tree or shrub to watch and make multiple observations about how it changes within a year's time. (Just think how much they can learn by doing that!) Visit <http://neoninc.org/budburst/citizenscientists>.



Susan L. Shafer



### Lost Ladybug Project: Early Summer

Help scientists keep tabs on our ladybug populations. Ladybugs feed on plant-eating insect pests, and during the past 20 years, several native ladybug populations have declined drastically, while others have increased both in numbers and range. Volunteers in the project locate and photograph ladybugs, and the information they provide helps scientists monitor the various ladybug populations. The nine-spotted ladybug (New York's state insect) was thought to be gone from the eastern U.S. until two children discovered one in Virginia in 2006 and reported it to the Lost Ladybug project. More recently, one was found on a sunflower at the Quail Hill Organic Farm in Amagansett, Suffolk County during a Lost Ladybug event this past summer. Since then, at least 20 more have been found at Quail Hill! Visit [www.lostladybug.org](http://www.lostladybug.org).

### Angler Diary Programs: Mid-June through September

Anglers can help DEC monitor various fish populations by participating in angler diary programs, which are conducted across the state. Anglers record trip, catch information, and biological characteristics of the species they

catch. Data from these programs provide valuable information which helps guide DEC's management efforts. Angler diary programs are currently being conducted for: smallmouth and largemouth bass on Lake Ontario (visit [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/27875.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/27875.html)); smelt, trout or salmon on Lake Champlain (visit [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/38381.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/38381.html)); walleye in Lake Ronkonkoma and Fort Pond on Long Island (contact the DEC regional office at 631-444-0280); and on four eastern Finger Lakes (Cayuga, Owasco, Skaneateles and Otisco; visit [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/27875.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/27875.html)); and seven western Finger Lakes (Canadice, Canandaigua, Conesus, Hemlock, Honeoye, Keuka and Seneca; visit [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/73518.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/73518.html)).

### Firefly Watch: June/Summer

Help the Museum of Science in Boston and researchers from Tufts University and Fitchburg State College conduct a firefly census to track fireflies. Firefly populations appear to be declining throughout the U.S. Volunteer firefly watchers observe and report on firefly activity in or near their backyards. Scientists hope the census will shed light on the geographic



James Clayton

## WHAT IS IT?

If you think the photo on the Table of Contents page is a close-up of a spruce cone—you're right! In this case, it's a seed cone from the Norway spruce (*Picea abies*), a European tree that has been planted widely in North America near homes and in conifer plantations. Mature Norway spruce are easily identified by their heavily drooping branches, and are the only species of spruce that have long (4-6") cones. Red squirrels often nip the cones to feed on the seed at the base of each scale, and sometimes leave large piles of stripped cones and scales at the base of trees. The cones are green at first and then turn brown as they mature and dry out.



Greg Miller

distribution of fireflies and their activity during the summer season. See June 2010 *Conservationist* ([www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/65630.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/65630.html)) or visit the Museum of Science's website [www.mos.org/fireflywatch/](http://www.mos.org/fireflywatch/).

### Quake-Catcher Network: Year-round

Citizen scientists can even help monitor earthquakes! The Quake-Catcher Network is a collaborative effort in which participants link their networked laptops and desktops for the purpose of forming the world's largest and densest earthquake monitoring system. The goal of the network is to provide a better understanding of earthquakes and to give early warnings to schools, emergency responders and others. Participants need to install a small, low-maintenance motion sensor. Visit <http://qcn.stanford.edu/>.

### Hudson River Almanac: Year-round

The Hudson River Almanac is a natural history journal that presents the observations of many individuals (more than 1,700 contributors to date), who range from elementary school students to professional biologists. The almanac contains valuable information on the entire river (from the High Peaks of the Adirondacks to New York Harbor), and encourages others to look more closely at the Hudson. From 1994 to 2001, the almanac was published as a bound book; today it is a free electronic newsletter delivered weekly via e-mail. To learn more, visit [www.dec.ny.gov/lands/25608.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/25608.html). To subscribe, e-mail [hrep@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:hrep@gw.dec.state.ny.us) (write E-Almanac in the subject line).

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



For more information about becoming a citizen scientist, visit DEC's website at [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/1155.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/1155.html) and [www.dec.ny.gov/about/1151.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/1151.html), or check out Science for Citizens at <http://scienceforcitizens.net/>, National Wildlife Federation's (NWF) Wildlife Watch at [www.nwf.org/WildlifeWatch](http://www.nwf.org/WildlifeWatch), or Cornell's citizen science webpage at [www.birds.cornell.edu/citscitoolkit](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/citscitoolkit).



## BEWARE: NATURE AHEAD!

*—A humorous look at the benefits of enjoying the outdoors*

By Gloria Van Duyne

Every time I turn around there seems to be another reason for people to be afraid of nature. The news is full of stories about how mosquitoes carry West Nile virus and eastern equine encephalitis, deer ticks can transmit Lyme disease, poison ivy can cause an itchy and painful rash, giant hogweed and wild parsnip might give you second-degree burns, rattlesnakes—well, enough said there—and, of course wild animals could have rabies.

It's no wonder people hesitate to spend a day outdoors! But if you listen to all this hype, you and your children will miss out on all the beauty and restorative power that nature offers.

When I was young, I was always hiking in the hills behind our house with my dad and sisters. I even explored the nearby woods, creeks and fields on my own. I built forts and tree houses, camped and fished, caught frogs and minnows, climbed trees and then napped in their shade on a sunny day. There were hills to roll down, insects to watch, animal tracks to follow and special places to discover. I also loved helping to plant and harvest a garden, and especially enjoyed watching seedlings break through the cracked soil. All I had to show for these various adventures, or so I thought, was muddy sneakers, scraped knees and an array of permanently “planted” burrs and seeds in my sweaters.

Even when the weather turned cold, my parents “encouraged” me (a.k.a. kicked me out the door) to play outside. Though I was less thrilled about staying outside in the cold, I always found ways to have fun. There were leaves to pile up and jump in, and acorns and pinecones to gather and use as “ammunition.” If there was snow on the ground, there were snow forts and snowmen to build, or sledding and snowshoeing to do. Following tracks could occupy me for hours, as I tried

to sneak up on the critter that made them. I was rarely successful, but had fun making up imaginary stories about what animal made them and what they were doing.

Today, it’s different. More and more, children’s outdoor play is planned and occasional, not impromptu and frequent. As a mom, I tell myself that I will make sure my son gets outside as much as possible. I want Jack to experience the same kind of excitement I did when exploring the woods, but I’ve



## Forests in New York State

and the world over are vitally important to our health and our lives. Forests provide services like improving air quality, reducing temperature extremes, sequestering carbon, shade, scenic beauty, recreation, and wildlife habitat. Forest products are critical to our economy, supporting the construction and paper industries, furniture and food production to name just a few. In support of the United Nations designation that 2011 is the International Year of Forests, Governor Andrew M. Cuomo proclaimed 2011 to be the Year of Forests in New York State. Governor Cuomo’s proclamation emphasizes the UN’s call to raise awareness on issues of sustainable management, conservation and sustainable development of all types of forests, and stresses New York’s commitment to “Keeping Forests as Forests.”



Kids explore a hollowed-out tree stump.



## Getting children outside:

- Include friends in your activities—most things are more fun with a friend.
- Outside alphabet scavenger hunt—just start with “A” and see how many things you can identify beginning with that letter. For younger children, try a color scavenger hunt.
- Buy or borrow field guides from your library. Children of all ages love the pictures and matching them to the real thing.
- Put up a birdfeeder in winter, or a bird house in the summer. Watch for birds that use your feeder or house.
- “Adopt” a tree in your yard or on your street. Learn what type it is and watch it change through the seasons. [www.dec.ny.gov/public/75949.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/public/75949.html)
- Visit a local nature center or park: have a picnic, take a walk in the woods.
- Make a list of what plants or pests you might be concerned about. Look them up online or at the library so you know how to avoid contact with them and to find out what to do if you come into contact.
- Explore DEC-managed state lands. They are free. Check out [www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/347.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/347.html) for more information.
- Check out DEC’s online family newsletter *Outdoor Discovery* ([www.dec.ny.gov/public/43355.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/public/43355.html)) for additional outdoor activity suggestions.

discovered that’s easier said than done. In fact, I can honestly say that I don’t think my son goes outside enough. I must admit: after work, school, homework, dinner and chores, I’m too tired to think about how much time Jack spends outside. And I feel guilty about this. I carry around guilt like the weight I gained after I gave birth to Jack: it’s always there, it’s uncomfortable and it’s really hard to get rid of.

Even when presented with outdoor activities, my son is not always the most enthusiastic. When told of our plans to go to a local nature center one morning, my son responded, “I don’t want to go. It’s so boring! All we do is walk in a big circle!” I felt like a huge failure. Whose son was this? He couldn’t have gotten that disinterest from MY side of the family. After all, I love the outdoors.

I discovered that if I made it fun for Jack, and allowed him to be part of planning our adventure, he was much more receptive to our outings. For instance, when I suggested we try and find as many things as we could on our hike that began with each letter of the alphabet, Jack rose to the challenge and practically ran the entire length of the trail trying to spot everything first.

There are many studies and articles that tout the myriad benefits of playing outside. Experts say that when children are outside, they are observing, exploring and even problem-solving. Just standing in the sunshine triggers our bodies to produce Vitamin D, necessary for strong bones. In addition, some studies show that exposure to trees and nature increases immune function, making us healthier. Now that’s my kind of workout—just being outside! Other cited benefits of being in nature include stress reduction, reduced aggression, better concentration, and a general increased



Susan Shafer

Thomas D. Lindsay



Kids listening intently for wildlife.

feeling of happiness. Maybe that's why my mom always said, "It's a nice day. Go outside. It's good for you."

But how do we get past this fear of the perceived dangers of being outdoors? I believe in the old saying, "knowledge is power." Last summer I saw a six-year-old boy hitting some shrubs on the edge of the woods with a stick. His mother warned, "Don't do that, there might be poison ivy." If we learn how to identify plants and animals that can be harmful,

then we can take appropriate precautions. This eliminates the fear, allowing us access to the world of nature that is both exciting and beautiful.

So, go ahead, take your family outside; it's good for you.

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

James Clayton



## Benefits of Enjoying Nature



- Outside activity burns calories.
- Studies indicate that children who play outside on a daily basis demonstrate increased creativity, better problem-solving skills, more focus, and better self-discipline.
- Visual exposure to settings with trees reduces stress within five minutes, as indicated by changes in blood pressure and muscle tension. In addition, patients who have a view of trees from their hospital window recover from surgery more quickly and require fewer painkillers.
- People with views of nature from their work environment are less frustrated, more patient, have greater enthusiasm for their job, and overall have a higher life satisfaction than those without views of nature.

# The Little Town that Could

—Victor residents work with DEC to fight pollution



By Dr. Joan Kennedy

Victor, NY is a small, picturesque community nestled in the gentle, rolling hills of northwest Ontario County. The town's 12,500 residents enjoy the charm of small-town living while being committed to the ongoing revitalization of their downtown business district. Most residents believe Victor is a great place to live, work, visit and do business.

Mike Annechino is one of those people. Down-to-earth and hard-working, Mike moved his family to an upscale Victor neighborhood in November 2004. To Mike, Victor appeared the perfect little town in which to live and raise his family. Indeed, there was no apparent reason to suggest otherwise.

However, in February 1990 the New York State Department of Health (DOH) was sampling small community water supplies

across New York State and discovered chemical contamination in the Modock Road Springs, one of Victor's drinking water sources. This was a surprise since contamination had not been found in earlier sampling. Working closely with DEC and the Village of Victor, DOH moved to protect the health of the residents. Alternative water supplies were provided to potentially affected homes, and DEC continued to search for the source of the contamination. By the late 1990s, DEC determined that in the 1960s or 1970s, chemicals were spilled or dumped at a nearby gravel pit and over time drained into the ground. Eventually these chemicals reached the water table and the springs that supplied water to local residents.

Before 2000, clean-up policy often allowed small amounts of some chemicals to be left at a site, as long as the community was protected against exposure. So, after several years of investigating and addressing the spill, residents and town officials considered it resolved and put the incident behind them. There was no reason to think that future problems would result from the spill. And like most other



Joan Kennedy

communities in a similar situation, the town didn't have guidelines in place for determining whether and how to approve residential construction on land where this type of chemical contamination is likely to have existed. It was not uncommon for residential tracts like Mike's neighborhood to be established on land that was originally thought to be affected, and was now considered cleaned up. In fact, safe reuse is an important goal of remediation.

However, in 2000, during an investigation of previously contaminated sites in Denver, Colorado, scientists discovered that even after a site was cleaned up and the water was safe, lingering fumes from some chemical spills could rise up through the soil and enter enclosed areas such as the basements of people's homes. This discovery was referred to as "vapor intrusion," and led the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and state environmental agencies like DEC to re-examine their environmental clean-up policies to consider the possible occurrence of vapor intrusion.

DEC moved quickly and changed their clean-up programs to include tests for vapor intrusion. In the process, DEC revisited more than 400 sites previously considered "cleaned up," including the Modock Road Springs/DLS Sand and Gravel, Inc. site in the town of Victor. So in early 2007, Victor residents received a letter indicating that DEC would be taking a closer look at the old site to see if vapor intrusion was a problem.

The letter drew immediate concern from many residents, especially given that they had been previously assured that the site had been cleaned up and they were safe. And as far as the best scientific knowledge of the 1990s showed, those beliefs were true.

For Mike, the letter came as a complete surprise. He remembers, "I



read the letter and saw that my house was definitely inside the area described as 'affected.' After I read the letter, I turned to my wife and told her, 'This is unbelievable.'" He continued, "I found out my family was at risk by an informational letter in the mailbox. The person who sold me my house never mentioned anything about water contamination and no one mentioned it in my neighborhood when I bought my house."

*"The key to the long-term success of the Victor community addressing this problem was the sense of partnership that developed as everybody worked together."*

Within days the local media had the story. The headline spilled across the front of the Sunday newspaper in bold type: "DANGER BELOW." The story described that dangerous chemical fumes left over from the old spill may be seeping into Victor homes located near the gravel pit. The following Monday, DEC offices were inundated with calls from concerned residents.

In response to the community's reaction, the town quickly held a public meeting to address concerns, answer

questions, and share information. Both DEC and DOH staff attended. Local residents packed the small town hall on a warm, spring evening, anxious for answers.

At the meeting, DEC explained vapor intrusion and the new technology that brought it to light in the Colorado investigation. Staff told worried residents that New York State was moving quickly to take a new look for any possible

vapor intrusion at previously cleaned-up sites across the state. The details, however, did little to quiet the rumors and concerns that were running rampant throughout the community. How could they embrace DEC's explanations now, after being given similar assurances years earlier? Moreover, the answers did not solve the more immediate concern: Were they presently safe in their homes?

The town board sprang into action to restore the community's confidence and address concerns. Working closely with

a panel of representatives from DEC and DOH, the town of Victor formed a voluntary citizen committee and approached Mike Annechino to head it. He had inspired trust from his neighbors during the public meeting as he asked the hard questions, and insisted on clear, accurate answers and information. At first Mike refused, but after thinking of his family's and community's well-being, he accepted.

The first goal of the committee was to ensure community residents' safety and respond to their fears. DEC tested 73 homes and installed six vapor removal systems (similar to radon removal systems) where testing showed vapor intrusion was a concern. District Senator Michael Nozzolio helped other homeowners in the study area who worried that they were at risk by obtaining funds to provide additional basement ventilation systems.

Mike Annechino then helped steer the citizen committee to develop a central location where people could get accurate information that explained the situation in an easy-to-understand way. This really helped to address homeowners' concerns and dispel rumors. He also kept abreast of emerging concerns



Excavating a test trench in the central part of the mine to try and locate the source of contamination.

and would sometimes go door-to-door to talk with neighbors, homeowners and business owners. Mike and the committee also encouraged monthly meetings between the Victor Town Board and DEC and DOH. In addition, the Victor town supervisor routinely posted updated articles and meeting notes on the town's website.

Next, working closely with DEC and DOH, the committee met regularly to conduct public information meetings in an open forum. DEC answered residents' questions, updated the community on the results of investigations, and shared information on upcoming technical work. Most importantly, the written communication for

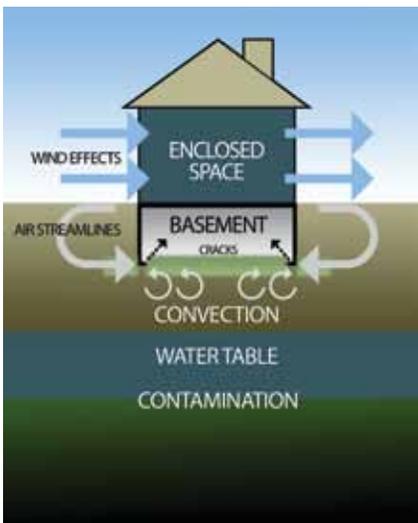
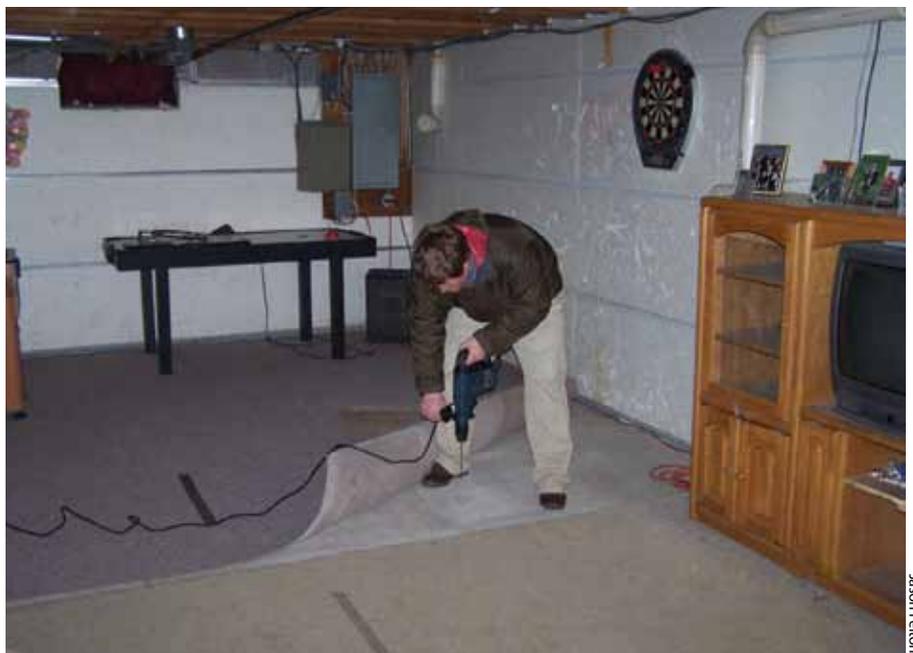


Diagram of vapor intrusion.



DEC contractor drilling a hole in the basement floor to determine if a depressurization system (used to alleviate vapor intrusion) is properly working.



Workers sample the soil and install a groundwater monitoring well near Modock Road Springs.

public meetings was put together collaboratively, Mike remembers. “We worked together on our information and messages.”

The committee met with DEC to build PowerPoint presentations and offer ways to present information to the public in a way that was easy to understand. Mike laughs as he recalls, “For example, we

told them that only engineers and scientists use terms like ‘operable unit’ and ‘permeable reactive barriers.’”

As the process evolved, residents saw that the citizen committee represented their interests and was a resource for providing answers to difficult questions. They also saw that DEC was responding directly to their

most important concerns, and residents found that they were, in fact, safe in their homes. The approach worked. “DEC was perceived by the community as really helping!” says Mike.

Jason Pelton, DEC’s project manager responsible for day-to-day operations during the cleanup in the community, agrees. He enjoyed the friendly greetings by residents as he stopped to buy coffee on his way to work. Mike thinks Jason’s willingness to talk to residents and answer questions is one reason why the Victor community has continued to enjoy prosperity and growth, including a fast growing subdivision in Mike’s neighborhood. During the effort, Jason felt like he was part of the community and now looks forward to opportunities to work with other communities in a similar way.

You won’t hear it from Mike Annechino, but in many people’s eyes, he was a big part of why this community pulled together and collaborated with DEC to ensure the health, safety and welfare of its residents. Looking back, Mike thinks out loud, “The key to the long-term success of the Victor community addressing this problem was the sense of partnership that developed as everybody worked together.” Mike believes this cooperative approach is one DEC can build on, and that it could serve well as a model for similar environmental investigations in the future.

An avid cyclist, **Dr. Joan Kennedy** is a citizen participation specialist in DEC’s Albany headquarters.



Drillers retrieve soil samples from an area north of the sand and gravel pit prior to installation of a groundwater monitoring well.



Hellbender

John Ozard

## Straying Sturgeon

This August, a dead lake sturgeon measuring just over four feet in length washed ashore near Oswego on Lake Ontario. Staff from the U.S. Geological Survey's Tunison Laboratory of Aquatic Sciences were working nearby, and examined the fish. They discovered that the sturgeon carried an internal identification tag which had been implanted in 2004 by scientists from Cornell University's Biological Field Station at Shackleton Point on Oneida Lake. The tag provided information about the fish, including the fact that it had probably hatched in May 1995 as part of a DEC lake sturgeon stocking program. The sturgeon came from eggs collected in Quebec and transported by DEC staff to the Oneida Lake Fish Culture Station in Constantia. DEC hatched the eggs and reared the sturgeon at Constantia, and then stocked them in several New York waters. This is the second tagged sturgeon known to have migrated from Oneida Lake to Lake Ontario—a distance of more than 50 miles, which includes seven canal locks. The cause of this sturgeon's death is unknown; though it can't have died of old age at only 16 years old, as sturgeon have been known to live for more than 100 years in the wild. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/26035.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/26035.html) to learn more about sturgeon.

lake sturgeon



## Headstarting Hellbenders

In October 2009, Buffalo Zoo reptile and amphibian keepers began working with DEC biologist Ken Roblee to give hellbenders a helping hand. Reaching more than two feet long, hellbenders are the largest aquatic salamanders found in North America. Because of their limited distribution in New York, declining population, and susceptibility to pollution and siltation, DEC lists hellbenders as a species of "special concern." Biologists collected about 700 hellbender eggs from the Allegheny watershed, and brought them to the zoo, where more than 600 successfully hatched. The hellbenders will be reared in captivity until summer 2013, when the juveniles will be tagged and released back into the Allegheny drainage. The hellbender rearing lab is open for public viewing inside the Buffalo Zoo Reptile House. Visit the zoo's website at [www.buffalozoo.org](http://www.buffalozoo.org) for more information, and visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7160.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7160.html) for more information on the eastern hellbender.

## Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease

DEC recently confirmed that approximately 100 white-tailed deer found dead in Clarkstown, Rockland County, were killed by the virus Epizootic Hemorrhagic Disease (EHD). EHD is transmitted by biting midges, also known as "no-see-ums" or "punkies." Outbreaks of the virus are most common in late summer and early fall. An infected deer may appear lame or dehydrated; symptoms include hemorrhages around the mouth and swelling of the head. EHD does not affect humans. Other animals are not at risk of infection from dead deer. As a general reminder: sightings of sick or dying deer should be reported to the nearest DEC Regional Office or to an Environmental Conservation Officer. Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/39767.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/39767.html) for more information about EHD.



red-tailed hawk

### Studious Red-Tail

Last May, internet observers noticed that an adult female red-tailed hawk nesting on a twelfth floor window ledge on a building at New York University had a swollen foot. Observers were concerned that a USFWS band on the bird's leg was causing the swelling. A team of DEC staff and raptor experts closely watched the bird's behavior and took a number of photographs. The bird appeared to be using her foot well to land on, bear weight, and manipulate food, and the band was not preventing blood flow from reaching the foot. Staff concluded that rather than risk injury to the hawk or its nestling in a capture attempt, they would instead continue to monitor the bird's health and take action only if necessary. Furthermore, images from the previous year demonstrated the swelling was a chronic condition, one which the bird had been successfully dealing with for some time. In June, the hatchling left the nest; in August, the adults visited for the last time. The hawk's foot was

still swollen, but she appeared to be doing fine. In late November, the hawk was videotaped in NYC. It now appears to have a fractured leg and its foot has become much worse. Be sure to visit the *New York Times* website for the latest information on this hawk.

### New e-Newsletter

*Leaflets* is a bi-monthly, online newsletter produced by DEC's Division of Lands and Forests, covering a wide range of topics from recreation opportunities on public land, forest health and updated regulations, to urban forestry workshops. The first two issues cover topics like reforestation projects, an expanded bike trail, giant hogweed, emerald ash borer and the state tree nursery. To learn how to subscribe, visit [www.dec.ny.gov/lands/74205.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/74205.html).

### Bird Seed Passes Test

Recent testing by the American Bird Conservancy (ABC), a not-for-profit organization that works to conserve native birds and their habitats, has

shown that commercially available bird seed is safe for wild birds. While the results may not be surprising, the tests for pesticide levels were the first of their kind, and resulted from sporadic bird seed contamination incidents. "We wanted to make sure that the isolated problem cases in the past were indeed behind us, and as far as we can tell, that is the case," said Dr. Moira McKernan, Director of ABC's Pesticides and Birds Program. ABC sampled some of the most commonly used seed, testing four different supply sources from across the country, including WalMart, Home Depot, Lowes and Target. Results showed the bird seed was either pesticide-free or contained pesticides at levels too low to threaten bird health. "The bird seed producers seem to be doing a good job of producing a safe product," Moira said. Be sure to visit [www.abc-birds.org](http://www.abc-birds.org) for more information about the study and about American Bird Conservancy.

Frank Knight





# LETTERS

Compiled by Eileen Stegemann and Jenna Kerwin

## Far-reaching Conservationist

We're always thrilled to hear where people find the Conservationist in their travels. Here are two recent stories. If you come across the magazine in a fun or interesting place, send us a photo. We'll try to include it in a future issue.

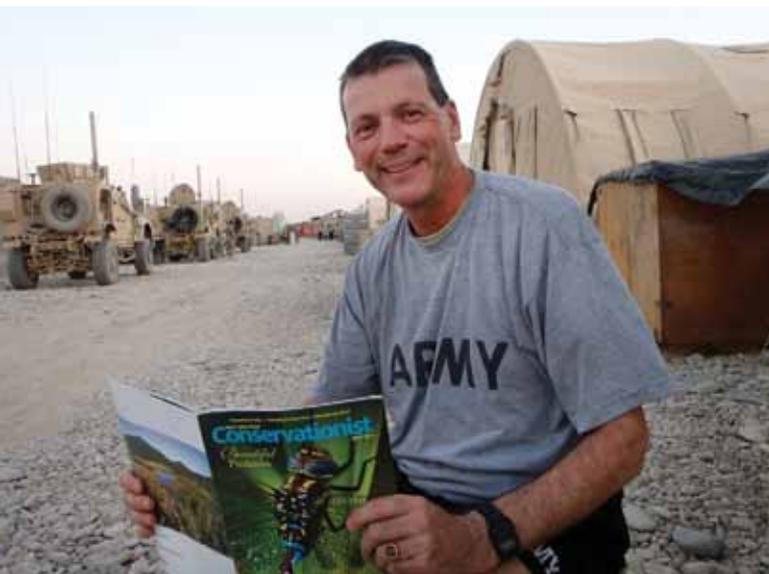


We took our dog on a hike up Black Mountain and found this inside a lean-to at Millman Pond.

Brian Frank  
Albany County

My brother-in-law, longtime ECO Myles Schillinger, sent me a Conservationist subscription during my two deployments to Iraq and now to Afghanistan. Each issue reminds me how much I miss the Adirondacks. After reading, I leave the magazines in our community center, and even though most of the soldiers on my base are from Colorado, each issue quickly disappears.

LTC Paul Brisson  
126th Forward Surgical Team  
FOB Todd  
Afghanistan



**Editor's note:** Why not follow Mr. Schillinger's lead and send a subscription to a service member you know? Call 1-800-678-6399 and ask about our special offer for service members.

## Nap Time



During my first time venturing to Owl Woods in Braddock Bay Park near Rochester, I saw this saw-whet owl. Since it is nocturnal, I didn't expect it to have its eyes open. It was still a treat to photograph!

Laurie Dirxx  
Ontario, Wayne County

## Mystery Stones

Years ago, I spent time at a family friend's place located near Kirby Point on Lake Champlain. While exploring a rocky shoreline in a nearby bay, we found these unusual stones with holes in them. Can you



explain what these are and how they came to be?

Fran Pavek  
Orange County

*They are "concretions," formed in glacial lake deposits when minerals concentrate around some kind of nucleus (often organic material), forming a harder material than the surrounding sediment. We always called them "clay dogs." These concretions are often round and formed somewhat like pearls, by adding layer after layer around the nucleus. I have found almost solid, thin layers of this hard limey clay with holes punched through. My guess on the holes is that as the clay dogs eroded, their centers weathered more quickly, leaving the wonderfully symmetrical holes. I've always loved collecting them!*

—Karin Verschoor, Geologist, DEC Lands and Forests

## ✉ LETTERS

### Time for a Swim



I saw this critter poking around the fish/frog ponds in my yard. I thought the raccoons were responsible for my missing fish, but after looking at these photos, maybe I was wrong. Is it a fisher?

John Yanzek  
West Shokan, Ulster County

*Actually, it's a mink. It's in the same family (Mustelidae) as the fisher, but mink are much smaller. Both have elongate bodies, but mink appear a little thinner for their size. Mink are equally at home in water or on land. They eat small mammals, birds, fish and amphibians, so you may be right about the raccoons not being the culprits who ate your frogs and fish.*  
—Conservationist staff

### Adirondack Lean-to

A few years back, we requested the floor plans for an original Adirondack lean-to, which we finally completed building. My dad, brother and I love the Adirondack Park. We used our own pines that we spent countless hours cutting and peeling; it was a labor of love. Thanks.

Jordan Baird  
Sayre, PA



*We love the photo—thanks for sharing. If others want to learn more about building an Adirondack lean-to, check out our December 2010 issue, available online at [www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/conservationist.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/conservationist.html).*

—Conservationist staff

*New York State Conservationist, December 2011*

### Ask the Forester

**Q:** When driving from Albany to Long Island, my travels took me along Rtes 90, 684, 84, 22 and the Taconic Parkway. I noticed the landscape is changing rather quickly; the evergreens and deciduous trees are disappearing in mounds of the invasive vine kudzu. Is there anything that can be done?

—Mary Ann Zwiebel



James Clayton

**A:** The landscape is indeed changing, but most of the vines you are seeing are probably not kudzu. Instead, you are probably seeing wild grape, Virginia creeper, poison ivy and Oriental bittersweet. Of these, bittersweet is the most invasive and problematic, being well-established in NY.

Roadsides are almost ideal environments for vines—disturbed forest edges with direct sunlight and physical structure (trees, fences, utility poles) on which to climb. But while you may see many invasives as you drive along, it's not all bad news, because if you look past this wall of foliage, you'll see thriving healthy forests.

As to what can be done, there's no easy answer. DEC is pursuing eradication of kudzu, but there are many more invasive plants, animals, and pathogens that are either too well-established or not destructive enough to justify the effort and expense. They then become the “new normal.” Individuals can help by choosing native species for gardens and landscaping, and buying local firewood. People can also clean aquatic weeds off their boats when moving between water bodies. If we all do our part, perhaps we can slow down the spread of invasives and the threat they pose to our native species.

—Jason Dehnam, Forest Health Specialist



### Write to us

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# Back Trails

## Perspectives on People and Nature

John Bulmer

### *Snowstorm* by Larry DeLand

I stepped out of the camp to get a couple armloads of firewood and a breath of fresh air. Clouds were racing wildly across a grey sky as the wind found its way through the spruce with a hissing sound. The hardwoods rattled and chafed with the approaching storm. A red fox hurried across the upper end of the clearing. I stomped the snow from my boots and went back inside. I thought to myself, "This is going to be some storm."

As I dropped the wood into the box, a deer mouse darted to a safer and quieter spot under the ice chest. I grinned as I thought of some of the company that I'd had at camp over the years. This little fella I didn't mind at all.



Eric Dresser

I busied myself bringing in more armloads of firewood; enough for several days. I hauled plenty of water from the well and split kindling for the fire.

A glance out the window showed a fine snow falling. The wind was blowing from the northeast with greater intensity. "Boy, am I hungry," I thought, and decided to cook some supper.

The old camp was 16' by 28' with two rooms. One room was for cooking and eating and playing cards. It had an old lumberjack wood cookstove, an enameled iron sink, a large oval table

and chairs, an icebox and assorted pots and pans. It was nicely lit with a gas light above the table and kerosene lamps.

The other room was for sleeping. There were two double bunks made of spruce logs, one on each side, an old easy chair and a large kerosene stove. There were three windows in each room, and various hunting scenes adorned the walls, probably from the 1930s. This camp had been my dad's and was now my most prized possession.

I sliced some raw potatoes and onions into an old cast iron skillet, shook on some salt and pepper, ladled on some bacon grease, and placed a lid on top. Now we were cooking. I say "we," as my little furry friend watched curiously from the corner. Some fried venison and fresh-perked coffee made this a meal fit for a king. I ate my fill of good food while enjoying the sounds of the storm.

After eating, I boiled water for dishes, wiped the table down and stepped outside for a quick trip to the outhouse. The path had at least eight inches of fresh snow, and where it had drifted, it was knee-deep. On my way back to the camp, the wind-driven snow stung my face like needles. Visibility was maybe five feet. As I entered the camp, wind and snow followed me in. I closed the door behind me and shivered.

My snowshoes needed mending, so I got busy working on them. A little pair of eyes watched my every move. Next, I tended the fire. I opened the draft, poked the coals and put in a couple chunks of well-seasoned beech. Time to relax; it

had been a long day. I shut the gas light off, left the kerosene lamp on, and sank into an old easy chair that smelled faintly of mothballs.

In the solitude, I could hear the friendly sound of the woodstove. The heavier wind gusts made the camp creak and I could hear snow blowing against the windowpanes. The clock gonged nine times and I was content to be right where I was. As I sat, my mind drifted like the snow outside. I thought of frozen streams covered with snow; of brook trout waiting for spring; of black flies and deer flies and hot, humid summers. I thought of hunting seasons come and gone, and of winter traplines enjoyed in my youth. I could see the faces of old-timers I have known, wrinkled by age and the elements, telling their tales of the woods. Stories of good times and stories of hard times.

The wind howled and the snow kept coming just outside the walls of the old camp. With my newfound "company" nestled in his corner, I fell asleep as the storm raged on.

**Larry DeLand** has been an avid outdoorsman all his life.

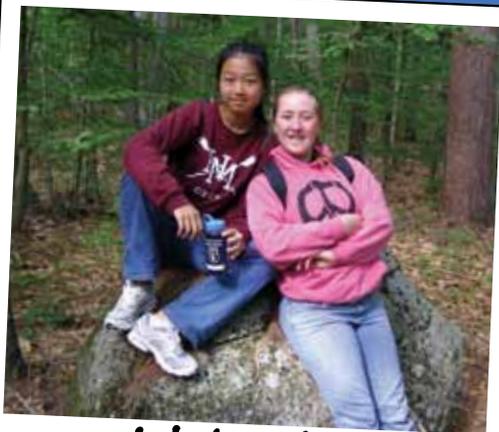


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Amanda Haddox

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