

TRIBUTARY

Spring 2007

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center

518-475-0291

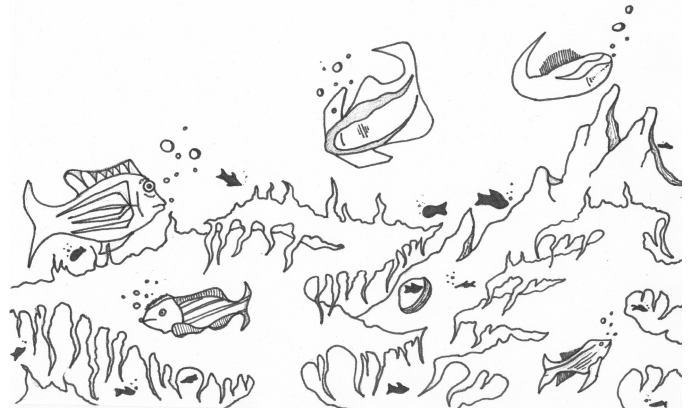
<http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/1835.html>

A Look Behind the Wall: *Animal Care at Five Rivers Center*

Five Rivers Environmental Educational Center is the home of many animals. Some of them roam throughout the Center's 446 acres, while others find their home inside the visitor center. The animals inside include "Jake" the eastern garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis sirtalis*), bluegill sunfish (*Lepomis macrochirus*), two snapping turtles (*Chelydra serpentina serpentina*), an American toad (*Bufo americanus*) and the popular "Aries," the barred owl (*Strix varia*).

These "wildlife ambassadors" are valuable educational resources that provide the public with first-hand opportunities to learn about animals they might not otherwise encounter. Observing and becoming familiar with the behavioral patterns of each animal is important because it helps determine if the animal is sick or on the verge of illness. Animal care is a major responsibility for the staff of Five Rivers. It is critical that the animals have clean shelter, water and a nutritious diet.

Snakes are amazing organisms that play important roles in maintaining order within ecosystems by preying on rodents and insects. The eastern garter snake is kept in a well-ventilated glass aquarium. The bedding inside the cage is a commercial reptile bedding that must be kept dry. Captive snakes require hiding places inside their habitat. The garter snake's living space has rocks and a wood stump that he uses for cover. Feeding frequency varies from several times a week to one meal per week. Jake's diet consists mostly of earthworms and fish. The snake's water dish is changed daily to provide clean water to drink and bathe in.



Maintenance of the community fish tanks is vital to the health and well-being of the Center's aquatic organisms. The community fish tanks are home to sunfish (pumpkinseed and bluegill), bullheads, dace, red-fin shiners, creek chubs, crayfish and snails.

The Center's aquaria need to be checked daily to make sure that the fishes' basic needs are fulfilled. To keep the fish healthy, they are given fish food daily as well as alternating days of color-enhancing pellets, shrimp pellets and bloodworms. We use dechlorinated water in the fish tanks because higher concentrations of chlorine can be toxic. Once a week, the walls of the fish tanks are scraped to prevent a buildup of algae and bacteria. The fish filters are cleaned once a month.

Turtles are ancient lifeforms whose fossil records can be traced back to the Triassic period, a time when dinosaurs roamed planet Earth. Five Rivers houses two small snapping turtles, each not much bigger than a ping pong ball. The snapping turtles' tank is filled with about five inches of water. Rocks of different shapes and sizes give the turtles places to climb and rest with their heads above the water.

The turtles eat two reptile sticks every other day. These are made from fish meal, wheat, yeast, shrimp meal and soybean meal, as well as many other vitamins and minerals. A couple of times a week they are fed turtle treats that provide them with additional protein. Turtle treats are high-protein snacks made of whole krill.

Toads make major contributions to the outdoors by controlling insect populations. Toads enjoy moist, diverse living places with detritus and enough space so that they can hop around. The Center's toad is a female, and she prefers some spots

within her living area that provide extra cover in which to hide. She also seems to prefer small spaces where she can burrow into the materials at the bottom of her living space.

The toad requires a damp living area, and needs to be misted with a water sprayer daily to keep her skin from drying out. The toad is fed a few times per week and food is rationed carefully to prevent her from overeating. A diverse diet is the best approach to feeding captive toads. A diet that consists of mealworms, crickets and other insects fulfills the toad's nutritional needs.

The Center's barred owl, Aries, has been a member of the Five Rivers family ever since he recovered from an accident that required the partial amputation of one of his wings. Unfortunately, Aries can never be released into the wild because he wouldn't be able to survive with one wing. Daily care for Aries includes providing clean water, maintaining his living area, and feeding. Aries is fed two dead laboratory mice daily. Two drops of a liquid vitamin-mineral supplement is added to the mice to provide nutrients that are lacking from a monotonous diet. Once a week, Aries is fed small minnows to add diversity to his diet.

Five Rivers Environmental Educational Center is dedicated to providing many valuable services to the community. These services include programs that are designed to educate the public about wildlife and their habitats, and to foster direct contact with natural resources. Caring for the Center's animals is an important aspect of Five Rivers' educational outreach program.

**--Michael J. Antinore
Naturalist Intern**

DIRECTOR'S NOTEBOOK

Leave No Child Inside

In his seminal book *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv argues that a lack of authentic contact with nature is creating among kids today a “nature-deficit disorder.” It’s not hard to believe.

To some, the outdoors can be downright scary. There’s coyotes. And ticks. And you’ll get skin cancer. And West Nile virus. All on the same trip. Some people are just not that interested in the outdoors. A Nature Conservancy poll found that kids would rather learn about National Parks on line than actually go to one. And there are many societal influences. Schools are reducing outdoor field trips, dropping outdoor recess. Many families can’t find enough unstructured time to spend together.

But spending time outdoors is critical to personal health and environmental health. Engaging in regular outdoor activity helps fight obesity and heart disease. A walk on the wild side is also great for mental health, and has been shown to relieve stress and even ADHD symptoms. Spending time outdoors also helps develop an awareness and appreciation of the natural world, and ultimately fosters stewardship values and responsible environmental behavior. The National Wildlife Federation recommends spending a “green hour” every week outdoors with your family. And so do we.

There is nothing more fundamental to our mission at Five Rivers than to put you directly in touch with the natural world, through a variety of staff-led encounters with real things, or simply by strolling a trail on your own. So get out. It’s good for your mind. It’s good for your body. And ultimately, it’s good for the environment.

--Craig D. Thompson

LOONS AT FIVE RIVERS?

Well, not usually. The *Breeding Bird Atlas of New York State* states that loons breed exclusively in the northern part of the state, in the Adirondacks and occasionally along the St. Lawrence. Loons undoubtedly were more widespread in previous centuries; in the 1800s they were actually hunted. Their numbers have greatly declined. The *Breeding Bird Atlas* states they are “...one of the most admired of New York State’s birds and are an object of intense study and concern.” They are found in spring and summer on lakes throughout the Adirondacks.

The Breeding Bird Atlas suggests that boaters and hikers “...can greatly assist New York’s loons by giving the birds a wide berth, especially when calls or distractions displayed by adults suggest the presence of a nearby nest or chick.” One of the greatest threats to loons is being chased or harassed by boaters.

Learn more about this elegant bird at an indoor program on May 12 at 2:00 PM. Amy Sauer, Program Manager of the Adirondack Cooperative Loon Program will present an indoor program on loons of the Adirondacks: their population, problems, solutions and successes.

NEW DEC WEB SITE

DEC’s website will soon be getting a whole new look. The redesign will make it easier to find information, regulations, and programs about New York State’s natural resources and environment. When the new site launches, the URL (website address) will change to www.dec.ny.gov, and the old URL will automatically send visitors there. We hope you will take some time to look at the new format and let us know what you think.

Five Rivers Environmental Education Center Spring Program Schedule 2007

Programs are free of charge unless otherwise noted. Participants should dress for the weather! We regret that we cannot accommodate organized youth groups at these programs. Please call to make special arrangements for a group.

We welcome those who have any type of physical challenge to all of our programs; please call ahead to let us know your needs.

For further information or for pre-registration, call Five Rivers at (518) 475-0291. In the event of severe weather, programs may be canceled. Please call the Center to confirm.

Sunday, April 1 MAPLE SUGAR OPEN HOUSE 1:30-3:30 PM

At our final Maple Sugar Open House of the season, watch sap drip from the tapped trees, and smell the syrup boiling in the evaporator. You'll learn to twirl a drill and pound a spile, and use your taste buds to sample maple syrup. Visit our exhibit "**Maple Sugaring Through Time**" featuring antique maple equipment, for a fascinating glimpse into the history of sugaring. Scout and other youth groups are welcome; call the Center to register a group. The program is an open house with activities ongoing from 1:30-3:30 PM. Maple products made by local vendors will be on sale in the Sugar Shack.

Saturday, April 7 *Watchable Wildlife:* BLUEBIRDS OF HAPPINESS 10:00 AM

John Burroughs noted that "...the bluebird is the first bit of color to cheer the northern landscape." Come join us on a field study of the eastern bluebird, New York's official state bird, as we celebrate the great Catskill naturalist's 170th birthday.

Tuesday, April 10 *Family Program:* SPRING 10:00 AM

Who's been here all winter, who's awakening, and who's coming back? During this family sharing program we will explore what the animals are doing this time of year. There will be a story sharing and a walk, followed by refreshments. Please call to pre-register by April 8.

Saturday, April 14 NEW YORK'S BEAVER 2:00 PM

Come join us and learn about New York's largest rodent. A brief indoor presentation on the history, life and behavior of this fascinating creature will be followed by an outdoor walk to look at some of the many signs of this industrious animal.

Special Earth Day Program

Saturday, April 21 ANIMAL CARE: BEHIND THE WALL 2:00 PM

Would you like to know more about the live animals we keep for educational purposes? Come celebrate **Earth Day** with us on this behind-the-scenes tour of our tanks and cages as we discuss the educational applications and proper stewardship of our wildlife ambassadors. This family-oriented presentation will be a great opportunity to learn first-hand about the natural history of some of New York's native fish, snakes, turtles, toads, and, of course, Aries the barred owl. You may even get to help us feed one of the animals from behind the wall.

Friday, April 27

SPRING PEEPER WALK

7:00 PM

Peepers may be the smallest of frogs, but they are likely to be the noisiest creature we encounter on this outdoor exploration. This program will continue our “Frogwatch” monitoring initiative, a nationwide citizen science project sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation. Come dressed for muddy trails and chilly air.



Saturday, April 28

VINES THAT TWINE

2:00 PM

We’ll explore the woods and meadow in search of plants that use other plants to hold themselves up. Native vines include the beautiful Virginia creeper, the tasty wild grape and poison ivy, which are of immense benefit to wildlife. Unwelcome invaders include the non-native Oriental bittersweet, which can strangle trees.

THE EARLY BIRDER

Walks are held on Thursday mornings: **May 3, 10, 17, 24.**

The early birder gets the bagels! Plus some great birding in Five Rivers' woods, fields, and wetlands.

Join us at 7:00 AM for refreshments and watching birds at the feeder. The outdoor walk begins at 7:30 AM. Beginners are always welcome! Bring binoculars and bird identification guides if you have them—we have some to lend.

Saturday, May 5

Cheep Thrills: BIRDING BY EAR

9:00 AM

In May, all nature comes alive with song. Come join us on an auditory tour of the grounds as we engage in “sound science” at the height of the annual spring bird migration.

Saturday, May 5 *How To Do It:* LANDSCAPING FOR WILDLIFE 2:00 PM

Want to get more catbirds and cowbirds in your dogwoods? Early May is a great time to learn the cardinal rules of enhancing the wildlife value of your yard. Join us for an indoor/outdoor discussion of site assessment, materials selection and arrangement.

Saturday, May 12 LOONS OF THE ADIRONDACKS 2:00 PM

Once you have heard the eerie, haunting call of the loon, you will never forget that sound. Come learn more about the natural history of one of the most beloved birds of our state as Amy Sauer of the Adirondack Cooperative Loon Program presents an indoor program on loons of the Adirondacks: their population, problems, solutions, and successes.

Saturday, May 19 SNAKES OF NEW YORK 2:00 PM

Snakes can slither along the ground and can also send slithers up the backs of some people! Come and join us to learn more about this fascinating (and not scary) animal. We will have live specimens of as many of the New York State snakes as possible, including the three venomous ones (kept in locked boxes!) Now is your chance to see a snake up close and personal.

Saturday May 26 FLOWERS OF MAY 2:00 PM

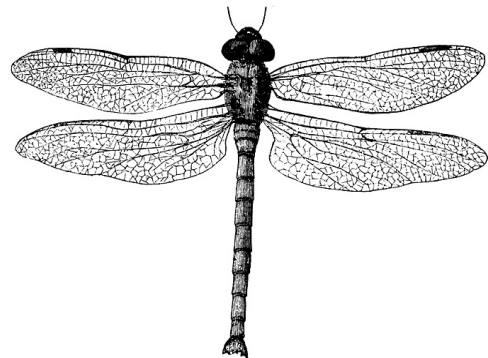
Learn some basic flower identification skills and enjoy the beauty of late spring blooms. The forest flowers are fading and the field flowers are just beginning their summer season.

Saturday, June 2 WETLANDS WALK 2:00 PM

Wetlands are among our most diverse ecosystems, and vital to humans in ways you may not have realized. On this outdoor survey, we will explore some of Five Rivers' wetlands and discuss the common plants and animals associated with them. Come dressed for wet feet.

Saturday, June 9 DRAGONS AND DAMSELS 2:00 PM

Dragonflies used to be something people feared and avoided. They have recently taken on a new status and, along with birds, flowers and butterflies, are something for which nature buffs keep life lists. You'll be amazed at the variety of both dragonflies and damselflies here at Five Rivers. Join us to census our population, and we may hook you onto a new environmental pursuit.



Friday, June 15 FROGWATCH IN JUNE 7:00 PM

Join us on a walk to look and listen for amphibians. This program will continue our "Frogwatch" monitoring initiative, a nationwide citizen science project sponsored by the National Wildlife Federation. No nets, please.

Special Program for Homeschool Families

Monday, June 11

10:00 AM

STREAM STUDY FOR HOMESCHOOLERS

This parent-and-child study program is for homeschool families that want to explore the fascinating world of stream life. Material will be presented in such a way that parents will be able to take what they need to present to their individual children at each specific level of development. Participants will wade in the water and collect specimens to examine and release. Other topics include microhabitats within the stream, stream flow and animal life, and inter-relationships between shore and water animals. Please call to register by June 8.

Saturday, June 16 HALL OF FAME INDUCTION AND RECEPTION 2:00 PM

DEC's Delmar facility has contributed mightily to America's conservation movement, and our proud legacy is revered far and wide. Join us on this, the 35th birthday of Five Rivers, for our 4th Hall of Fame Induction Ceremony, as we celebrate the lifetime achievements of Delmar staffers and site-related personnel who made a difference. This year's slate of inductees will be announced in late March.

Thursday, June 21 FLOWERS OF MID-SUMMER'S EVE 7:00 PM

Longest day, shortest night: just the recipe for folklore and myth. Many of our June-blooming flowers came from Europe endowed with a rich tradition of medicine, culinary use, superstition and magic. On this middle-of-the-year walk we'll explore the secrets of our most common plants.

Saturday, June 23 CLIMATE CHANGE: WHAT'S THE SCOOP? 2:00 PM

In this indoor presentation, we will discuss what climate change is and study some of its known causes. This discussion will explore some of the potential impacts of increased global warming as well as include information on some promising new technologies being developed to combat this problem. We will also talk about what you can do to help.

Saturday, June 30 TREES BY THEIR LEAVES 2:00 PM

The leaves are fully opened, and they're a great way to learn about trees. We'll study basic identification, and discuss the many uses of trees for people and wildlife.

Saturday, July 7 *Family Fun:* 10th ANNUAL BUTTERFLY COUNT 2:00 PM

What's red, white and blue and flutters in the wind? Dang, there goes another one! Whatever it is, they're flying all over the grounds. Join us for a close-up look at common butterflies of the Capital District as we continue our annual catch-and-release census. Nets or binoculars are welcome. Please call to register by July 3.