

STONY KILL ALMANAC

BY AND ABOUT

Stony Kill Farm Environmental Education Center

Calendar of Events Inside

email: skfarm@gw.dec.state.ny.uswww.dec.ny.gov

Weasels of New York State

by Jonathan Townsend, DEC Naturalist Intern

Jasper is my pet ferret. His is the only domesticated species among his family, the mustelids. Seven members of this family, which includes weasels, skunks and their kin, live in New York State. The biggest is the river otter, decimated in the early twentieth century, but now making a slow comeback in New York through DEC's River Otter Restoration Project. We have even spotted one this year at our Stony Kill farm pond!

Our second largest weasel is also, for some, the biggest stinker. Skunks have never had a problem with recognition; everyone remembers their first encounter with these pungent critters. As my family dog found out this past Fourth of July holiday, skunks are best admired from afar.

Mink, like otters, live near rivers and lakes, as well as ponds and marshes. Mink almost exclusively prey upon muskrats, but given the opportunity will eat other small rodents, birds and amphibians. Pine martens and fishers are both forest animals. Martens' favorite prey is red squirrels, while fishers are perhaps the only predator that regularly dines on porcupines.

Among the smallest carnivores on the continent, long-tailed weasels and ermine, or short-tailed weasels, display amazing hunting prowess. Weighing half a pound or less, they make up for their lack of size in fierceness, often taking prey many times their size. Both species turn from brown in the summer to white in the winter for better camouflage in the snow.

All weasels possess amazing morphological traits that are unique among mammals. Elongated necks enable them to carry large prey, and they can leap up to ten times their body length with their short but powerful legs. The bite of a weasel is pound for pound one of the most powerful in the animal kingdom, and the lower jaw locks into the skull to provide support for its terrible strength. Weasels have a much longer vertebral column, proportionally, than most other mammals, giving it a spring-like force, which helps them to take down large prey.

These unique animals are often hard to find, as they are natural slinkers and skulkers. If one has the time and patience, it is possible to observe them in nature. I, on the other hand, prefer the easy way out, with my buddy Jasper here. He is much easier to spot and, since his scent glands were removed at birth, usually smells a bit better than his wild cousins.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation
Eliot Spitzer, Governor Pete Grannis, Commissioner

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SLATE OF PUBLIC PROGRAMS

We welcome those who have any type of physical challenge to all our programs. If you call us ahead at **845-831-8780, ext 300** to let us know your needs, we will be happy to learn how we can best serve you. All programs are approximately one and one-half hour in length.

The Stony Kill Almanac is available online!

Do you have internet access? Are you able to view and print PDF files? Receive your copy of the Almanac electronically! Sign up for our listserve at <http://lists.dec.state.ny.us/mailman/listinfo/stonykillalmanac> to receive an e-mail notification each time a new newsletter is available on the DEC website. Back issues are also available. DEC plans to phase out providing paper copies of its environmental education center newsletters to cut down on paper consumption and better serve our readers, so sign up early and don't miss any of our news.

DECEMBER

Saturday, December 15 at 2:00 PM

Go Green For the Holidays

Come to Stony Kill and create your own nature-inspired greeting card, and maybe even an earth-friendly holiday gift.

Saturday, December 22 at 2:00 PM

Winter Solstice Saunter

Discover your inner druid and celebrate the first day of winter with a walk in the woods.

Thursday, December 27 Noon to 4:00 PM
Holiday Open House

Bring the family to enjoy this annual tradition. Displays, activities about owls, birds, winter tracks. An outdoor walk, storytelling, live music by the Tiger Lily Trio. Refreshments and decorations by the Verplanck Garden Club.

Saturday, December 29 at 2:00 PM

Adapt or Else

Join a Stony Kill naturalist and learn how our furry and feathered friends survive the cold season.



JANUARY

Saturday, January 5 at 2:00 PM

Explore Nature on Snowshoes

Snow conditions permitting, we'll strap on snowshoes as native Americans have done for hundreds of years, and enjoy a bracing winter excursion in search of wildlife tracks and traces. If there is not enough snow, we'll go for a winter walk instead.

**Saturday, January 12 at 2:00 PM
Skills for Winter Survival**

Discover some of the traditional and modern skills humans use to survive tough outdoor conditions, and gain greater appreciation for the resourcefulness of those who brave the elements.

**Saturday, January 19 at 2:00 PM
Trail Cleanup Day at Stony Kill**

Honor the community spirit embodied by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and help your local environmental education center at the same time. We'll work together to prune back shrubs, pull invasives, and pick up litter. Bring a pair of work gloves, hiking boots, warm clothing, and your own hand pruners or loppers, if you have them. Adults and older children.

**Saturday, January 26 at 2:00 PM
Winter Birdwalk**

Winter birding is invigorating, and a good way to get to know birds, starting with the species that stay with us through the winter. Bring your own binoculars, if you have them, and dress warmly.

A Look Ahead to March

Saturday, March 1 - Exploring Nature on Snowshoes

Saturday, March 8 - Know Your Oaks (And Other Trees)

Saturday, March 15 - Winter Stories

Saturday, March 22 - You Can Help Stop Climate Change

Saturday, March 29 - First Signs of Spring

FEBRUARY**Saturday, February 2 at 2:00 PM
Explore Nature on Snowshoes**

Snow conditions permitting, we'll strap on snowshoes as native Americans have done for hundreds of years, and enjoy a bracing winter excursion in search of wildlife tracks and traces. If there is not enough snow, we'll go for a winter walk instead.

**Saturday, February 9 at 2:00 PM
What the Wild Things Wear**

Discover the world of our native fur bearing animals, and learn why, even if fur coats are less fashionable today, they are important ecologically as well as historically.

**Saturday, February 16 at 2:00 PM
Alien Invaders!**

What do water chestnuts, starlings, and barberry all have in common? They are all invasive species in New York. Learn how to identify some of the culprits, find out about the problems they cause for our ecosystems, and some solutions which may be available for landowners.

**Saturday, February 23 at 2:00 PM
Discover Your Tracks**

Learn how to find out what wildlife is up to through the ancient art of tracking. We'll look for tracks and traces left by deer, coyote, fox, squirrels, rabbits and other winter-active wildlife as we walk Stony Kill's woodland trails and field edges.



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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