

# STONY KILL ALMANAC

BY AND ABOUT

Stony Kill Farm Environmental Education Center

Calendar of Events Inside

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## Of Snakes, Birds and Third-Graders

by Richard Parisio, Environmental Educator

After twenty-four years, my work at Stony Kill is still full of surprises. Just this May, a surprise came in the form of a snake sighting. Now, to see a snake at Stony Kill in the spring is not of itself very unusual. But on this particular spring day, leading a group of lively third graders from Poughkeepsie on a forest discovery lesson, I could never have expected to see this snake in the way we did.

One of the boys in the group, Connor, was walking right beside me, a few steps ahead of his classmates, as we headed into a thick stand of young black birches. Suddenly Connor cried out, "Snake!" - a familiar enough exclamation to anyone who has spent much time with children in the woods (slightly less common than the related "Snake hole!"). Looking straight ahead, I saw what I thought Connor was shouting about: a dead branch, hanging in a tree, that with much less imagination than the average eight year old possesses could easily become a snake. I grabbed the branch and handed it to Connor, smiling. Connor promptly pointed to an exquisitely camouflaged black rat snake, about two feet long, coiled around the branches of a sapling, perhaps five feet above the ground. I had walked right past it!

The young snake remained motionless, except for its flickering tongue tasting the air, as the group of thirteen children and I admired its beauty, and the special 'keeled' scales that enable it to climb trees, an ability most other snakes lack. In all my years of teaching, I have never had such an extended opportunity to view such a normally shy and elusive creature at leisure, and at eye level!

Rat snakes' climbing ability lets them add the eggs and nestlings of songbirds to their spring diet. While some might find this trait appalling (especially bluebird nest box monitors, who sometimes open a box to find a satisfied-looking rat snake coiled upon the nest within), it's good to remind ourselves that snakes, along with birds, are part of the complex web of living things in the natural world that we only partially understand. (Continued on page 2)

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New York State Department of Environmental Conservation  
David Paterson, Governor      Pete Grannis, Commissioner

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## SLATE OF PUBLIC PROGRAMS

All programs are approximately 90 minutes long, unless otherwise noted.  
We welcome people with disabilities to all of our programs. Call us ahead, **845-831-8780**,  
**ext 300**, to let us know your specific needs and we will be happy to accommodate you.

### JUNE

**Saturday, June 7, at 6:00 PM**

#### **Nature's Flying Bug-zappers**

Nine species of bats inhabit New York State. These mosquito-eating mammals are now in trouble. Find out more about these amazing, important creatures and what you can do to help. An indoor slide presentation by Al Hicks, DEC bat expert, will be followed by a walk to view the capture and release of live bats using mist netting.

**Saturday, June 14, at 10:00 AM**

#### **Family Fishing Day**

Enjoy a morning of fishing in our farm pond (poles and worms provided for those who need them). Children can have fun making colorful fish prints as they learn some fascinating fishy facts!

**Saturday, June 21, at 10:00 AM**

#### **Summer Solstice Celebration**

Mark the start of summer by joining us for a family scavenger hunt and a "solar" craft, followed by some tasty treats baked in a solar oven.

**Saturday, June 28, at 10:00 AM**

#### **Sierra Trail Saunter**

Join a naturalist for a leisurely hike on our two-mile Sierra trail. Explore a variety of habitats, including a meadow, an old field, young and mature woodlands, and a beaver pond.

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### JULY

**Saturday, July 5, at 10:00 AM**

#### **Parent and Child Nature Discovery Program**

Hey, kids! Bring your parents for a fun morning exploring our forests and fields through games, crafts, and scavenger hunts. For all ages, with adult.

**Saturday, July 12, at 10:00 AM**

#### **Amazing Insects**

Sweep-net the grass, roll a log over and use a magnifying glass to get a close-up look at some of the insects that inhabit our woods and meadows. Make your own "insect," and learn some fascinating facts about the most numerous and diverse creatures on the planet.

**Saturday, July 19, at 10:00 AM**

#### **Birds of the Grasslands**

Bluebirds, bobolinks, meadow larks and savannah sparrows are a few of the birds we hope to spot as we walk the edges of our fields at Stony Kill. Bring binoculars if you have them.

**Saturday, July 26, at 10:00 AM**

#### **Family Fun with the Wind and the Sun**

Cook in a solar oven, make a wind craft and discover the power of alternative energy sources. For ages 5 and up, with adult.

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(Snakes continued from page 1) I was reminded of this by the sharp "wheep!" call of a great crested flycatcher as I headed out of the woods after the lesson that day. These birds often use shed snake skins in their nests. When they can't find one, they may substitute a bit of cellophane, perhaps part of a candy wrapper dropped by a sharp-eyed, but not too careful, third-grader!

## AUGUST

### Saturday, August 2, from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM Butterfly Festival

Do you know what it's like to be a caterpillar and change into a butterfly? During the festival, learn about the butterfly life cycle and local species. Listen to butterfly stories and create a butterfly craft. Visit an enclosure to view live butterflies up close. Fun and educational for the whole family.

### Saturday, August 9, at 10:00 AM Fruits of the Season

Discover the variety of berries and other wild edibles at Stony Kill. Learn which of the weeds you are pulling out of your garden could go into your salad or soup pot!

### Saturday, August 16, at 10:00 AM Life in the Water

Enter the amazing world of aquatic insects and other creatures, and learn what they have to tell us about the health of our streams and watersheds. Come ready to get your feet wet!

### Saturday, August 23, at 10:00 AM A Summer Bouquet

Get to know the goldenrods, asters and other wildflowers that bloom in our meadows, and learn about the intricate web of life they support, including migrating monarch butterflies.

### Saturday, August 30, at 10:00 AM Bye-bye Birdies!

Join a naturalist for a bird walk to wish early migrants, like the hummingbird and barn swallow, a safe journey south.

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#### A LOOK AHEAD TO SEPTEMBER:

Saturday, Sept. 6, Verplanck Ridge Trail

Saturday, Sept. 13, Muller Pond Trail

Saturday, Sept. 20, Woodland Trail  
(Wheelchair Accessible)

Saturday, Sept. 27, Freedom Trail

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### New Online Family Newsletter

*DEC Outdoor Discovery*

Visit [www.dec.ny.gov/public/43766.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/public/43766.html) to read DEC's new biweekly online outdoor newsletter for families. Each issue introduces readers to a seasonal environmental or nature topic, suggests a related activity, and lists family-friendly events at DEC's environmental education centers. Subscribe for free and have the newsletter e-mailed directly to you!

### Read The *Almanac* Online

Help us reduce mailing costs and conserve resources by viewing the *Stony Kill Almanac* online! See [www.dec.ny.gov/education/1841.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/education/1841.html) to view Stony Kill's quarterly newsletter on the DEC website.

To be notified by email when the newsletter is posted online, sign up for our new listserve. Go to <http://lists.dec.state.ny.us/mailman/listinfo/stonykillalmanac> and follow the directions. If you currently receive a paper copy in the mail, let us know to remove your name from our mailing list. Thank you for your concern for the environment.

# NEW YORK STATE CONSERVATIONIST

Support Stony Kill Foundation by subscribing to *Conservationist*, New York's premier outdoor and environmental magazine. Half of the subscription price goes directly to support programs at Stony Kill Farm EEC. This offer is also good for renewals, but you must include the word "Renewal" on your order, as well as your name as it appears on your *Conservationist* mailing label.

**YES, start a one-year subscription to *Conservationist* for just \$10.** I understand \$5 from each subscription goes directly to support educational programs at Stony Kill Farm EEC. **Make checks payable to: Stony Kill Foundation.** Mail to: Stony Kill Foundation, 79 Farmstead Lane, Wappingers Falls, NY 12590.

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