

Gear Junkie | Walkway Over the Hudson | Outdoors Women

NEW YORK STATE
Conservationist

DECEMBER 2009

CLASH
of the **TALONS**



Night
Lights



Dear Reader,

Winter has arrived, bringing an amazing range of outdoor recreational opportunities to enjoy across New York State. Whether it's snowshoeing, skiing, birdfeeding or a quiet stroll on a snowy morning, New York winters offer some of the best outdoor experiences around.

If you're interested in getting outside this winter, DEC's Environmental Education Centers are wonderful places to explore New York's natural world. Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, near Albany, offers programs in January and February devoted to celebrating our feathered friends. On January 9th, Rogers Environmental Education Center, in Sherburne, Chenango County, hosts its annual festival celebrating the winter season. You can find out more about activities at any of DEC's environmental education centers, including upcoming events and directions, on our website at www.dec.ny.gov/education/74.html.

No matter the season, going outside is a great way to help children develop a lifelong interest in nature. A great way to connect a young person to the outdoors is a week-long stay at one of DEC's four residential environmental education camps during the summer, where boys and girls aged 12 to 17 can learn first-hand about the state's natural resources and enjoy fishing, hunting, canoeing, hiking and camping. At just \$325 per camper, it makes it a great holiday gift! To find out more about DEC Summer Camps, go to www.dec.ny.gov/education/29.html.

Wherever your paths lead you this winter, I wish you and your family all the best. Have a safe and happy holiday season.

Sincerely,

Commissioner Pete Grannis

David Paterson, Governor of New York State

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Kelly Stang

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FIGHT *OR*
FLIGHT



Photos by John Mattera

Text by Dave Nelson

 nature, aggressive interactions can occur between different predator species. Such interactions are often about who rules the territory, and who controls the bounty it provides. Sometimes it's about nesting habitat; few things raise the level of behavioral responses above that of a mother protecting her young. When food is involved, animals' instincts are to fiercely defend their prey, for in so doing, they might live to see another day.

While these interactions are fairly common, they are infrequently witnessed by humans. Capturing such a moment with a camera is rarer still. Occasionally, however, everything comes together, and a photographer finds himself in close proximity to two predators entirely focused on each other.

In December 2008, off-duty Bureau of Environmental Criminal Investigations (BECI) Lieutenant John Mattera was photographing a snowy owl—a fairly uncommon visitor—at Jones Beach on Long Island when the unexpected happened. Unbeknownst to Mattera, a peregrine falcon was a few hundred yards

away on the beach, guarding the carcass of a ring-billed gull it had killed. To the falcon, the owl was an unwelcome competition for its hard-earned meal, and so when the unknowing owl flew from the dunes to the beach, the falcon had had enough, and attacked. These photos show the interaction that ensued.





A falcon will use a combination of speed, surprise and its sharp talons to deliver a serious blow to unsuspecting prey or a competitor. A snowy owl, however, has some pretty significant weaponry of its own. By rolling onto its back in flight, the owl met the business end of the falcon in a move ornithologists call “presenting talons.” This went on repeatedly, until the owl eventually tired of the continued harassment and left the area.

At that point, the falcon returned to the beach and feasted on the gull, leaving only feathers and bones (see page 6). The following day, Mattera saw the owl again, apparently none the worse for wear.

A Lieutenant in DEC’s BECI for many years, **John Mattera** retired this past July. He is an avid photographer, and used a Nikon D3 with a 600-mm lens and a 1.4X converter to film this encounter.

Dave Nelson is editor of *Conservationist*.

Snowy Owl



Large owls with bright yellow eyes, snowy owls are common in the arctic tundra, but sometimes visit New York in winter. Their mottled white coloration is perfect camouflage for their arctic breeding grounds. Snowys feed primarily on lemmings and small rodents, and will

take larger prey up to the size of a Canada goose when necessary. Snowys are also known to kill young peregrines on their nesting grounds. In turn, adult peregrines will kill snowys.

Peregrine Falcon



Crow-sized peregrine falcons are fierce predators, and can attain air speeds of more than 200 mph when diving (or “stooping”) on prey from above. Peregrines are also known as “duck hawks,” and feed primarily on birds, which they capture in flight. Once extirpated from New York, a successful restoration program begun in the

mid 1970s has returned the peregrine as a breeder to many Hudson River bridges and buildings in major cities throughout the state. Check out DEC’s website at www.dec.ny.gov/animals/56121.html for more information about peregrines, including webcams that document nesting peregrines from early spring to early summer.

Bunchberry

Cornus canadensis

By Barbara Nuffer

Frank Knight

Bunchberry, *Cornus canadensis*, is a native plant that grows in the cool forests of the mountains of New York State. It is a close relative of the flowering dogwood tree (a popular home landscaping plant), because it has the same foliage and flowers. However, bunchberry only grows to six inches tall.

The attractive white flowers of the bunchberry appear in May and June, surrounded by the shiny, green leaves of the plant. Each “flower” is actually made up of four white petal-like bracts, with a center of many true flowers. The flowers of the bunchberry are self-sterile and depend on pollinating insects for fertilization. When an insect lands on the central portion of the flower, pollen is propelled explosively onto the insect’s body.

Each “true” flower produces a berry-like drupe, resulting in a cluster of attractive, bright red fruit. A drupe is a type of fruit that produces one hard seed, which is enclosed in a stony pit, such as an olive. The name bunchberry derives from the plant’s “bunches” of red fruit.

Other common names for bunchberry are ground dogwood and dwarf dogwood, because of the plant’s short stature. To thrive, it requires the shade of conifer trees and cool, acidic soil. The acidity comes from fallen conifer needles that decompose in the soil surrounding the plants. Their location in the mountains provides the cool, below 65-degree soil condition they require.

Each flower produces a berry-like drupe, resulting in a cluster of attractive, bright red fruit.

Many wildlife species enjoy the edible fruits of the bunchberry, as other names for the plant, including

bearberry and squirrelberry, confirm. Bears return year after year to munch on colonies of bunchberries in the fall. But the main agent of dispersal of the seeds is migrating fall birds, who drop them after eating the fleshy fruits.

Each seed takes two to three years to germinate, but the plant can also spread by rhizomes, which are horizontal stems growing underground.

Bunchberry was used by Native Americans as a cold and colic remedy. In New England the plant was known as pudding berry because the fruits were used to thicken plum puddings.

On a snowless day in early winter, take a hike on a trail in the Adirondack or Catskill mountains and gaze at the bronze-colored foliage and bunches of red fruits of the ground-hugging bunchberry. Be sure to return again in the spring to enjoy the plant’s bright-white flowers.

Barbara Nuffer works in DEC’s Division of Air Resources in Albany.



Barbara Nuffer

Adrenaline Rush

I caught up—sort-of—with outdoor enthusiast and nationally syndicated columnist Stephen Regenold, a.k.a. “The Gear Junkie,” this summer. While I was enjoying a relaxing camping and hiking vacation with my family in upstate New York, Regenold, whose column focuses on reviews of outdoor technical gear, was exploring the wilds of who-knows-

where, and fittingly (for the subject of this article) we used electronic gizmos to swap stories and develop this interview. And truth be told, while I play a mean left defense in old men’s ice hockey, I couldn’t catch up with the much younger, and much more fit Regenold, on a bet.

—Dave Nelson



Regenold in June 2009 backpacking the Devil’s Path in the Catskills.

© Stephen Regenold



Regenold on the summit of Mount Rainier, Washington.

Conservationist: Tell me about your youth: where did you grow up? Did you take apart the lawnmower, or the family Buick, in the backyard?

GJ: I grew up near Minneapolis; I was practically born on skis and in a canoe. My family took me camping from six months of age through high adventure with Dad as a teenager. We trained for a year and climbed Devils Tower, a 1,000-foot monolith in Wyoming, when I was 17.

My family's business is locksmithing. I did it in college; I enjoyed tinkering. We didn't have a lot of money, but we made do with Army Surplus gear and even some homemade items. Once, we fashioned an ad hoc ice axe for winter climbing out of a garden tool. Bad idea! It was those early, bad formative gear moments that converted me into a "junkie" and a connoisseur of the very best gear around.

Conservationist: How did you get your start reviewing gear and writing?

GJ: In college I created a small climbing magazine called *Vertical Jones*. The local paper in Minneapolis wrote a story about me and a couple of the editors. That same writer at the paper later started a weekly outdoors section, and I offered to do gear reviews

for it. *Gear Junkie* was born, and over a few years it blossomed into a nationally-syndicated column and www.gearjunkie.com.

Conservationist: Were you an excellent writer in college?

GJ: Probably a B+ student. I did have the motivation to start that 'zine, however. That's the ball that got my career rolling.

Conservationist: Your job—testing and reviewing gear—sounds awesome. Is it all fun and games?

GJ: I'm at a desk most days. I work hard, and I play hard. I travel about once a month. But I run, bike, paddle, etc., all the time in and around my hometown. And I do about 20 competitive running, orienteering and adventure races per year to stay in shape, including marathons and ultra events.

Conservationist: Testing gear is obviously your passion. But is testing your body physically as much a part of the challenge?

GJ: Right. I am more about pushing my body and mind to the utter limit. Gear just helps me get there, or makes me faster! I had an epiphany a couple years ago that if I eat and hydrate right, pace myself, and stay mentally aggressive and positive, I can keep going for hours and

hours and hours. I have gone straight through on races without sleep for more than 48 hours. Pushing hard for 48 hours and more than 100 miles on foot and bike—it is crazy. It expands your mind.

Conservationist: I'm guessing your wife also enjoys outdoor adventures.

GJ: When we dated, she did things like climb 5.10 rock routes. (*Editor's note: these are very difficult, technical climbs.*) She got me into marathons. She is still active and outdoorsy, but usually now with a kid on her hip.

Conservationist: How has having children changed your work?

GJ: My wife and I bring the kids along everywhere. They have camped since they were four months old, including road trips through Scandinavia and backpacking trips. We try not to let them slow us down too much. And they love the pace! Naturally, my interest in kid-based gear has grown along with that.

Conservationist: Did I see a review of a (gasp) family tent in your column?

GJ: I'm a big family guy. We do camping weekends where my siblings and their families, and my parents, reserve sites next to each other. It's a two-day festival of campfires and little-kid mayhem with cousins, nieces, nephews, and dogs.



Testing a Speedo competitive swim suit at Cedar Lake in Minneapolis.

Conservationist: You've created your own niche. Do you see yourself doing this at age 40? At 50?

GJ: At 40 or 50, for sure; beyond that, who knows? I'm 32 years old. But I've always seen myself as someone who will take up long-distance bike vagabonding in my old age.

Conservationist: Do you see trends in gear development? Miniaturization? Comfort?

GJ: A continuation of keeping things lightweight, streamlined and simple to use. Some of the biggest recent technological advances are in clothing and outerwear. There is an uninterrupted march toward the perfect wicking base layer and waterproof-breathable shells that actually work. Another thing: the iPhone and Google Maps are getting more people interested and familiar with street maps, topo maps, and satellite views. As a map nerd myself, I think this is a good trend.

Conservationist: What are your favorite outdoor activities?

GJ: Orienteering is the best sport on the planet. It combines all-out aerobic capacity (running), with on-the-move map reading and decision making, with unfettered backwoods exploration (bushwhacking). Love it! Adventure racing is a close second. And my other longtime favorites are cycling (any type), skiing (backcountry, alpine, and cross-country), and rock climbing. Plus, I am addicted to running, and run three or four times a week.

Conservationist: What is your favorite outdoor spot in New York and why is it so?

GJ: Last summer, I backpacked the Devil's Path, a 25-mile trail through the Catskills. Quite an epic hike, actually. We did it over two days, including one 17-mile day in which we climbed four peaks. You can read about it in the *New York Times*, September 25, 2009 edition.

Conservationist: Do you have a funny story or adventure you'd like to share?

GJ: My worst incident—and this is an episode that could have killed me—was about 10 years ago when I was testing an emergency rappelling system for *Vertical Jones* magazine. The rappelling product, which included a fanny pack stuffed with 4mm cord and a special rappel device, was made for emergency situations when you needed to abseil a cliff but did not want to have to bring along a regular climbing rope. Anyway, I didn't trust the setup at all, and so when testing it on a 100-foot sheer cliff I had a climbing partner back me up with another rope. I rappelled, and the little cord did fine, but while



Regenold navigating a one-person “pack raft” through a set of rapids on the Arkansas River, Colorado.

wrapping it up at the bottom I noticed that the cord was sliced almost all the way through near one end. Very bad. Not sure if it came like that from the company or if something on the cliff face cut it, but I was glad I had that backup line as my life hung literally by a thread.

Conservationist: There is a lot of focus these days on nature-deficit disorder. Do your gear reviews help people experience the outdoors?

GJ: I hope so. My altruistic motive is to get people excited, outside, and having (active) fun.

Conservationist: I’m almost afraid to ask. What’s on your “to-do” list?

GJ: In February, I’ll be participating in the Patagonian Expedition Race in Chile’s Tierra del Fuego at the tip of the South American Continent. In April, I’ll join a team from Expedition Champion on a week-long uphill trek to Base Camp on Mount Everest—at 17,700 feet. Since founding *Gear Junkie* in 2002, I have strived to push my personal limits on mountaineering trips, marathons, multi-day ultra races, and other wilderness excursions around the globe. But I’ve never been to Nepal. You could say I’m looking forward to it.

Conservationist Editor **Dave Nelson** enjoys the wilds of New York in a slightly less aggressive way than the *Gear Junkie*.

Stephen Regenold writes the nationally syndicated column, the *Gear Junkie*. His website, www.gearjunkie.com includes reviews of all kinds of outdoor technical gear, from camping and hiking equipment to technical rock-climbing gear, bicycles and helmet cameras.

Regenold on the summit of Alta Peak in Sequoia National Park. Winter ascent, February, 2009.



© Stephen Regenold

NEWVIEW TEAM



By John J. Rashak

Walkway Over the Hudson transforms an old railway bridge into a spectacular promenade over New York's iconic river.

Just a mile upriver of the Mid-Hudson Bridge, the Walkway Over the Hudson gives new life to the 120-year-old steel truss Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge, which was the first bridge over the Hudson between New York City and Albany. At 6,767 feet long and 212 feet high, this is a big bridge—once the longest in the world. Completed in 1888, a mere five years after the Brooklyn Bridge, it was used as a gateway to the west for rail passengers from New England, World War II troops, and goods, although its importance for passenger transport began to diminish in 1917 with the completion of New York City's Hell's Gate Bridge.

A devastating fire in 1974 led to the bridge's early retirement. The railroad owners decided the cost of repairing the 700-foot section of charred railroad ties and warped rails was too great. Ideas for new uses for the bridge flourished, like using the bridge for a bungee-jumping business, or as a riverbank-to-riverbank shopping center. Then, a not-for-profit group called Walkway Over the Hudson, which owns the bridge, came up with the idea to transform it into the world's longest elevated public park in time for the Quadricentennial Celebration of Henry Hudson's exploration of the river that flows both ways.

After years of planning and fundraising—including a thorough eight-week inspection to ensure that the bridge was structurally sound—construction to transform it into a pedestrian walkway began in earnest in June 2008. A little over a year later, Governor David A. Paterson opened the Walkway Over the Hudson as the state's newest park on October 3, 2009, making it the longest pedestrian bridge in the world.

The newly opened Walkway affords visitors magnificent views of the Hudson River and surroundings, and will eventually link 27 miles of rail trails on both sides of the river—connecting Hopewell Junction in Dutchess County with New Paltz in Ulster County. With a pedestrian deck 25 feet wide and three 35-foot-wide viewing platforms, visitors can stroll, jog, or bike atop the spectacular promenade, or simply gaze out at the iconic river that has stirred our imagination since Henry Hudson first laid eyes on it back in 1609.

The grand opening of the Walkway drew thousands of visitors, and “the park in the sky” has quickly become a must-see destination for local residents and tourists alike, bringing eco-tourism dollars into the Hudson Valley and serving as a catalyst for a stronger economic and environmental future for the region.

QUADRICENTENNIAL LEGACY

Walkway over the Hudson is just one of three Quadricentennial “legacy” projects. Off the southern tip of Manhattan, restoration of the Governor's Island perimeter promenade will afford unparalleled views of the Statue of Liberty, New York Harbor and the Manhattan skyline.

On Lake Champlain, the state conducted a full restoration of the historic Crown Point Lighthouse, including an

original Rodin sculpture. Now, the light's beacon once again shines over the ruins of two nearby forts—Crown Point and St. Frederic—that symbolize the region's English and French heritage. Together, these projects symbolize New York's commitment to celebrate its rich history of discovery, innovation and economic prosperity.





Susan Shafer

SUPPORTERS

An amazing combination of public and private organizations was involved in transforming the Poughkeepsie-Highland Railroad Bridge into the Walkway Over the Hudson. In 1992, a core group of dedicated volunteers formed Walkway Over the Hudson as a not-for-profit organization dedicated to preserving the landmark bridge. The group was instrumental in garnering the support of a wide group of organizations and individuals to support the effort, including the State of New York, Walkway Over the Hudson, The Dyson Foundation, Scenic Hudson, the people of the Hudson Valley, and several elected officials of the region. Working together, these supporters raised funds, conducted research, and did public outreach that ultimately culminated in the completion of this one-of-a-kind construction project in just 16 months. For more information, visit www.walkway.org/.



Susan Shaler

Note: Walkway Over the Hudson is managed by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. While the walkway is generally open from 7 a.m. until sunset, the hours of operation may vary, so be sure to check out www.nysparks.com/parks before heading out.

John J. Rashak is an avid cyclist who lives in the Hudson River Valley.



Susan Shaler

WILD WOMEN

By Bernadette LaManna
photos by Kelly Stang and Mary Bailey



 ever gotten frostbite, been lost in the woods, or eaten a live grub? These are some of the questions asked of the participants in the Becoming an Outdoors-Woman (BOW) program, sponsored by

the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). BOW teaches women who have little or no outdoor experience some of the skills necessary for safe and rewarding outdoor pursuits.

This is my second time attending BOW, and I'm taking classes in archery, canoeing, GPS and survival at a wonderful facility on Lake George. My younger sister, who has attended several more BOW workshops than I, is accompanying me this time. I joke that the biggest challenge we'll face is to avoid getting on each other's nerves. (Fortunately, we're not in any of the same classes.)

Before getting down to business, we assemble for lunch at communal tables. This is difficult for me; I'm not shy, but I have a hard time making small talk with strangers. In this case, my sister's gift of gab, which sometimes drives me crazy, is a blessing. BOW attendees range in age from young adults to what I like to call us "mature" individuals, and everyone's outdoorsiness varies. I'm a little self-conscious about my polished nails ("Nantucket Mist"), but relieved as others confess to bringing irons and hair dryers.

After lunch, my first class is Beginning Archery. Our instructors, Al and Cora, teach us about archery's history and terminology and how bows and arrows are constructed. They demonstrate how to use the equipment and talk about various kinds of competitions. We even "make" our own arrows, which we get to keep—talk about an authentic souvenir!

Interesting as all this is, I'm wondering when we are going to get started because time is running out. I can't wait to get my hands on one of those snazzy compound bows or a graceful recurve bow.

Finally, we head outdoors, and I get to use a bright-yellow compound bow I've been eyeing. Trembling from the strain, I try desperately to maintain good form—right arm fully extended and hand lightly gripping the bow, left elbow in line with my ear and three fingertips pulling the bowstring taut. I release the arrow. Ouch, that string scraping my fingertips hurts, but my pain quickly turns to pleasure as the arrow hits home. Well, not exactly home, but at least it made it to the neighborhood—that is, the straw surrounding the actual target.

Time and again, I aim and fire, my shots gradually and consistently getting closer to the target. Hey, this is fun! It's also tiring. Approximately 90 minutes of practice later, I wonder whether my shoulders and fingers will function the next day. I'm weary, but happy, and head off for a brief rest before dinner.

After eating, my sister and I check out raffle items and products for sale in the cabin where everyone gathers for the evening's activities. Kelly Stang, lead coordinator for BOW, officially welcomes the crowd and talks about BOW's history, instructors, sponsors and students, past and present. Kelly—a wildlife biologist for DEC—also awards prizes for a variety of things and encourages the audience to buy raffle tickets, especially for a hot-pink kayak, which is a real eye-catcher.

At 8:00 p.m., three different programs are offered, one of which is about white nose syndrome in bats. The presenter, a petite blonde, looks to be about 12 years old, and



(opposite page) BOW classes teach women of all ages a variety of tips, techniques and skills necessary for safe and enjoyable outdoor experiences. Participants in the Survival Skills course learn how to build a makeshift shelter, like the one pictured here.

(Bottom right) Classes like Beginning Archery are not only educational, they're fun. Participants practice shooting, and also make their own arrows to keep!

we're stunned to learn she's a neuroscientist. Following her impressive slideshow, I head to bed.

Saturday morning dawns all too soon, and I'm a little groggy. A couple of cups of black coffee set me straight. My shoulders and fingertips have recovered, and Beginning Canoeing beckons. The sun is dazzling in a brilliant blue sky, and the lake is clear enough to see several feet down. I'm raring to go again, but first, our instructor, Meg, has a few things to say about the rudiments of canoeing. She also tells some stories, including one about a burly male friend who could be heard across the water "screaming like a little girl" when he spotted a spider in his canoe. We all chuckle, though a few shudder at the thought.

In addition to clip-on flashlights that Meg gives each of us to keep, she has bags full of appropriate clothing (i.e., not cotton), as well as footwear and sunglasses to loan to anybody who forgot theirs, and she provides snacks and beverages too. My canoeing partner, Carol, and I choose life vests and a couple of kneeling pads. If I didn't know better, I'd think we were going to reenact the Lewis and Clark expedition.

As advised, Carol and I bang loudly on our overturned canoe to rout out any critters taking shelter underneath. Then we turn it right side up, carry it to the side of the dock and lower it into the water. We manage to get into the canoe without mishap, a promising start.

After semi-synchronizing our paddling, we make our way around another dock to the inlet where we've been told to congregate. We're sharing the lake with a group of kayakers, their colorful vessels eclipsed only by the lead kayaker's pink boa. No worries about losing track of her!

Meg wants us to switch places with our partners so that each of us can try paddling both fore and aft. Canoeing alone, she pulls up parallel to the shore and adroitly steps out of her craft. We're closest to her and decide to follow suit. After all, how difficult can it be? With one foot still in the bow, I plant my other foot firmly on the sand, intending to steady the canoe so that Carol can get out too. But my plan quickly goes awry.

The canoe begins to drift ever so slowly away from shore, and the distance between my feet is becoming uncomfortably wide. I try to catapult sideways back into the boat, but the foot that's on shore doesn't make

"Why are you eating so fast?" asks my sister. I tell her that I don't want to be late for my next class, which I'm anxious to begin. She, on the other hand, confesses to having second thoughts about hers, which is Kayaking.



Beginning Canoeing may seem intimidating to some, but participants (like the author, pictured here, left) quickly learn that with focus and attention, canoeing is an easy and enjoyable way to experience the outdoors.



During the popular Beginning Shotgun course, women are given a hands-on opportunity to learn how to safely handle and fire a shotgun.

it and winds up in the lake instead. The water's surprisingly tepid, but that's little consolation. Where did we go wrong? As it turns out, we should be perpendicular to the shore so that I can jump out and then pull the canoe in farther for Carol's exit. Foot wet and lesson learned, we switch places, re-enter the water, try different paddling techniques and admire the view.

It's early autumn in the Adirondacks, and the foliage is tinged with a little color, all the more vivid against a sapphire sky. The air has the barest hint of nippiness, and despite the number of people on the water, there's little noise. Wet foot aside, I could die happy here and now. All too soon, we return to the dock and replace our canoes and other borrowed equipment before heading off to lunch.

"Why are you eating so fast?" asks my sister. I tell her that I don't want to be late for my next class, which I'm anxious to begin. She, on the other hand, confesses to having second thoughts about hers, which is Kayaking. I don't understand why she's nervous; I personally would have no misgivings under the watchful eye of an instructor. Besides, if it doesn't go well, my sister's a good swimmer, so what's the problem? Inexplicably, she also signed up to take Next Step Kayaking where she'll learn how to roll the boat. She can't remember why, but seems resigned to her fate. She's nuts. Away we go.

I'm about to start Beginning GPS, which I assume is a more modern version of Map and Compass, a class I

took during my first BOW weekend. That didn't go so well for me, and were it not for others, I'd still be lost in the Catskills. I soon realize that in this class, we're going on a high-tech scavenger hunt, a.k.a. geocaching. Huh? Our instructor, Cate, hands us each a GPS, presents a brief slide show and provides the "coordinates." What the heck's a coordinate? Isn't that when your accessories match your dress?

We're searching for items hidden specifically for us to find, and told to look for things in the woods that don't seem normal. I'm a little confused until I spot a bunch of sticks piled in a way that just wouldn't happen naturally. Then I see a pile of rocks that look like a mini-Stonehenge. One more clue, and we (that is, everybody else who's figured out how the GPS works) locate the treasure.

It's only 5:00 p.m. or so, and I'm bushed but looking forward to the evening's festivities. These include a silent auction, samples of fish and game prepared outdoors by students in the Fish and Game Cooking class, a slideshow of all of us in action, the awarding of more prizes and awards, and the drawing for the hot-pink kayak. As before, our chairs are piled with numerous small gifts, compliments of various vendors and sponsors. We're full of good cheer (and supper), and we're pumped. Most of us have shed our awkwardness with each other, and we're developing a common bond through new experiences and small accomplishments.



Don't Miss the Upcoming Winter Workshop

NYS BOW is holding a winter workshop from January 29-31, 2010 at the Rensselaerville Institute in Albany County. During this weekend, nearly two dozen classes will be offered, such as snowshoeing and ice fishing. In addition, NYS offers Beyond BOW workshops, which focus more in depth on a singular outdoor activity. Please visit DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov/education/68.html for more information about BOW opportunities.

BOW is a non-profit program which offers workshops and trips that are reasonably priced to enable many people to take advantage of them. Upon inquiry, a few scholarships may be available as well.

For further reading, see: Girl2Women in the June, 2002 issue of *Conservationist*.

As I wait for my chance to snag some fish and shop for a few BOW products, my picture flashes up on the screen. There I am, learning how to determine my dominant eye for archery. And hey, there's my sister in her Field Dressing and Handling Game class posing with—wait, is that a dead bear? And my sister's smiling! Did I mention she's nuts?

My final class the following morning is Survival Skills, and my fellow students and I hunker down in an unheated building, the cold penetrating even the multiple layers that we all wear. Already, our mettle is being tested. Sue, our instructor, seems unfazed by the chill, perhaps because she's so animated. It's evident that she's confident and capable—the kind of person you'd want with you in an emergency, such as being stranded in the woods. She initially talks about how to avoid life-threatening situations in the first place. However, she knows that even experienced outdoorspeople can get into trouble, and that's why we novices are here—to learn how to be prepared for and cope in a worst-case scenario.

As Sue passes around her homemade survival kit, she explains what's included and why. She also has various first aid kits and cautions us to remember that normally we'd be carrying everything on our backs, so evaluating the size and weight of what we pack is important.

Sue also discusses the importance of dressing in layers and choosing clothing made of almost anything other than “killer cotton.” During all this discussion, she is handing out numerous freebies, from little flameless gizmos for starting fires to packages of beef jerky. It's like your birthday every day here!

Pockets and fanny packs stuffed with treasures, we look forward to warming up under the sun, which has been teasing us through the windows. If we're this wimpy under these circumstances, what are our chances of surviving in the wilderness?

Our first task is to make a fire without matches or a lighter. In preparation, we clear a patch of ground that's not near anything flammable. There's been little rain lately, making it easy to find a variety of dry, natural fuel—moss and leaves, twigs, bark, even the “silk” from milkpods. Using a knife, we take turns scraping a piece of magnesium (from the emergency kit) close to the pile of fuel. A few strikes on a flint and it isn't long before there's a spark, which develops into a small flame. As we add more tinder, a little fire erupts, making us proud. We don't need no stinkin' matches! We extinguish the fire and move on to our next challenge—building a shelter.

A tree that has fallen at an angle provides a convenient starting point. We lean sturdy branches from the forest



Participants of BOW survival classes learn important safety lessons necessary for wilderness survival, including what and how much to carry in a backpack.

floor close together along both sides of the tree and construct a roof by overlapping pine boughs, which we also use to cover gaps in the sides of the shelter. In addition, Sue shows us how to weigh down a tarp or poncho—which can be used as a roof too—by tying rocks into the corners of the fabric with string from her survival kit. Mounds of dried leaves serve as both insulation and bedding. The shelter looks cozy, albeit small, and we're surprised that it accommodates two of us with a little wiggle room besides.

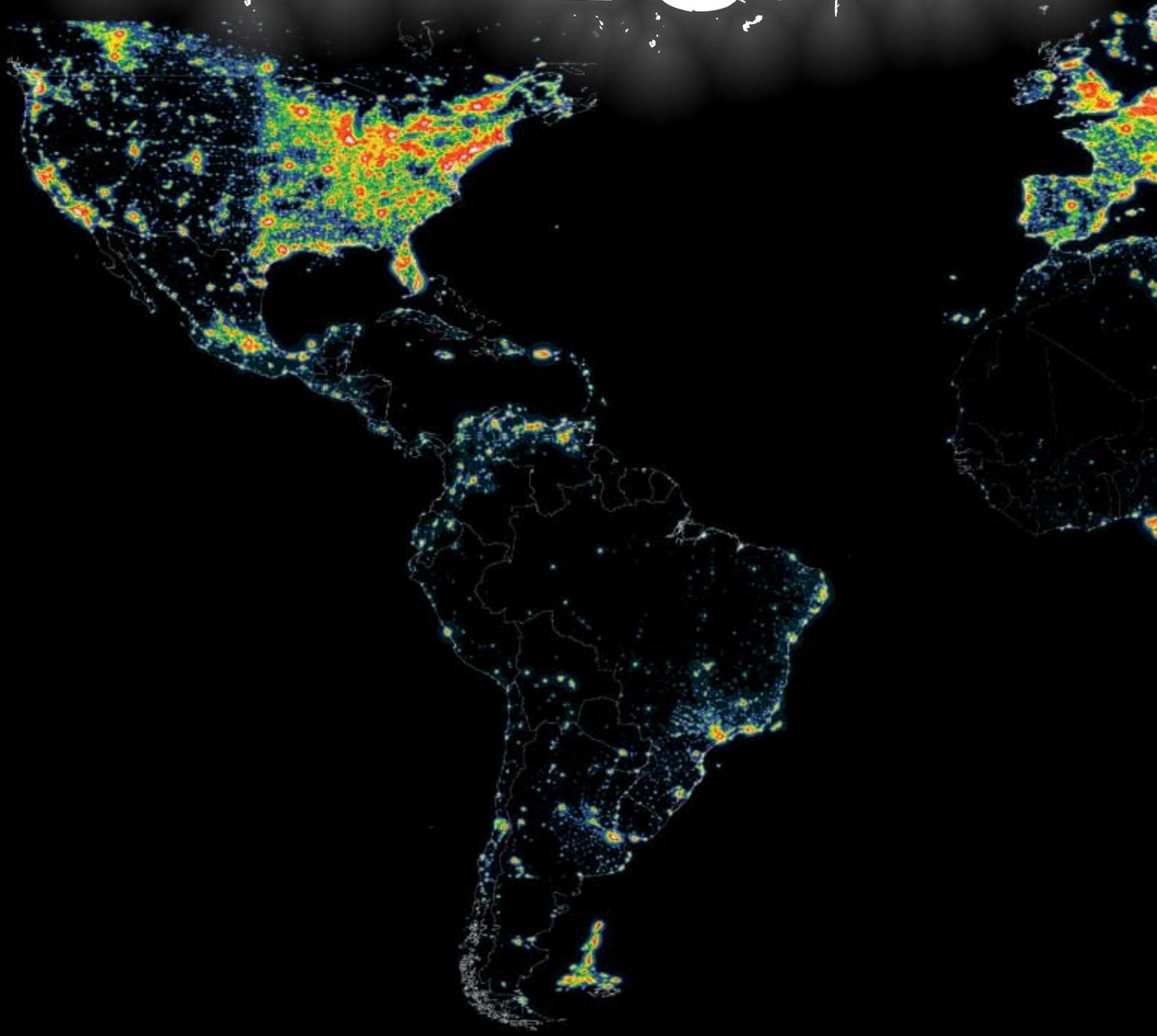
Although there's much more we could cover—edible wild plants for example—it's nearly lunchtime already. I return to finish some last-minute packing before we eat and head home. My sister's changing into dry clothes after she successfully learned how to roll her kayak that morning. She accepts my congratulations with aplomb, the previous afternoon's terror apparently forgotten.

The weekend has been educational and enjoyable and makes me wonder why I waited so long to attend another BOW workshop. I feel ambivalent about returning to civilization, especially as the traffic thickens. I'm already considering signing up for BOW's winter program...

Oh, and that question about eating live grubs? Of the two women who admitted to having done so, one was my sister. Why am I not surprised?

Bernadette LaManna is a contributing editor of *Conservationist*, and a BOW enthusiast.

Night Lights





Too Much of a Good Thing?

By Daniel J. Rozell

“Men fell on their knees, groans were uttered at the sight, and many were dumb with amazement.” —Wabash Plain Dealer, 1880

That was the reaction of the residents and witnesses who were present to watch Wabash, Indiana become the first town in the world to illuminate the night with electric lights. One hundred and twenty-nine years later, such lighting is commonplace—so much so that the east coast of the U.S. is among the most lit regions in the world.

Few would argue that the advent of artificial light hasn't made our lives easier and more pleasant—enabling us to do and enjoy a multitude of tasks and activities that would otherwise be impossible. But what are the costs of projecting all this light where there would naturally be darkness?

Scientists only recently began to seriously study the impact of artificial light at night, and a picture began to emerge of its effects on local ecosystems and species. Scientists have discovered that too much artificial light, or light pollution, is disturbing and harmful to local ecosystems and the inhabitants. Since all living things have evolved according to a day/night cycle, it takes little light to upset nighttime cycles and alter natural rhythms. And while most forms of artificial light don't cause light pollution in broad daylight, even weak sources can cause problems on a moonless night. Many species of insects, migratory birds, sea turtles, bats, nocturnal rodents, snakes, fish, aquatic invertebrates, and even plants are affected by night lighting.

Everyone has seen moths fluttering around an outdoor light at night. They can be drawn to a standard street light from up to 400 feet away. Some moths die immediately when they fly into the light. Others endlessly circle it, risking starvation, or land nearby and become food for spiders, birds and bats. A steady

decrease in nocturnal flying insects in populated areas has been attributed to the “vacuum cleaner” effect of night lighting. In other words, every porch light and streetlight lures them from surrounding habitat, often to their deaths. Since these nocturnal insects play an important role in the ecological food chain, excessive night lighting is a concern. Fortunately, studies show that switching to low-pressure, sodium vapor lamps or UV-filtered bulbs drastically reduces insect attraction and mortality.

While switching light sources helps insects, the same solution doesn't apply to amphibians. Frogs and salamanders subjected to artificial night light may change normal feeding behavior, become less fertile and become more vulnerable to predators. The only solution for them is to limit their exposure to night light.

In New York State, the most evident victims of night lighting are migratory birds which are attracted to brightly lit tall structures, including lighthouses and radio towers. These birds will circle the light repeatedly until they collide with the structure and die. Overcast moonless conditions can result in the deaths of thousands of birds in one night. In Toronto, the Fatal Light Awareness Program educates building owners on how to reduce such deaths by darkening buildings during the height of migratory seasons.

Research has also shown that too much artificial night light can contribute to air pollution. When you look into the night sky and see a glow, that glow is wasted energy. According to the International Dark-Sky Association, this is due to poor lighting design, like unshielded outdoor lighting. In New York State alone, excessive light creates millions of tons of greenhouse gases—equivalent to the emissions from thousands of cars. Clearly, reducing light pollution can mean big benefits for the environment.

Obviously, there are circumstances when outdoor night lighting is necessary. Common sense tells us that night lighting provides safer night travel conditions and deters crime. However, current research suggests that night lighting for these reasons is probably overused. In fact, bright or poorly shielded lighting along roads can create glare that actually decreases the ability of drivers to see into surrounding dark areas; in effect, reducing visibility.

According to a study sponsored by the U.S. Department of Transportation, the safety of a highway lit only at interchanges is similar to the safety of a highway illuminated along its entire length. So, in this case, why not use less lighting?

Most people don't realize how little night lighting is required to improve vision and safety. Once the human eye has adjusted to darkness, it can see surprisingly well with only the limited light provided by a full moon. In fact, farmers and travelers of centuries past relied on moonlight to extend their day. Even now, the Harvest Moon is welcomed by farmers around the world.

Because people commonly associate darkness with higher crime rates, they believe that night lighting deters crime. Increasing security lighting is often the first response to a crime, even though most crimes occur during the day. A Department of Justice report on the relationship between night lighting and crime found that there was no significant evidence that lighting affected levels of crime. However, increased lighting did appear to decrease the *fear* of crime.

A few pioneering communities have ignored conventional wisdom and reduced “crime-deterrent” lighting with good results. Five years ago, the city of Des Moines shut off 40 percent of its streetlights along main thoroughfares to save money. Despite the



Many species of insects, migratory birds, sea turtles, bats, nocturnal rodents, snakes, fish, aquatic invertebrates, and even plants are affected by night lighting. Moths can be drawn to a standard street light from up to 400 feet away. Some die immediately when they fly into the light, while others may get caught in a spider's web, or eaten by birds and bats. Since these nocturnal insects play an important role in the ecological food chain, excessive night lighting is a concern.

concerns of shop owners and police, there was a 3.5 percent drop in vandalism, burglary and robbery.

Even those who aren't afraid of the dark or the threats it might bring react strongly to the absence of night light. After an earthquake knocked out power in Los Angeles, Ed Krupp, director of Griffith Observatory, was barraged with calls regarding a strange phenomenon believed to have been caused by the earthquake. As it turned out, callers were perplexed by the rarely seen, very starry night sky over Los Angeles!

With no light pollution and fair weather, a young observer with good vision should be able to see as many as 7,000 stars with the unaided eye. Most of us in New York State don't see anywhere near that number. As a general rule, if you can't see the Milky Way on a clear summer night, then fewer than 250 stars are visible in your area.

According to author Verlyn Klinkenborg, "Living in a glare of our own making, we have cut ourselves off from...the light of the stars and the rhythms of day and night." This is especially true in brightly lit New York City where some young people

today may never have seen anything in the night sky other than the moon and perhaps a dozen of the brightest planets and stars.

To help relieve light pollution, we must reduce our own contribution to the problem. While installing a simple outdoor light without giving it much thought beforehand seems harmless enough, an accumulation of many such decisions can have global consequences. Good lighting decisions consist of three components: determining when lighting is necessary, choosing the right fixture, and choosing the right light source. Keeping in mind misconceptions regarding security lighting, common sense dictates when lighting is necessary. Good light fixtures generally point all their light downward where it will be used. Likewise, a good outdoor fixture is mounted low enough to prevent light from invading surrounding areas.

Selecting the best light source depends on where and how it will be used. For lighting a small, specific area, low-powered LED sources—which have become increasingly energy-efficient—are a good choice. But for larger areas, low-pressure, sodium

vapor lamps remain the most efficient and preferred source of outdoor light.

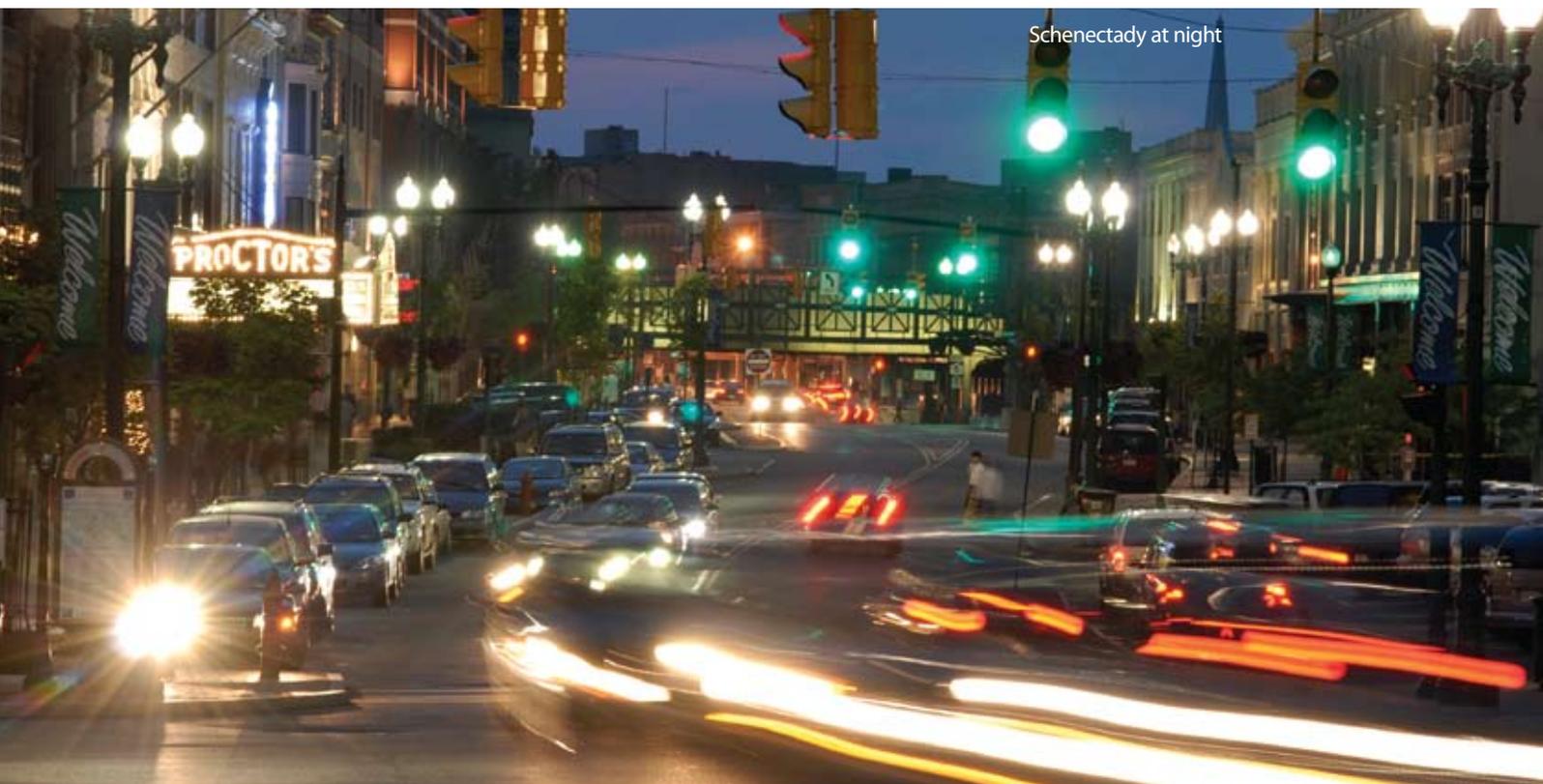
We need to keep in mind that even an efficient lamp can illuminate more than necessary. Remember, being continuously suffused in light is neither natural nor ideal; darkness has its own value and beauty. Let your eyes—and your expectations—adjust. You just might find you appreciate something you've been taking for granted all along.

Dan Rozell works for the Division of Air Resources in DEC's Region 1 office in Stony Brook.

For more information about light pollution, visit the website of the International Dark-Sky Association (IDA) at www.darksky.org. To find additional information on light-pollution legislation in New York State, visit Sensible and Efficient Lighting to Enhance the Nighttime Environment (SELENE) online at www.selene-ny.org.

Photo on page 22: P. Cinzano, F. Falchi (University of Padova), C.D. Elvidge (NOAA National Geophysical Data Center, Boulder). Copyright Royal Astronomical Society. Reproduced from the Monthly Notices of the RAS by permission of Blackwell Science.

Susan Shafer





On Patrol

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

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

Carl Heilman II

K-9's Nose Knows—Herkimer County

In October, ECO Steve Shaw received a call from a homeowner who stated that someone had shot a doe from the road near his house and then came back a few minutes later to pick it up. The homeowner gave a vehicle description and a plate number. A short time later, ECO Shaw located the car in question and called ECO Corey Schoonover for assistance with the traffic stop. The car's three occupants had spots of blood on them. When asked where the deer was, they all stated that one of them had shot a five-point buck that morning and that was the source of the blood. The men had just come from a nearby house, where the five point buck was supposed to be hanging. ECO Schoonover and his K-9 Griz went to the house and found the buck hanging in the garage with a legal tag on it. ECO Schoonover then asked Griz to "find the meat," a command that instructs the dog to locate any venison in the area. The K-9 went to the backyard and quickly uncovered a doe buried under dirt, leaves and sticks. Five tickets were issued to the three men. The shooter was charged with having a loaded firearm in a motor vehicle, discharging a firearm from a public highway, and possession of an illegal doe deer. The other two were charged with possession of an illegal doe deer.

Fish For Sale—Kings County

Recently, ECO Kevin Thomas was in Sheepshead Bay in plain clothes doing surveillance when he noticed a commercial charter boat attracting a large crowd. He went over to investigate and found a crew member with 33 out-of-season fluke and several other fish that were under the legal size limit displayed on the deck. The crew member was offering the fish for sale. Thomas contacted ECO Jennifer Okonuk who arrived to issue summonses and document the evidence. The crew member received tickets for possession of undersized fish, possession of out-of-season fish, and selling fish without a permit.

Stay on the Trail—Greene County

Kaaterskill Falls, a popular hiking destination in the Catskills, was the site of a recent rescue operation. Despite numerous signs warning visitors of the sheer cliffs and slippery footing past the end of the official trail, many often choose to climb on the steep slopes along both sides of the falls. On this day, three individuals were hiking along the east side of the falls when midway up the steep slope, one of them slipped, sliding and tumbling approximately 50 feet onto the cliff edge of the lower portion of falls. The person then continued his harrowing descent, falling approximately 60 feet onto the rocks below, suffering multiple injuries that left him in serious condition. Eight forest rangers and fire department & rescue squad personnel responded to the scene. While paramedics tended to the hiker's injuries, forest rangers and other rescue personnel prepared for a helicopter hoist evacuation and a back-up half-mile carry-out rescue. Fortunately, weather and flight conditions were ideal and he was safely extracted and flown to Albany Medical Center where he was treated and eventually released.

ASK the ECO

Q: If I shoot a deer while I'm hunting but can't locate it right away, can I track the wounded animal after dark? Are there any restrictions on the type of light I can use?

A: Yes, you may go out after legal hunting hours to look for a wounded deer. You may use any size or type of light you wish, however you may not bring along any firearm or long bow as that would be a violation of Environmental Conservation Law.

Susan Shafer



Lifejackets Required

Beginning November 1, 2009, each person on board a “pleasure vessel” measuring less than twenty-one feet in length—including rowboats, canoes, and kayaks—must wear a securely fastened United States Coast Guard approved wearable personal flotation device of an appropriate size, between November 1st and May 1st. The New York State Legislature recently amended the state’s navigation law as a safety measure for people boating during the colder months when immersion can very quickly cause people to be overcome by hypothermia. Failure to comply is punishable by a fine. For more details, visit the New York State Parks web at www.nysparks.com/recreation/boating/ and click on Navigation Law.

EAB Quarantine

Since the discovery of the invasive emerald ash borer (EAB) beetle in Cattaraugus County this past June,

DEC and many other state and federal agencies have worked to combat the fast-spreading pest. One measure initiated by DEC and the Department of Agriculture and Markets is a quarantine of Cattaraugus and Chautauqua Counties that restricts the movement of ash trees, ash products and firewood from all wood species. Foresters hope the quarantine will stop the spread of EAB into other areas of the state. In addition, a multi-agency team continues to monitor the EAB purple prism traps that were set up throughout the state this past summer (see page 29 in the October 2009 *Conservationist*). Fortunately, no new EAB infestations have been reported to date. For more information on the new quarantine order and emerald ash borer, visit www.dec.ny.gov/animals/56774.html.

Deadline Approaching

If you’re interested in helping to protect the environment, a career as a DEC environmental analyst may be right for you. Environmental

analysts evaluate the effects of development projects on the environment, and take steps to minimize adverse impacts. Analysts work on a wide variety of important and challenging issues, from protecting tidal wetlands, water quality and endangered species to developing new wind farms. The deadline to apply for the environmental analyst civil service exam is December 21, 2009. The test will be given on January 23, 2010. Check the exam announcement at www.cs.state.ny.us/jobseeker/public to see if you qualify.

Nature a Mouse Click Away

If you have ever wondered what kinds of plants and animals are found in your neighborhood, or your favorite outdoor recreation area, New York Nature Explorer can help. The new online tool provides a variety of biodiversity information to residents, landowners, consultants, students, and anyone interested in learning about our natural world. Users can look up information about animals or plants for a specific geographic area or watershed. Results are gathered from various databases housed on the DEC website. The



BRIEFLY

new gateway helps provide a better understanding of the diversity of life in the state, and DEC plans to add more information over time. To explore the new tool, visit www.dec.ny.gov/animals/57844.html.

Don't Burn Trash

To reduce harmful air pollutants and help prevent wildfires, DEC extended restrictions on the open burning of residential waste. Since October 14th, open burning of residential waste is prohibited in all communities state wide, regardless of population size, with certain exceptions, including burning tree limbs and branches at limited times of the year.

Once considered harmless, open burning releases significant amounts of dangerous chemicals into the air. Trash containing plastics, polystyrene, pressure-treated and painted wood, and bleached or colored papers releases harmful chemicals when burned. In addition, open burning is also the single largest cause of wildfires in New York. For more information and details, visit www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/58519.html.



Stream Defenders

In October and November, as part of the “Hudson River Estuary Trees for Tribes” program, DEC and many partner organizations and volunteers planted stream buffers throughout the Hudson Valley. More than 2,500 trees and shrubs were planted at 20 Hudson River project sites by Boy Scout troops, municipalities, and environmental groups. Buffers like these are important in maintaining healthy streams and protecting water quality; they help reduce pollution by filtering storm water runoff, stabilize stream banks to prevent erosion, and increase overall biodiversity. The program is conducted through DEC’s Hudson River Estuary Program, with help from DEC’s Saratoga Tree Nursery. To learn more about this project, visit www.dec.ny.gov/lands/43668.html.

Raffle Winner

The *Conservationist* would like to extend hearty congratulations to Philip Koons of Ithaca, winner of the lifetime fishing license from the drawing at the *Conservationist* booth at the New York State Fair this past August. On behalf of DEC, we wish you many years of happy, safe fishing!

Ask the Biologist

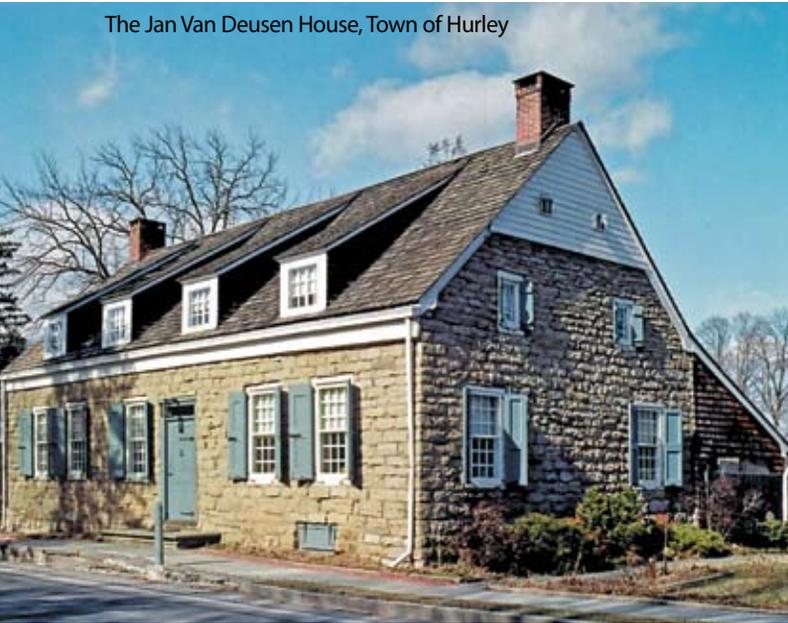
Q: I’ve been watching several deer, including one nice buck, along the wood’s edge near my house over the past few weeks. Last week I saw the buck with only one antler, and then the next day it seemed he had lost both antlers. Is this supposed to happen?

A: Yes. White-tailed bucks shed and regrow their antlers each year. Typically antlers are cast off or shed in late December or January, a result of decreasing levels of testosterone following the breeding season. Come spring, the antlers begin to grow again, and the cycle is repeated.

With deer losing their antlers each year, you might wonder why you rarely find the sheds. That’s because the antlers are a source of calcium and other nutrients for rodents (including mice, voles, porcupines and squirrels) who feed on them. If you do find a shed antler, look closely because you may see gnaw marks from a small rodent.
—Jeremy Hurst, DEC Wildlife Biologist



The Jan Van Deusen House, Town of Hurley



Hal Hauck, stonehouseday.org

Dutch Settler

I have been a subscriber since 1957, and really enjoyed the August issue which focused on the discovery and settlement of the Hudson River Valley. You and your readers might be interested to learn that today there remain 10 stone houses of Dutch origin in Hurley, New York. One, the Van Deusen House, was a temporary capitol of New York during the War for Independence.

Phil Van Deusen
East Haven, Connecticut

Thanks for sharing your story. It's great to hear from a descendant of one of the original Dutch settlers of the Hudson Valley.

—Jenna Kerwin, Staff Writer

Where the Heart Is

I just wish to complement you and your staff on the August issue. From the artwork of Mr. Tantillo to the Sanderson *Mannahatta* article, it was superb. My father was born in Manhattan, so it was wonderful to see what that magnificent island looked like when Hudson sailed up the river. I was born and raised in Saratoga Springs, where part of my family has been resident for 150 years. Although I have lived in Maryland for 45 years, my heart is still in New York and the Hudson Valley.

Benjamin Straus
Bowie, Maryland

We thank everyone who wrote or called to tell us how much they liked the special commemorative August Quadricentennial issue. We're always happy to hear from our readers, especially when they have something nice to say.

—the *Conservationist* staff

More of the West

I noticed your August issue was entirely focused on the Champlain-Hudson corridor. I would like to see more articles about western New York in the magazine.

Disgruntled Westerner

Hailing from western New York myself (northern Chautauqua County, to be exact), I agree. See Whither it May Flow and A Teacher's Legacy in the October issue.

—Dave Nelson, Editor

Conquering Mountains

I enjoyed the fire towers article in the October issue. As a matter of fact, my friends and I have visited several New York fire towers, inspired by the Fire Tower Challenge, created by the Glens Falls-Saratoga Chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club (www.adk-gfs.org/fire_tower_challenge.html). To date, between us we have hiked all five of the Catskill towers and eighteen of the Adirondack summits.

Carol Wierzbowski
Schenectady

Congratulations! Thanks for sharing your photos and story. You and your friends are quite the fire tower aficionados.

—Dave Nelson, Editor

Overlooked Towers

I would like to thank the *Conservationist* for publishing the article on the centennial of New York's fire towers. As pointed out, fire towers continue to serve the people of New York nearly twenty years after their official closing.

However, I am disappointed that the fire towers outside of the two forest preserves (on Long Island, and in the lower Hudson Valley, the Hudson Highlands, the Southern Tier, and the Taconic Mountains) were omitted from this article. Presently, eleven fire towers outside of the Adirondacks and Catskills are under various stages of restoration, or waiting to begin restoration work. Furthermore, an effort to re-erect a fire tower on Long Island has been moving forward in a positive direction.

These fire towers are visited by thousands of people annually...(and we should) acknowledge these other towers and the volunteer restoration workers.

Bill Starr, State Director, Forest Fire Lookout Association, Scotia, Schenectady County

Red Hill Fire Tower, Catskills



✉ LETTERS

You're absolutely right. There are many towers outside the "blue line" worthy of visitation. One of my childhood favorites is the Summit Fire Tower in Allegany State Park.

—Dave Nelson, Editor

Swing and a Miss?

I was walking in the snow at DEC's Rogers Environmental Education Center and came across these odd tracks. They measured about 20" long and 3" wide, maximum. Can you tell me what could have made them?

Christina Shubert
Sherburne



Though it's difficult to judge what could've made these strange tracks, one possibility may be a "swing and a miss." A bird of prey may have been in the midst of a swoop attack, but (fortunately for its possible meal) the critter in the snow got away. The resulting tracks may be from the bird's wing tips.

—Gordon Batcheller, DEC Wildlife Biologist

📖 REVIEW by Shannon Brescher Shea

Farewell, My Subaru

By Doug Fine

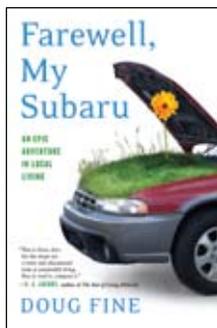
224 pages; soft cover \$15.00

Villard Publishing, Random House, Inc.

www.randomhouse.com; (212) 782-9000

Farewell, My Subaru is subtitled, "An Epic Adventure in Local Living," and certainly earns that moniker. Although "local living" can imply lackadaisical browsing at the farmer's market, Doug Fine throws his commitment to sustainability into drive and never hits the brakes. Once a war correspondent, Fine writes about his attempts to maintain his modern lifestyle—including ice cream and stereo subwoofers—in the face of his desire to reduce his dependency on fossil fuels. To achieve his green dream, he tackles four major projects at his New Mexico ranch: raising livestock, installing solar panels, converting his vehicle to run on restaurant grease, and growing a large garden.

Despite the apparent simplicity of these goals, Fine manages to turn his pursuit into hilarious misadventures. His very first task is adopting a pair of nanny goats to ensure a steady supply of homemade ice cream. But shortly after picking them up from his local breeder, the desert sky cast down thunder, lightning



Deadly Pursuit

I thought you might be interested in some pictures my 17-year-old daughter took in our backyard in Glenville. An ermine was hunting a squirrel.

Lindy Sue Czubernat
Schenectady

Thanks for sharing the photos. Not many people get to witness, let alone photograph, this kind of National Geographic event. Members of the weasel family—which includes mink, fisher, skunks, otters and wolverines—ermine (or short-tailed weasels) are ferocious hunters, and will kill animals that are several times their size. The squirrel provided much needed food to help this ermine survive the winter.

—Eileen Stegemann, Assistant Editor



Write to us

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or e-mail us at: magazine@gw.dec.state.ny.us

and lots of rain. The resulting deluge—the worst August flood in history—forced him to ford two different rivers separating his new ranch from the city. While he struggled to keep wayward fish out of his car, his infant goats butted the windshield with their tiny horns.

Although most people will never battle predatory coyotes or scald themselves with solar-heated water, even the least green of us can learn a lesson or two from Fine. He is honest and funny when describing his experiments, sharing both his failures and accomplishments. He includes some political commentary, but his candor should be refreshing to even the most apolitical reader.

Overall, Fine's experience shows us that even when it isn't easy to change your lifestyle, it can be incredibly rewarding. To assist us in our own endeavors, he recommends five major steps people can take towards sustainability. Even though they aren't as painful as most of his escapades, these suggestions—from eating locally to supporting smart growth—can provide a new perspective. For anyone who is interested in living "off the grid" or just likes to laugh, *Farewell, My Subaru* illustrates how the road to sustainability can lead to hilarity and wisdom in equal degree.

Former *Conservationist* staff writer **Shannon Brescher Shea** currently works for the National Academy of Sciences in Washington, D.C.

Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

Voyage to Remember by Tara Sullivan

After more than a year of preparation, working with hundreds of communities and organizations, speaking at boat clubs, rotaries, historic societies, and town halls—building momentum and support for the biggest event of New York’s Quadricentennial year—we were finally entering the home stretch. Then, the United States Coast Guard (USCG) delivered the shocking news—it would not issue the permit for the River Day flotilla. There would be too many people and boats for a safe event. We were stunned.

River Day was to be the signature Quadricentennial event. Arrangements were already in place for a parade of ships to trace, over the course of eight days, Hudson’s historic journey up the river from New York Harbor to Albany. Riverfront communities had scheduled festivals to welcome the fleet; boat clubs and marinas planned to host opening day ceremonies and then join the flotilla; and the replica of Hudson’s ship, the *Half Moon*, was lined-up to lead the fleet accompanied by New York legacy flagships *Onrust*, the *Clearwater*, the *Woody Guthrie*, and the *Mystic Whaler*. We needed that permit.

The Coast Guard advised us that our only hope of salvaging the event was to submit a revised permit that included a designated safety officer—one with extensive experience on the Hudson and an impeccable reputation. It took marathon hours of phone calls, meetings, and organizing what seemed like an unending number of tiny details (docking procedures, vessel sewage plans, communications, scheduling,

and safety and security measures) to pull together the weightiest USCG permit in history, but it paid off.

Captain Greg Porteus of the *Launch 5* Safety Boat emerged as the safety officer with the essential credentials. A former NYC police officer who had



Steve Stanine

participated in September 11th World Trade Center water evacuations, he was recognized by the Coast Guard as the man for the job. With Greg on board, other details began to fall in place. By the time River Day rolled around, we had our permit in hand. The coast guard provided two on-board lieutenants to assist us aboard *Launch 5* and two cutters fore and aft of the flotilla to keep order and enforce a safety zone. So far, so good.

River Day started early on June 6th with dozens of boats in the New York harbor coming ‘round the Statue of Liberty and then heading upriver. Visiting dignitaries, including DEC Commissioner Grannis, state and

city officials, Dutch VIPs, and Native American leaders, joined history buffs and boat enthusiasts onboard the historic vessels in this elegant parade.

On the second day, we sailed by thousands of well-wishers on shore, cheering and waving the Quad flags, singing, and sounding bagpipes, bells and horns. I finally felt like I could relax and enjoy this historic event. Coming around the narrows by West Point, we were treated to a 16-cannon salute. In return, the *Half Moon*, *Mystic Whaler* and the *Onrust* fired their guns. With more than 400 boats moving at a steady 5 knots, we were a true flotilla. Families on cabin cruisers, rumbling cigarette boats, sleek yachts, fishing boats and Boston Whalers united on the river. For me, it was the thrill of a lifetime!

When we bid our goodbyes in Albany at the end of the journey, we all took pride in our spotless safety record—not one incident despite heavy commercial and barge traffic, and more than 1,500 boats, 120,000 spectators, and 100 riverside events including three fireworks displays.

River Day proved a fitting tribute to Hudson’s voyage and the ensuing four centuries of Empire State history. Its success was due to the boaters, the communities and environmental organizations of the Hudson Valley, the incredible crew of *Launch 5*, and the amazing dedication of a dauntless band of women known as the “Quad Squad” (Nicole Sama, Barbara Fratianni, Carol Bisetta), to whom I owe great thanks.

Tara Sullivan is Executive Director of the Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial Commission and a proud member of the Quad Squad.



James Hoggard



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