

NEW YORK STATE

CONSERVATIONIST

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FEBRUARY/MARCH 2021



Moving a **MOOSE**

Getting Outdoors in Winter
Counting the Fish in the Sea
Winter's Beauty

Dear Readers,

During these challenging times, I encourage you to take advantage of the opportunities we have to enjoy nature. For some people, this time of year provides a chance to enjoy various outdoor winter adventures, while others look forward to the coming change of season, with warming temperatures, the disappearance of snow, and different ways to get outside.



In this issue, we highlight some amazing photos of New York's winter beauty and celebrate a great winter sport—snowmobiling—which can be enjoyed on more than 10,000 miles of trails throughout the state (pg. 12). You can also read about a native Floridian who moved to New York and learned to cross country ski – and how that changed his view of the heavy snowfall we experienced this winter.

And for those who enjoy reading about animals, check out the story of a moose on the loose and the strategy DEC wildlife biologists and Environmental Conservation Police Officers (ECOs) used to defuse this tricky situation (pg. 2). You can also learn about DEC's efforts to determine the size of our marine fish population, a process that employs many of the same techniques as medical research, and is a vital tool to manage and protect the health of marine fisheries (pg. 8).

In addition, check out the species spotlight on barred owls, known to wander the skies across New York during the winter months. Discover some interesting facts about this vocal, forest raptor, and focus your eyes on the sky – you might catch a glimpse of this stocky bird in flight (pg. 22).

There's also an article on an area of the Shawangunk Mountains that highlights the Mohonk Preserve and Minnewaska State Park Preserve, beautiful places to visit in any season (pg. 24).

Please also check our 2020 Annual Report, which can be found at: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/24.html>

We can all celebrate the beauty of New York State in wintertime. Let's get outside.

Have fun, be safe, and stay positive.

Sincerely,
Basil Seggos, Commissioner

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Andrew M. Cuomo, Governor of New York State

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BACK COVER: Winter, by Joey Priola



BY JAMES STICKLES

Few things are more challenging than free-darting North America's largest member of the deer family, handling it safely, and releasing it unharmed. To pull off a successful rescue requires a great deal of coordination, preparation, and in this case, lots of luck.

On October 2, 2020, I received a message from DEC Environmental Conservation Police Officer (ECO) Lacroix, who received a report from a landowner about a moose trapped inside a cattle pasture in the town of Clinton. As a DEC Big Game Biologist in the Adirondacks, this kind of request comes to me to determine how best to address this issue. The officer mentioned that the pasture was about 200 acres, with a six-foot-high fence, and had no cows in it, but did have a lot of overgrown brush and some wet areas. With available food, cover, and water, and no other animals in danger of being injured by the moose, we had time to assess the situation and make a plan. I contacted the property owner so we could access and assess the site.

Upon arrival, it became clear that removing this animal safely had the potential to be a difficult task. Much of the pasture had thick brush, making it nearly impossible to

locate the moose. In fact, after spending the better part of two hours searching for it, we never saw the animal. However, there was evidence that it was in there, including tracks, scat, and shrubs browsed six to eight feet high. Just finding the moose would be the first obstacle; we would then need to get within darting distance (closer than 25 yards) and remove the animal unharmed, all while maintaining human safety.

We discussed other options, such as leaving the main gate open or cutting a hole in the fence to allow the moose to leave on its own, but these were not desirable. The landowner wanted the moose gone ASAP so he could move his cows into the pen. He didn't want other critters, such as coyotes, deer, or another moose, entering the pen through an open gate, and he didn't want any further damage to his fence.

There were only two options—attempt a darting effort and pray that everything goes smoothly or remove the moose by lethal means. We all agreed to try a darting effort, and only use lethal means if the situation became too dangerous.

A Time for Collaboration

This assignment was going to require some special equipment and manpower. Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs, i.e. drones) are increasingly becoming useful tools for all kinds of jobs. Luckily, our agency has a couple of drones outfitted with high-quality cameras, including a thermal camera, and some well-trained staff to operate them. The drones are mostly used for human search-and-rescue missions, but they are becoming increasingly popular for wildlife work, such as conducting aerial surveys or locating specific animals.

I contacted our Division of Law Enforcement to see if the drone and its operator were available to help. It wasn't long before I had an answer, "Yes, absolutely." Law Enforcement also offered a few ECOs to assist with moving the animal once it was sedated; an offer that was gladly accepted.



The rescue team consisted of ECOs, wildlife biologists, UAV (drone) operators, volunteers, and the property owners.

Preparation

Normally, when a moose-in-distress call comes into our office, there is very little time to prepare, and we often don't know what potential hazards the moose—and responders—might encounter. The risks and any on-site help and equipment that may be needed are assessed upon arrival. Then, a plan is developed and communicated to staff and volunteers. The plan is executed with the understanding that things may not go according to the plan, and we may need to improvise or temporarily abort the mission and regroup to develop a new strategy based on changing circumstances.

For this moose rescue, because an initial site visit had been conducted, we were aware of potential hazards and were able to bring extra gear to deal with any anticipated dangers that might develop. Before we arrived on scene, we had time to gather gear, make sure the equipment was functioning, and start developing a specific plan. In addition, the weather was favorable for drone operation and thermal camera detection. Every advantage was in our favor before we'd be attempting the rescue.

Traveling Moose

During spring and autumn, moose generally move across the land more often. Much of the springtime increase is driven by yearling moose dispersal, shifting availability in food resources, and a need for salt. As moose traverse the landscape, they are sometimes struck by vehicles, wander into urban areas, or become entrapped in human-made structures or fenced areas.

Autumn movement is primarily driven by breeding activity. Bulls often travel long distances in search of females that are ready to breed. In low-density moose herds, where finding a receptive mate can be difficult, bulls have been known to enter livestock pastures to court domestic cows.

Bulls wandering through urban environments may get their antlers caught in playground equipment, such as swings and netting, or become entrapped in fences and pens. Due to increased movement, moose sightings and vehicle collisions are most common during the breeding season.

Biologists at DEC use sighting reports to help monitor the state's moose population. If you happen to see a moose in New York, please report it at: www.dec.ny.gov/animals/6964.html.

The Plan



Locate the Animal

The landowner had encountered the moose on a network of ATV trails on the southern portion of the pasture, and he recommended that we start there. After about 10 minutes of searching the area with the drone and its thermal camera, there appeared to be a large heat signature in an area of overgrown apple trees. A transition to the normal camera confirmed the heat signature was indeed the moose.



Close the Distance

While the drone operators continued to monitor the location of the moose, we worked with the landowner's brother to develop a plan to get within darting range. With two staff armed with dart guns, and me armed with a rifle in case the animal charged, we followed his instructions while keeping an eye on the drone, which was hovering over the moose. We were walking on an ATV trail when suddenly, the moose popped out of the woods approximately 100 yards up the trail and headed in our direction. The drone appeared to be herding the moose toward us. We slipped into the woods about 10 yards off the trail, hoping that the moose would continue on its path and offer a shot as it passed by.

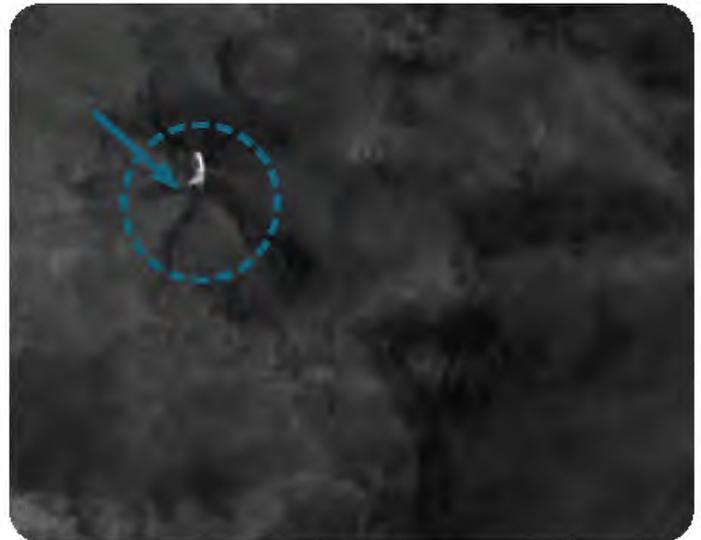


Dart the Moose

Moose are one of North America's largest animals and getting within darting range of a moose can be very dangerous. In addition, it was breeding season, and male moose can be a bit ornery during that time. We kept as many large trees between us and the trail as possible, but we still needed to have some clear shooting lanes to dart the animal.

Our anticipation grew as we watched and heard the drone slowly moving our way. We saw the head of the moose crest a small rise, and within seconds the animal was in full view and closing the distance quickly—30 yards, 20 yards, 10...and then it stopped. The moose looked directly at us, at which point I disengaged the safety on the rifle and took aim. If this moose was going to charge, I would only have a fraction of a second to react.

The moose continued to stare at us for what seemed like an eternity. Eventually, it turned its head and kept walking down the trail and through a shooting lane, where it was darted, about eight yards from us. The moose immediately began to run down the trail, but after about 200 yards, it



The moose is spotted with the drone's thermal, infrared camera.



Fortunately, the moose stayed near a trail, making for easy recovery and removal.



The crew prepares the moose for safe transport.

began to stagger. The drugs were beginning to take effect, but the moose disappeared out of sight. We waited a few minutes before moving forward—it's important to give a darted animal a little time to succumb to the drugs after the initial shot.

04 Find the Moose and Remove it From the Pasture

Approaching the point where we last observed the moose, we became a little nervous because we couldn't locate it. If the moose had veered off the trail into the thick brush, recovering it would be extremely difficult and potentially dangerous. Tripping over brush while carrying an 800- to 1000-pound animal is a recipe for injuries. If it stayed



ECOs and volunteers coordinated efforts to load the moose onto an awaiting ATV trailer.



Every step of the rescue went well, and the moose was released into nearby woods.

on the trail, it would offer us an easy recovery, as we had an ATV with a flatbed trailer on standby, ready to help recover the animal and get it out of the pen.

We continued down the trail. There was a big sigh of relief when we noticed a large, dark body on the side of the trail. It was the bull moose.

We approached slowly and quietly because sometimes the drugs don't fully sedate the animal. I snapped my fingers, clapped my hands, and poked the moose with a long stick to gauge its reaction and sedation level. When an animal is fully sedated, it won't respond to any of those stimuli. Luckily, our moose was fully sedated, so we called in the ATV and began to work-up the animal.

05 Work-up, Release, and Follow-up

Working-up any animal begins with making sure the animal is in a good position to breathe properly. We then put some lubricating ointment in its eyes, because the animal is unable to blink when it is sedated, and then cover the eyes with a cloth to help keep the animal calm and to protect the eyes from dirt and debris. It's not easy to move a moose, so we had several ECOs and a few volunteers help us move the massive bull onto a carrying tarp, and then onto the ATV trailer.

Once the moose was on the trailer, we had to drive it out of the pasture, fit it with a collar and some ear tags, collect some blood samples, move it off the trailer, administer the reversal drug, remove the face mask, and wait for it to stand up and walk off. Everything went smoothly and the moose ambled off into the woods upon release. A follow-up check on the collar a few days later indicated that he was doing well and had moved away from the cattle pasture. Mission successful!

Final Words

Every step of this rescue went unexpectedly well. The animal was located within minutes after launching the drone, getting within darting distance wasn't as much of a challenge as expected, the animal was sedated on the trail, and the release was perfect. In fact, everything went so smooth that I decided to buy a lottery ticket using the radio collar frequency and the ear tag numbers. Must be that my luck ran out when we released the moose, because I didn't win! Regardless, there is no better feeling than when a moose rescue goes as smoothly as this one, and that alone was reward enough for everyone involved.

James Stickles is a Big Game Biologist in DEC's office in Ray Brook.

MEET THE MOOSE



BY EILEEN STEGEMANN AND TONY COLYER-PENDAS

If you've ever seen a moose in the wild, it's a sight you won't easily forget. Enormous, lanky, and muscular, a moose will capture your attention, making you suddenly feel very small, while also commanding your respect.

Once common in New York, moose disappeared from the state in the 1860s, largely due to habitat change and unregulated hunting. By the early 1980s, however, abandoned farmlands and changes in forestry practices had created the areas of new and old growth that moose prefer, and these impressive animals moved in from neighboring states. While moose still aren't common in the state, more people are being treated to the sight of them, especially in northeastern New York.

Description/Diet/Behavior

The moose (*Alces alces*) is the largest and heaviest member of the deer family, and is actually the largest land mammal in New York State. Adult male (bull) moose average 6 feet tall at the shoulder and typically weigh 600 to 1,200 pounds; females (cows) are smaller (500 to 800 pounds).

Most adult male moose have distinctive antlers. The flat, shovel-like antlers of big bulls can measure as much as 4 to 5 feet wide and weigh 25 to 30 pounds each. The size and growth rate of these structures are determined by age, nutrition, and genetics.

After the mating season, males drop their antlers to conserve energy for the winter; they will regrow a new set of antlers in the spring.

Moose are cold-adapted mammals that have long legs allowing them to more easily traverse areas of deep snow, and access vegetation from ground level to approximately eight-foot high.

Their fur consists of two layers, a thick undercoat, and long, hollow guard hairs, which help to keep them warm in the

coldest temperatures. Moose also have a single noticeable hump on their shoulders, and horse-like heads, with a flap of skin that hangs beneath their chins. This skin flap, called a bell, is very pronounced on males. Moose also vary in color from light brown to dusty black, with faces that are generally dark brown or black on bulls, and light brown on cows. In addition, cows have a white patch of skin under their tails.

Though nearsighted, moose have keen senses of smell and hearing to warn them of potential danger. Their long legs allow these large animals to run through the forest quickly, at speeds up to 35 mph. Good swimmers, moose are known to swiftly move through the water for many miles. A moose tail is too short to swish away insects, but when black flies and mosquitoes torment them, moose may nearly submerge themselves in water or roll in mud to acquire a protective coating.

Depending on the season, moose are found in a variety of habitats, including mixed conifer and

hardwood forests, brush, beaver flows, and other wetland areas. They seek out areas with plenty of cover and nutritious food. Moose require access to both young forest for food and mature forest for shelter and cover. Cows with calves are often near water, which offers a ready escape from predators, aquatic plants and woody browse for food, and a nice place to cool off during hot summer days.

Primarily browsers, moose eat large amounts of leaves, twigs, and buds, and in summer, aquatic vegetation. Willows, birches, aspens, maples, firs, and viburnums are their preferred foods. A healthy adult moose can eat 40 to 60 pounds of browse (vegetation, twigs, etc.) daily. Like deer, moose lack upper incisors, and they strip off browse and bark rather than snipping it neatly.

Salt is an important nutrient requirement for moose. In winter, moose may get their salt from the wet areas along highways where road salt accumulates. Throughout summer, moose feed heavily on sodium-rich aquatic plants.

Life History

Moose breed in the fall, generally from mid-September through mid-October. Both bulls and cows are sexually mature by 1½ -years of age. However, older, more mature animals are typically more successful at breeding, more fertile, and better at raising young. After an eight-month gestation period, cows usually give birth in late May or early June. Young cows typically have one calf, while mature cows may have twins or, on rare occasions, triplets. Calves are reddish brown and weigh 20 to 25 pounds at birth, but will weigh 300 to 400 pounds by fall.

Calves are weaned at about six months, but remain with their mother for one year, when she drives them off shortly before her next calf is born.

Unlike most other deer species, moose do not form herds and are generally solitary animals, though several moose may gather near streams and lakes to feed and share favorable habitat.

Due to their large size and strength, adult moose have no natural predators in New York State. However, predators of young, sick, or injured moose include black bears and coyotes. Typically, moose die from vehicle collisions, accidents in the wild (drowning, falls, etc.), disease, starvation, or old age. Unlike most hooved, domesticated animals, moose cannot digest hay, and feeding it to a moose can be fatal.

Since 2007, DEC has conducted surveys to assess New York State's moose population. Results of these surveys show that the number of moose in New York has been increasing. Re-establishment of moose is a welcomed addition to New York's biodiversity, and a testament to sustainable forestry and wildlife management practices. However, moose may endanger themselves and people when they move across highways or into developed areas. Balancing the needs and benefits of moose with public safety and the protection of property is a goal of DEC.

Eileen Stegemann is the Managing Editor and **Tony Colyer-Pendas** is an Assistant Editor with *Conservationist* magazine.

Did You Know?

- A mature male moose is called a bull; a mature female a cow; and a young moose a calf.
- Newborn moose calves can stand up the first day.
- Moose can move each ear and each eye independently.
- A moose's home range varies from 5 to 50 square miles.
- Moose can store over 100 pounds of food in their stomachs.



How We Count the Fish in the Sea

BY JESSE HORNSTEIN

Have you ever wondered how scientists figure out the size of fish populations?

If I told you that we are 95 percent sure that a population of fish included 10.1 to 16.3 million individual fish, would you believe me?

Some people will accept scientific data at face value, but others may question the science of fisheries management and, consequentially, the fishing regulations set for commercial and recreational fisheries. This skepticism and confusion is likely attributed to the way we talk about and explain fisheries.

Abstract terms such as maximum sustainable yield, fishing mortality, and yield per recruit are terms that may be used to describe the status of fish populations. Many people aren't familiar with the research that goes into fisheries management, or the terms used to summarize the health of a fish population, which may lead them to question the results.

Additionally, our own fishing experiences may influence our opinion on what we consider a healthy fish population. For example, if I catch fish every time I go fishing, it may lead me to believe that the fish population is healthy. The same goes for the opposite scenario. However, our personal experience and knowledge of a fishery may not reflect the fish population as a whole. This may cause additional hesitation in accepting the results of a fish population assessment, especially when it contradicts your opinion.

What if a doctor told you that he or she was 95 percent sure that a medication would treat a disease you had; would you take it? In my case, I'm already filling the prescription.

The truth is, the science behind medicine is similar to the science behind fisheries. The steps and process taken to estimate the size of a fish population are much like the research behind any medication you have ever taken.

While by no means will I attempt to cover all the intricacies of fisheries or medical research, my hope is that after reading this, you will have a better understanding of how fish populations are estimated and the process behind the research. And hopefully, you will be more willing to accept the results of a fishery population assessment, like you would if a doctor prescribed you a pill.

Step 1: Describe a Problem or Question to Study and Collect Background Information

To start, the first thing we need to do is come up with a question we want to study. For the sake of this article, our medical researcher seeks to design a drug to limit the growth of a disease, and a fishery biologist wants to determine the size of a population of fish.

Background research often starts by exploring documents or studies that were previously conducted. Medical researchers may seek to understand the biology of a specific disease, the types of tissue it attacks, what environmental conditions it prefers, and how it reproduces or spreads.

Fishery biologists will investigate what we call the “life history” of the fish species. This is simply a fancier term for the biology of the fish. A fishery biologist will study things like how long a fish lives, how fast it grows, its environmental preferences, when it matures, and how many offspring it can produce.

Although this type of research is generally a review of existing literature, it can also be obtained through hands-on laboratory experiments and field research.

Step 2: Formulate a Plan to Collect Additional Information

Following the initial background research, we need to formulate a plan to obtain the additional information we need. A medical researcher may plan a study to design various formulas of drugs to determine their effectiveness, safety, and reproducibility. This type of medical research is called “preclinical” research, which is accomplished by scientists in laboratory tests and trials. After this stage is complete, “clinical” research begins and the drugs are tested on humans to understand potential side effects, their effectiveness, and proper dosages.

As a fishery biologist, we want to understand how big or small a fish population is so that we can manage the fishery appropriately. To do this, we design and conduct surveys. There are two types of fishery data that are collected: fishery dependent and fishery independent.

Much like the research done in preclinical trials, fishery independent data is collected by scientists from designed surveys or studies, *without* the involvement of stakeholders or public input. An example of this is the Western Long Island Juvenile Striped Bass Survey conducted by DEC, which tracks the abundance of first-year (age one) striped bass in New York’s western saltwater bays and estuaries.

Similar to clinical trials, fishery dependent data is collected from people. In this case, those people are commercial harvesters and recreational anglers. For instance, we may collect harvest and catch information through required reports, dockside interviews, sampling fish markets, and volunteer recreational cooperative angler programs. This information is used to determine how many fish are being caught, released, or kept, and what the length, weight, and age of these fish are.

Whether it is fishery dependent/independent data or preclinical/clinical medical research, both types of information are needed to provide the most complete understanding of the research question being studied. For example, medical researchers may be confident that a drug they have run trials on in the preclinical phase will be effective at limiting disease growth. However, if during clinical trials, they discover the opposite, additional research is needed. If a fishery independent survey records an abundance of juvenile fish, it is expected that this will be reflected in the fishery dependent data collected from commercial reports and recreational surveys as the fish grow to legal size.



Step 3: Analyze the Results

After the data collection process of a research study is completed, the results are analyzed using different types of statistics to determine trends and the significance of the results. This provides us with a better understanding of what the data means.

Information collected by medical researchers will help them understand if their drug had an impact on stopping disease growth, what types of side effects people experienced, if the drug is safe, and how people fared on the drug compared to those taking a pill containing no medication (i.e., the placebo). Through statistical analysis, they may be able to say they are 95 percent confident that some dosage of a drug will be successful in preventing further disease growth in patients, based on the results of the study.

Similarly, a fishery biologist will use a mathematical model to understand the size and status of a fish population. Because we cannot see or count every fish easily, mathematical models are tools used to help us estimate the size of a fish population and understand the impact fisheries have on them. These models synthesize the data we collect about the biology of the fish and the fishery independent/dependent survey data to provide an estimate of the size and status of the fish population. Output from this analysis allows a fishery biologist to say he or she is 95 percent confident a population of fish is within a quantitative range—for example, between 43.2 to 56.1 million fish.

Step 4: Report Conclusions

The last step in this process involves reporting the results and conclusions of the research. Medical research is reviewed by an independent panel of scientists and the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to critique the merit and findings of the study. If it is determined that the medication is safe and effective, provides the benefit it is intended to, and meets all the necessary FDA criteria, it will become available for public use.

When fishery biologists assess a fish population, they are performing what is called a “stock assessment.” Results of the study are put in a stock assessment report, which

details all the information collected and the resulting population size determination. This report is reviewed by an independent panel of scientists to evaluate the merit and conclusions drawn from the assessment. If it is approved by the reviewers, this information is used by fishery managers to set a “sustainable level of catch,” and may lead to adjusting fishing regulations—like bag and size limits, or fishing seasons—to maintain healthy fish populations.



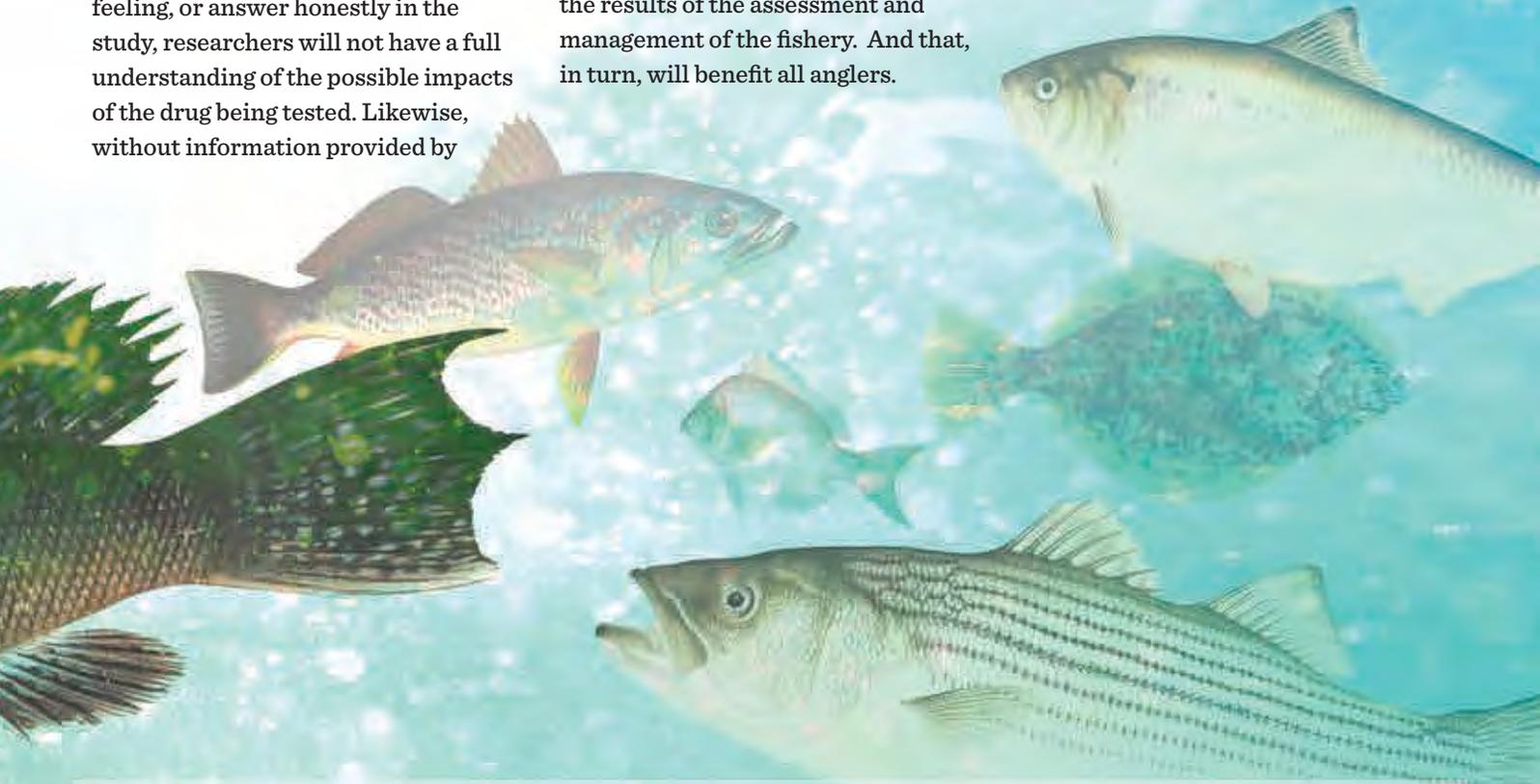
Final Thoughts

Public involvement in fisheries is critically important in order to accurately assess a fish population. In medical research, if people do not provide information on how they are feeling, or answer honestly in the study, researchers will not have a full understanding of the possible impacts of the drug being tested. Likewise, without information provided by

commercial and recreational anglers, fishery biologists will be missing a valuable portion of the data, resulting in an inaccurate assessment. Thus, the more people that participate and provide accurate data, the better the results of the assessment and management of the fishery. And that, in turn, will benefit all anglers.

Author's note: Common side effects of a healthy fish population include catching lots of fish and pure enjoyment.

Jesse Hornstein is a fisheries biologist in DEC's Marine Resources office in East Setauket.



STAFF PROFILE

Jesse Hornstein—The Lure of Marine Life

When you grow up on the south shore of Long Island, you're often drawn to the water. Jesse Hornstein is no exception. In his youth, Jesse would spend his summer days fishing or crabbing at local piers, lured by the excitement and anticipation of what might bite the hook next.

Based on his experiences, he took an elective marine biology course in high school and realized he "could do this as a job," and went on to earn a bachelor's degree in environmental science and then a master's degree in marine science from Stony Brook University.

He was hired as a fish and wildlife technician at DEC's Division of Marine Resources in 2007, then went on to graduate school, before returning to the same position in 2010. During the last decade he has worked as a marine biologist in various DEC units, including shellfish management, diadromous fisheries (where fish migrate between freshwater and saltwater), and his current position as a unit leader in the artificial reefs/marine fishing access unit.

Jesse is responsible for an array of critical tasks, ranging from obtaining reef permits, monitoring reefs, and promoting reef programs. One of the exciting aspects of his job is using an underwater Remote Operated Vehicle to monitor the

development of a reef, as well as the species that inhabit it and the abundance of fish on the reef.

Recognizing that much of his job involves technical information, Jesse always tries to make fisheries science and management understandable to the public. As illustrated in the accompanying article, he likes to compare it to a topic that people are more familiar with—like medical research—to illustrate its purpose and goals.

It's no surprise that Jesse enjoys being outdoors, whether it's fishing, working on his house, or introducing the world and its wonders to his two-year-old son. He says that "any day he is out on the water (for work or pleasure) is a good day...there's something special about it, the salty air, and the marine wildlife."

One day, as Jesse and others were pulling in a net full of striped bass as part of a survey, a passerby commented that "they pay you to do this, that is awesome." Jesse couldn't agree more.





A NEW YORK SNOWMOBILER HITS THE TRAILS

BY DOMINIC JACANGELO / PHOTOS PROVIDED BY AUTHOR

I will be the first to admit that I was not born on a snowmobile; I actually came to the sport rather late in life, compared to many of my snowmobiling friends. I first learned about snowmobiling in the early 1980s when my boss, who had a farm in Delhi, Delaware County, showed me the sleds he owned. There was no official trail system there, and riding consisted of cruising around the farm. I remember being intrigued and thought it sounded like fun.

My reintroduction came in the mid-1990s, when I rode a Ski-Doo 440 two-up sled as part of the work I was doing at that time. I was a New York State Parks employee, and the agency's snowmobile program director invited me to take a trip with him out to Allegany for Winterfest. It was the perfect excuse to hide from higher-ups, as there was no phone service or even beer service in Allegany State Park at the time. I remember looking clearly up a gas line right-of-way (ROW) that seemed like it went straight uphill. My director advised me to, "Go for it, and if you start sliding downhill just 'bail out' and don't worry about it." So, I went for it and reached the top. By the time I got there, I was hooked, and made a vow to get back to the sport as soon as life allowed.



On Tug Hill in sight of the windmills with NYSSA President Rosanne Warner and Craig LaPlante.



Safety first -
avoid riding alone

Like many snowmobile households, I own two sleds—one that I ride and one that my son rides whenever we get that chance to ride together. It is a unique bonding opportunity that I wish more parents had a chance to do with their children. My son is grown and out of the house now, but we've been riding together since he was 10 years old.

I remember a ride with him in the Pulaski/Altmar, Oswego County, area along with other riders from the New York State Snowmobile Association (NYSSA) Board of Directors. That day, I learned that my son rides much better than I do! He rode with the more skilled riders, while I rode with the old folks. Another memorable ride was near Chautauqua. My friend, Ray, invited me out to experience the area. He suggested that I take a ride with his daughters and I thought, "I can handle that." He failed to tell me, however, that his two grown daughters were basically "born on a sled" and could outride their spouses, and, of course, me.

Chautauqua has many gas-line ROWs that make perfect trails—long and straight, with a jog once every couple of miles. I don't think these two young women know what a leisurely ride is. The whole way felt like a speed test as we passed through several State Forests on our way from Mayville to Cherry Creek for lunch. The scenery was spectacular; the forests were gorgeous, with a tapestry of snow draped from branches of various conifers.

It was what happened on the return trip that made this excursion even more memorable. My glasses were warm and the air was cold, so the glasses completely fogged over just a couple of minutes into the ride back. I was temporarily blinded and soon found myself getting "sucked into" the soft, deep snow as my sled did a slow rollover to the right.

My trail guides came running up to me a minute later. They were concerned that I was hurt and asked me why I wasn't moving. In fact, I was just laughing too hard to move. Frankly, I felt like a beached whale, with no place

to get footing in the more than three-foot-deep snow. Thankfully, there were no pictures that would embarrass me in perpetuity.

For many years now, I do at least one ride each year with Jim Jennings, the former director of NYSSA. We have ridden from Long Lake to Inlet, via the Seventh Mountain Lake Trail; traveled from Horseshoe Lake through most of the St. Lawrence system; and most recently, ridden from Speculator over to the Salisbury Ridge Runners. Jim rides at a comfortable pace, which I like, as it allows me to take in much of the scenery. On the ride up to St. Lawrence, he treated me to a view from the top of Little Blue Mountain. It seems like our rides would be a little more than 100 miles out and back. Just long enough for me, short for some others, and maybe excruciating for a new rider.

Today, I am the Executive Director of NYSSA, the umbrella organization of the 220 local snowmobile clubs in New York and the primary advocate for the state's snowmobiling community. NYSSA is actually the largest snowmobile association in the world, with more than 50,000 members.

New York State has thousands of miles of trails for snowmobiling. These trails cross through both public and private land, creating a huge network to be explored. (See Box on page 15.)

NYSSA spends a good deal of time educating both snowmobilers and landowners on topics ranging from rider safety, to the legal and proper use of trails, and how to enjoy the sport while respecting others and our natural resources. It is important that snowmobilers stay on a trail because that's the safest place to ride. Most snowmobile trails have been prepared and signed, with the goal of making it as safe as possible. In fact, on average, there are more accidents off a trail, than on a trail.

For snowmobilers, landowners are our most valuable asset. Without their selfless act of allowing a trail on their property, there would be no trail system. NYSSA's efforts are frequently focused on ensuring that landowners are

fully insulated from lawsuits resulting from allowing snowmobile use of their property. New York's Recreational Use Statute and the general liability insurance policy that our association acquires for all landowners and clubs in the state helps ensure that landowners are comfortable allowing snowmobile use of their property.

No matter what the perception is about snowmobilers, I have learned that snowmobiling is a social sport. Riding alone is never a good idea, while riding with a small group is always fun.

I have been fortunate to have had the opportunity to ride in many areas of the state. I have ridden from Chautauqua County to Clinton County, where you can clearly see how this sport contributes more than \$868 million to our State's winter economy, much of that in areas that could use the infusion of winter cash. There are also several snowmobile destination areas around the state, including Chautauqua, Tug Hill, and Old Forge, that offer amazing opportunities. I have come back from each of those areas with a story to remember. It is those stories and experiences that make snowmobilers go out for a ride, time and time again.

For an adult to ride legally in New York, it's pretty simple: you need a valid snowmobile registration and liability insurance on the sled you are riding. A snowmobile registration costs \$100, but is discounted to \$45 if you join a club first. All but \$5 of that registration fee goes into the "Trail Development and Maintenance Fund." Those dollars are recycled back to the clubs to maintain the trail system. It takes about 10 minutes to join a club and get your NY registration, both can be done online.

Snowmobiling in New York State is made easier because of the 220 snowmobile clubs and their volunteers who develop and maintain the trail system each year. Clubs are the social fabric upon which the trail system exists. Without these clubs and their volunteers, there would be no trail system.

There are snowmobile clubs that you can join from Long Island to Grand Island. It is best to join a club and volunteer where you ride. My club is the Grafton Trail Blazers, over on the Rensselaer Plateau. It's a medium-size club, with around 250 members, and maintains about 25 miles of trails. The club embraces youth safety education and introducing snowmobiling to new riders. Each year, members host a "Take a Friend" snowmobiling program at the Grafton Lakes Winter Fest event. Besides actually riding, nothing gives me a greater reward than putting a happy face on someone who rode a snowmobile for the first time.

The snowmobile season starts when New York's big game hunting season ends. There is no law stating this "opening day," but 80 percent of the trail system is located on private land, and those landowners prefer that we not ride on their property until the big game season is over. This often means that clubs cannot get trail



A food stop on Tug Hill accessible only by sled.



The view from Little Blue with a couple of snowmobile friends.



The covered bridge in Salisbury, NY.

signs installed until late December, if they weren't able to get all their work done in the early fall. Most clubs spend far more on trail maintenance than they receive from the trail fund. Fortunately, raffle sales and chicken barbecues help make up the difference.

If you have an interest in becoming a snowmobiler, there are a couple of things you should know. Many people enter the sport by buying a pre-owned sled. There are lots of them out there that you can buy for a fraction of their original list price. Many of today's sleds will last much longer than 5,000 miles, with owners only needing to replace wearable items, like belts, carbides, and sparkplugs. Opening the hood will usually tell you if a sled has been well taken care of. Many four-stroke sleds will go 7,500 miles or more with few or no problems.

Newer sleds are cleaner and quieter than older ones. Don't buy a sled with a modified exhaust—it is illegal and it's a sign that you are purchasing a sled from a "trail jockey." Newer sleds tend to have longer tracks, which make for a more comfortable ride, and they are less likely to get stuck in deep snow. You don't need anything more than a 600 CC in a two-stroke engine or 125 horsepower in a four-stroke. You will be amazed at how few times you will ever exceed the state maximum speed of 55 mph on a trail.

Still wondering if you want to make the investment? Call that friend you know who has more than one sled and ask him or her to take you for a ride. I can almost guarantee that they will offer to sell you that sled. It will allow them to buy a new one, and both of you will be able to enjoy winter adventures.

Dominic Jacangelo is the Executive Director of the New York State Snowmobile Association.

Editor's Note: Snowmobiling is one way to enjoy New York's winter wonderland. Another way to enjoy winter's landscape is cross-country skiing. See the Back Trails essay on page 32 to read about this fun activity.

Snowmobile Safety

SNOWMOBILES ARE POWERFUL, HEAVY MACHINES. FOLLOWING THESE RULES WILL HELP ENSURE THAT RIDERS HAVE FUN AND STAY SAFE.

- If you have not ridden before, take a safety course.
- Never ride alone.
- Always wear a helmet.
- Zero alcohol before and during a ride.
- Stay on the trail, off unfamiliar lakes, and respect landowners' property.
- Ride within your ability; operate at a safe and prudent speed.
- Stay right and share the trail.
- Be prepared for changing trail and weather conditions; bring additional dry, warm clothes and a first aid kit.
- Check your snowmobile to make sure that it's in good working condition.
- Have a small toolkit with you to address any small mechanical issues that might arise.

New York State Snowmobile Trail System

The State Snowmobile Trail System includes more than 8,000 miles of snowmobile corridor trails across the state, crossing both public and private land along the way. The trail system is administered by the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP), and is largely maintained by snowmobile clubs and funded, in part, by a portion of snowmobile registration fees.

There are numerous trails on DEC-managed lands in the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve where riders can experience a wild forest character through a system of seasonal motor vehicle roads and backcountry snowmobile trails. These backcountry trails generally are narrower than the trails on private lands. Snowmobilers can also enjoy riding on more than 1,000 miles of trails located on State Forest lands managed by DEC. Some of these are part of the New York State Snowmobile Trail system, while others are State Forest Trail Systems, which are more local in nature.

For more information, visit DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7718.html.

WINTER

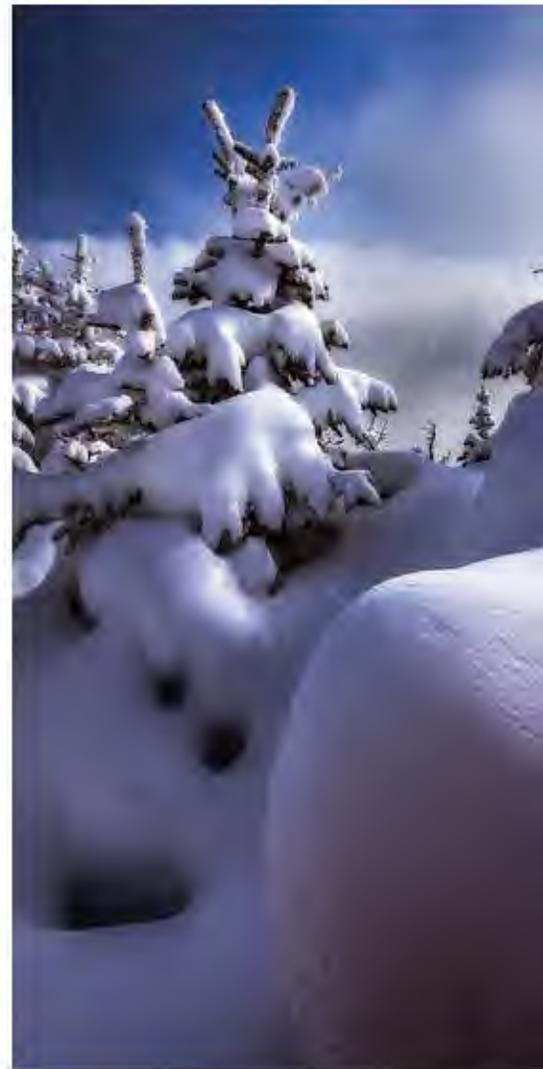
BEAUTY



Reflected colors, by Joey Priola

Living in the Northeast, we are privileged to fully experience the four seasons, and all that they have to offer. Many eagerly anticipate the return of winter each year, and the abundance of activities that come with it. From skiing and snowshoeing to ice fishing and snowmobiling, winter has much to offer. And what child does not eagerly wait for their first snow day, and a chance to spend the day sledding, building snow forts, and having snowball fights?

While some might see winter as something to endure rather than enjoy, nobody can argue the beauty that the season brings. From snow-covered mountains to forests hushed by a blanket of new-fallen snow, the varied landscapes of New York State are transformed into a winter wonderland as the season takes hold. We hope that you enjoy the photos that appear on the next few pages, and whether you love winter or would rather hibernate and miss it, let the beauty of the season remind you why we are so lucky to live where we do.



Nature's own snow globe, by Joey Priola



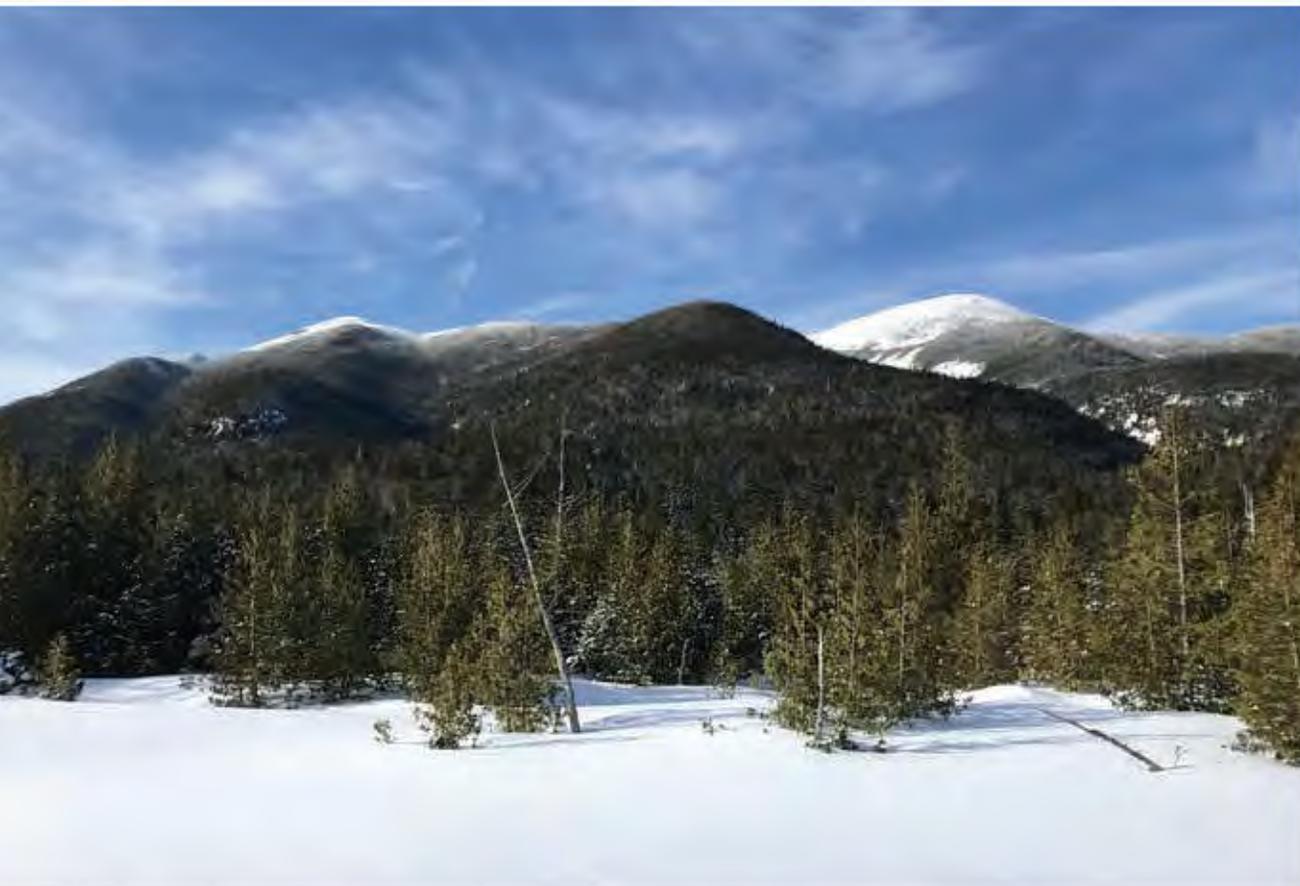
Trail to Belfry Mountain's Fire Tower, by Elaine Taft



Haunting beauty, by Joey Priola



Encased in white, by Joey Priola



McIntyre Range as seen from Lake Colden, by Erin Burns



Hoarfrost in the High Peaks, by Elizabeth Ricci



Ultimate powder, by Joey Priola



Glazed beauty, by Joey Priola



Winter on Whiteface, by Joey Priola



Spectacular Adirondack winter view, by Joey Priola



Winter's Grasp, by Joey Priola



When rainbows freeze, by Joey Priola

On Patrol

Real stories from Environmental Conservation Police Officers and Forest Rangers in the field

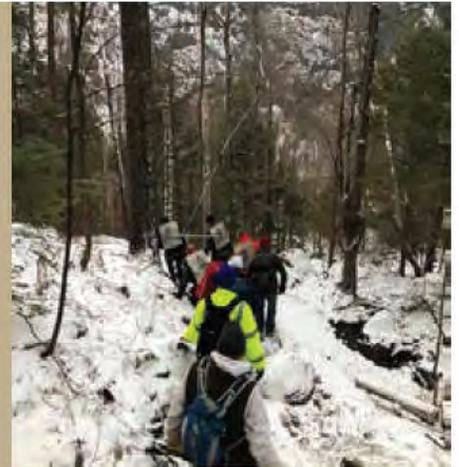


Illegal Taking of Deer—Chautauqua County

On December 12, 2020, ECOs partnered with Town of Ellicott Police to arrest two men charged with the illegal taking of a deer in the town of Poland. Investigators found that one of the men shot a deer from a public road with a spotlight, on posted property, and with a rifle equipped with a silencer. ECO Kinney began investigating after a landowner reported blood and drag marks in the snow near his property. The men were charged with the illegal taking of a deer at night with a light, discharging a firearm from a roadway, using a silencer, and trespassing. The men will be due in court to answer the charges.

Steep Angle Rescue—Essex County

On December 28, 2020, DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch received a report that a man had sustained injuries from a 30-foot fall off the Giant Mt. Ridge Trail. Forest Rangers Lewis, Mecus, Praczkaljo, and Evans responded to the trailhead and determined that icy trail conditions warranted a coordinated response. Five more Forest Rangers, two members of the DEC trail crew, and eight members of the Keene Valley Backcountry Rescue Group assisted with a steep-angle technical rescue. The team stabilized the hiker, who was from Forest Mills, and packaged him into a litter for a two-mile carryout. He was then transferred to Keene Valley Rescue and transported to a local hospital for further medical treatment. DEC urges hikers to be sure to properly prepare and plan before entering the backcountry; visit DEC's Hike Smart NY (www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/28708.html) and Adirondack Backcountry Information (www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7865.html) webpages for more information.



Aviation Rescue—Washington County

On November 14, 2020, DEC's Ray Brook Dispatch was contacted regarding a hiker with a knee injury on the trail near the summit of Black Mountain. Forest Rangers Baker, O'Connor, Donegan, Bode, and Hess responded, along with the Dresden Fire Department and Skenesborough EMS. The Forest Rangers located the hiker, from South Glens Falls, and requested the assistance of New York State Police (NYSP) Aviation. At dusk, NYSP Aviation performed a power-on landing at the summit of Black Mountain, and the injured woman was loaded into the helicopter. The hiker was flown to a local airport, transferred to an ambulance, and transported to the hospital for medical treatment.

Combatting Chronic Wasting Disease

During the 2020 Big Game Hunting Season, DEC ECOs, with the assistance of the NYSP, established checkpoints on roadways in communities along the state borders to help keep Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) out of New York. Officers checked hunters returning to New York State from an out-of-state hunt. Hunters are required to follow State regulations that prohibit the transportation of certain parts of a wharvested deer, moose, or elk into New York. Information about CWD, prevention, and the State regulations can be found at: www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7191.html.

SPECIES SPOTLIGHT

BARRED OWL

BY PATRICK J. CHAISSON
PHOTOS BY AUTHOR UNLESS OTHERWISE NOTED



You will probably hear a barred owl long before you see one. Imagine yourself sitting around a campfire or out for an after-dark stroll in the forest. Suddenly, the woods around you fill with a deep hooting sound. “Who cooks for you,” the mysterious voice seems to ask, “Who cooks for you all?” You have just heard a barred owl.

During the day, this well-camouflaged hunter normally roosts in thick forest cover so it can sleep. However, once darkness falls, the owl likes to come out and chat with friends. This sociable bird is one of New York State’s most vocal wild animals. Apart from its distinctive “who cooks for you” call, the barred owl also utters a mating cry best described as “hoo-WAAHHH.”

Other noises in its vocabulary include piercing shrieks, warbles, groans, and chirps. Known to “talk” or “duet” with other owls, this chatty woodland resident might answer if you imitate its call. And if you are really lucky, it might even fly in close to investigate.

Description

The northern barred owl (*Strix varia*) is a large, stocky forest bird identified by its rounded head, yellow beak, lack of ear tufts, and a medium-length, curved tail. It is the only owl native to New York State that has brown eyes. Its overall color is blotchy brown and white, with rough, dark brown streaks across the chest. Its underparts are mostly marked by vertical brown stripes on a white background. The tail is brown to greyish-brown, with four or five whitish bars.

Both males and females look alike, although the female barred owl is larger than the male. An adult female usually stands 20 inches tall, while the male typically measures 18 inches. A mature male weighs 1.2 pounds on average, whereas the female tends to be heavier, at 1.7 pounds. Males and females have a wingspan stretching 42 to 44 inches.



Habitat, Diet, and Behavior

This secretive bird usually makes its home in deep forests and wooded swamps. It likes to perch high up in large trees for safety, and so it can see prey moving around below. A non-migratory animal, the barred owl normally remains in the same area year-round. Its hunting territory covers one square mile, although this may increase in winter when meat becomes harder to find.

The barred owl hunts by sound alone. Small mammals, like mice and voles, make up most of its diet, although this voracious predator will also eat a variety of cold-blooded animals, such as frogs and salamanders. One has even been spotted grabbing a fish right out of the water with its strong talons.

It likes to swallow food whole. Sometimes, though, the owl carries its catch to a wooded perch where it then shreds the meal into bite-sized pieces before gobbling it down. Indigestible bones and fur are regurgitated later in the form of prune-sized pellets.

While occasionally sighted at dusk or dawn, a barred owl is most active at night. Bright lights (like a campfire) may draw the owl near, as it hunts for large insects that are also attracted to the light. Otherwise, this shy bird will fly silently away if it feels threatened. The great horned owl is its only natural enemy.

Life History

Beginning around February, the male seeks its mate in a noisy nighttime courtship ritual. His deep hooting mating call (that startling “hoo-WAAHHH”) provokes a similar but higher-pitched response from the female. Barred owls breed once a year, generally during the winter months, and stay together for life.

Owl pairs prefer to raise their young in tree cavities, but will also take over an abandoned hawk, crow, or squirrel nest to lay a clutch of two to four eggs. The female sits on its nest for 28 to 33 days, while the male brings food to her.

Owlets begin to fend for themselves about four weeks after they hatch, although the parents sometimes continue to feed them for as long as four months. Barred owls tend to use the same nesting spot year after year.

The lifespan of barred owls in the wild is 10 years, although a captive owl can live as long as 23 years.

The barred owl can be found throughout the eastern half of the United States, as well as in Canada’s southernmost regions. This inquisitive owl is thriving all across New York State’s thickest forestland, so don’t be surprised if you hear one calling out in the woods after dark. It might even want to know the name of your favorite chef.

Patrick J. Chaisson is a naturalist and author who often hears talkative barred owls while tending the campfire at his family’s cabin in the Adirondacks.



Fun Facts

- Wildlife biologists have observed barred owls snatching bats out of the air while in flight.
- Other regional names for the northern barred owl include hoot owl, rain owl, wood owl, eight hooter, black-eyed owl, striped owl, swamp owl, and laughing owl.
- The species’ scientific name (*Strix varia*) describes it very well. *Strix* derives from the Latin word *strizo*, which means scream; and the word *varia* means variegated, which refers to the owl’s feather pattern.
- Barred owls bob their head up and down while hunting; this helps them estimate the distance to their prey.
- Fossil evidence of barred owls dating back 11,000 years has been discovered in Ontario, Canada, as well as in Florida and Georgia.



THE GEMS
in
The Gunks

Natural Beauty and Outdoor Recreation
Preserved and Open to the Public

BY ROBERT S. DREW

As you travel along the New York State Thruway, in the vicinity of New Paltz, Ulster County, a long, narrow ridge appears to the west. This ridge, with an elevation over 2,000 feet, is part of the upper portion of the Shawangunk Mountains (known affectionately as the “Gunks”).

The Gunks are made of a very durable, very old conglomerate rock, formed under intense pressure and heat more than 400 million years ago. The rock subsequently shifted upward and buckled, exposing even older shale and causing huge blocks of the conglomerate to break off in clean fracture lines. This left vertical cliffs, comprised of tough, white-colored rock, that are very attractive to rock climbers, who consider the Gunks to be some of the best rock-climbing in the U.S.

In addition to its spectacular rock formations, the Gunks are noted for windswept edges in the lower elevations, fast-flowing mountain streams, several waterfalls, and a series of small, but beautiful gem-like “sky lakes” that were carved out of rock when the glaciers of the last Ice Age melted, about 10,000 years ago.

Three of the lakes are located within 10 miles of each other in the northern portion of the Gunks—easily accessible from New Paltz to the east, or from Rondout Valley to the west (via Route 44/550, which cuts across the ridge). Lake Mohonk is to the north, Lake Minnewaska is in the middle, and Lake Awosting (the largest lake) is to the southwest. Each lake is unique, but all feature vertical rock ledges—some rising as high as 60 to 150 feet—as well as huge rock overhangs, and lower elevations that offer designated swimming and non-motorized boating access.

Imagine a place with pristine “sky lakes” and scenic cliffs, carriage roads revealing a rich history, and amazing opportunities for hiking and climbing, as well as swimming and boating. That place exists in an area the Native Americans called Minnewaska—meaning “good waters”—and it’s within a short drive of millions of New Yorkers.

Early Development

Development for lodging, and the use of the large, undeveloped natural areas for hiking and carriage trails, dates back to 1869. That's when identical twins Alfred and Albert Smiley opened a modest-sized hotel on Lake Mohonk, offering room and board from May to November.

Over the years, the wood-and-stone hotel at Mohonk was winterized and expanded into a Victorian "castle." It is now several stories high, with many balconies, wood-burning fireplaces, and unusual architectural features.

The Smileys and their descendants also significantly expanded their landholdings, and, at one time, controlled up to 17,000 acres, including Lake Minnewaska and adjacent lands that are now part of the Minnewaska State Park Preserve.

Following the expansion of the Mohonk Lake resort, the Smiley brothers split their landholdings and two large wooden "Catskill" type hotels were built at Lake Minnewaska: the Cliff House (1879) on a high ridge to the east, and the Wildmere (1887) at a slightly lower elevation to the west, on the edge of a cliff overlooking the lake. Relatively small—just 36 acres—Lake Minnewaska sits at an elevation of 1,652 feet. Steep cliffs and overhanging rock formations offer easy hiking trails around both lakes, providing enjoyable recreation for individuals and families.

For many years, the resort hotels operated in a friendly manner, with guests from one hotel sometimes taking a carriage ride to the other for afternoon tea or other outdoor pleasures. But the Minnewaska story got more complicated in 1955, when descendants of the Smiley family sold their Minnewaska lands (but not the Mohonk House) to Kenneth Phillips, the general manager of the property.



80321 WILDMERE HOUSE FROM MID-CLIFF, LAKE MINNEWASKA, N. Y.



495 Cliff House, Lake Minnewaska, N. Y., Shawangunk Mts.



A Property in Trouble

Despite the efforts of the Phillips family, the Minnewaska property was losing money over the years and the family-run business declared bankruptcy in 1971. Through direct purchase and conservation easements, the Palisades Interstate Park Commission acquired approximately 8,600 acres in 1971 and 1977, including Lake Awosting. Subsequent purchases from other landowners expanded state-owned holdings to 10,000 acres.

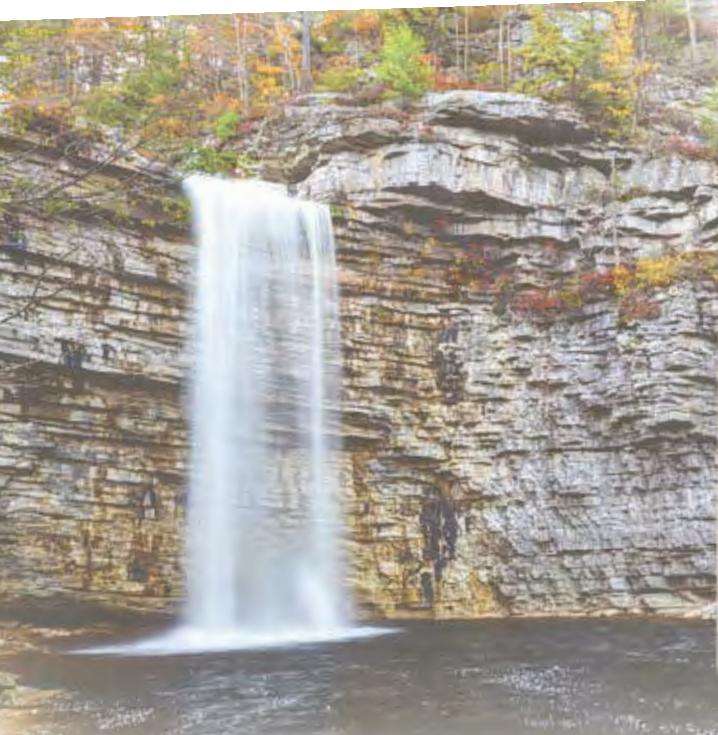
However, Phillips retained the lands surrounding Lake Minnewaska and sought a buyer to redevelop the site into a modern resort. In 1979, the Marriott Corporation entered into a conditional sales agreement to buy the site, planning to build a 450-room hotel and conference center where the Wildmere Hotel was located, expand the golf course to 18 holes, and construct 300 condominiums atop the former site of the Cliff House. Before Marriott could obtain permits, DEC held public hearings in 1980 and 1981.

Hearing participants fell into three general categories: those in favor of the project on economic grounds; those opposed outright to any new private development at the lake, especially condos; and a group generally in favor of the new hotel and other aspects of the proposed project, with proper controls during development, but not condos. Following then-DEC Commissioner Robert Flacke's ruling on June 2, 1981, Marriott withdrew its offer. Whether all the lands around Lake Minnewaska should be in public domain remained an issue. After considerable negotiations, the Palisades Interstate Park Commission purchased the property to be included as part of Minnewaska State Park Preserve.



Recreate Responsibly

Remember during the COVID pandemic to recreate responsibly to protect yourself and others. For more information, visit DEC's website at www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/119881.html.



DEC Helping to Protect Natural Resources and Birds in the Gunks

During the past 30 years, DEC has played a critical role in conserving natural resources in the Shawangunk Ridge. State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) monies were used to acquire and manage more than 6,000 acres of land, including Huckleberry Ridge State Forest, Graham Mountain State Forest, Wurtsboro Ridge State Forest, Roosa Gap State Forest, Shawangunk Ridge State Forest, and Witch's Hole Multiple Use Area. These properties provide public access for hiking, camping, winter sports, and hunting and trapping. In addition, there is a designated DEC Bird Conservation Area (BCA) at Minnewaska State Park—a high priority area for biodiversity conservation—where visitors can easily view birds of the forest in a scenic natural setting, including a pair of endangered peregrine falcons that nest on the cliff face.

An Area Preserved

The potential sale of these lands reawakened public awareness. Today, nearly four decades later, it's clear to visitors that the Gunks have been well preserved and maintained—but it's a continuing process of stewardship.

The Mohonk House remains a thriving, first-class destination resort and conference center, and is listed as a National Historic Landmark. The property includes the hotel perched on the cliff overlooking the lake, a spa, a greenhouse and formal gardens, a nine-hole golf course, several tennis courts, and swimming and boating on the lake.

The lands between Mohonk and Minnewaska are part of more than 8,000 acres maintained by Mohonk Preserve, Inc. The area hosts the largest nonprofit nature preserve in the state, offering hiking and mountain biking trails, areas for rock climbing, and a beautiful visitor's center on Route 44/55, between New Paltz and Minnewaska.

Minnewaska State Park Preserve contains miles of trails and carriage roads and offers opportunities for horseback riding. And the 80-foot-tall Awosting Falls, located a short

distance from the State Park entrance, is a not-to-be-missed attraction (see Editor's Note). As a result of a partnership with the Open Space Institute (OSI), the Park has grown in size and seen several major improvements, including the opening of the new Visitor's Center at Minnewaska and the renovation of miles of carriage roads. The Nature Conservancy has also played an instrumental role, coordinating with OSI to acquire and manage the 5,000-acre Sam's Point Preserve and creating a new visitor's center on the site, prior to the transfer of these scenic lands to State Parks.

Visitors to the area can purchase a day pass that allows them to enjoy thousands of acres of open space along the crest of the Shawangunks. Patrons can enjoy hiking, biking, cross-country skiing, swimming, and other outdoor activities. The space includes lands and waters managed by the Village of Ellenville, the Palisades Interstate Park Commission (which maintains the present day Minnewaska State Park Preserve), the privately-operated nonprofit Mohonk Preserve, and the Mohonk Mountain House, Inc.

Both public and private organizations have been great stewards of these properties. Along with the public, they continue to protect, use, and enjoy the beautiful lands and lakes nestled in the Gunks, while also ensuring future generations will have the same access and opportunities.

Some sites are timeless, and definitely worth the trip.

Robert S. Drew retired as Chief Administrative Law Judge from DEC in 1991. He is an avid collector of new and old postcards, having collected them for more than 65 years. All the postcards reproduced here are from his private collection.

Editor's Note: *Minnewaska State Park Preserve often reaches full visitor capacity. To avoid crowds, visitors should consider going on a weekday or when weather conditions are less favorable. Have a plan ready to visit a different park or trail if the area you want to visit is full.*

For additional information, visit:

Minnewaska State Park Preserve:
<https://parks.ny.gov/parks/127/details.aspx>

Mohonk Preserve:
www.mohonkpreserve.org/



First Day Hikes 2021

This year marked the 10th anniversary of the State’s First Day Hikes Program, and on New Year’s Day weekend, many New Yorkers celebrated by getting outside and going on a hike. First Day Hike excursions were offered on state lands across New York, providing special and unique experiences. The program was adjusted to ensure a safe experience for all, as participants practiced social distancing and wore masks. More than 300 New Yorkers participated in DEC’s 19 hike offerings, and countless others took first day walks and hikes on their own. It was a wonderful start to the new year.



J. Sherman

Lake Champlain Ice Fishing Survey

DEC is conducting an ice fishing survey on four bays of Lake Champlain—Cumberland, Willsboro, Bulwagga, and South. The surveys began at the start of ice formation (approximately January 1), and will run through ice-out (as late as March 31). Anglers coming off the ice will be asked to provide information about their day of fishing, including target species, number of fish caught, and the size of each fish caught. Participation in the survey is voluntary, and the data gathered will provide DEC fisheries biologists with information about angler use and expectations, while also playing a part in determining future Lake Champlain management practices. To learn more about the 2021-2022 Lake Champlain Ice Fishing Creel Survey, visit: www.dec.ny.gov/docs/fish_marine_pdf/lkchamplaincreelplan.pdf.



Drones Help Fight Climate Change

DEC and the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) are using state-of-the-art drone technology to help reduce climate change by locating and plugging abandoned oil and gas wells that leak methane. Methane is second only to carbon dioxide in its overall contribution to climate change, and reducing its release into the atmosphere is a key component of New York’s nation-leading policies to address climate change. The wells are difficult to find during land-based field surveys, but the drones will fly over the landscape with specialized equipment to create maps to help DEC locate orphaned wells. Sealing these wells is critical to reduce the amount of methane that escapes into the atmosphere.

For more information, visit: www.dec.ny.gov/energy/111211.html.



Wetlands Enhanced

DEC recently completed two projects—installation of two new water control structures and the renovation of an existing water control structure—to enhance the wetlands at Perch River Wildlife Management Area (WMA) in Jefferson County. The structures provide DEC staff the ability to manage water levels and enhance breeding habitat for waterfowl and other water-dependent wildlife. Water level management also assists in improving public access to the WMA. Perch River WMA is comprised of 7,932 acres of wetland and open-water habitats located in the towns of Brownville, Orleans, and Pamela. For information on Perch River WMA, visit: www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/46441.html.

Protecting Water Quality

As part of the State’s commitment to ensure that all New Yorkers have access to clean water, DEC worked with land trust partners to protect water sources in the towns of Alexandria and Pine Plains. In addition to protecting water quality, these projects safeguard water resources for the areas, protect viewsheds, and ensure that land will remain open and viable for agricultural use into the future. The projects were made possible using New York State Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) funding. For more information on the WQIP program, visit: www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/4774.html.



Reducing Greenhouse Gases

On December 15, 2020, New York State finalized regulations required by the Climate Leadership and Community Protection Act (CLCPA), which will help the State reach its goals of reducing emissions 40 percent by 2030 and 85 percent by 2050, faster than any other state. The act also requires the State to reach net zero emissions by 2050 and zero emissions electricity by 2040, and to focus investments on green technology, protect disadvantaged communities, and create jobs. To learn more about the climate change regulations, visit www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/103870.html.



Improve Resiliency and Mitigate Ice Jams

DEC is partnering with the New York Power Authority and New York State Canal Corporation on a new pilot program to help improve resiliency along the Erie Canal and Mohawk River in Schenectady County and to address the complex causes of ice jams in the Mohawk River. Initial efforts this year include testing the ability of tugboats, as well as a newly acquired amphibious dredger to limit the formation of sheet ice upstream of Lock E-7 and the Vischer Ferry Dam. This pilot program is part of the Reimagine the Canals initiative introduced in Governor Cuomo’s 2020 State of the State address to reimagine the Erie Canal to mitigate flooding, enhance irrigation and recreational fishing, restore wetlands, and create and expand recreational activities to boost tourism.



Gone in a Flash

I was doing my dishes and BAM, I see a white spot in my favorite tree. So I grabbed the camera and was able to take one photo before it was gone. It was about four inches long, had a small beak, and a short tail. Can you tell me what it is? VIRGINIA GLEZEN | CORTLAND COUNTY

Based on the photo, it appears to be a northern shrike, which is a songbird that preys primarily on small birds, small mammals, and insects. They are sometimes called “butcher birds” because they will often save food for later by impaling it on thorns or barbed wire. —Jeremy Taylor, Editor, Conservationist for Kids



An Old Marker

We were walking in a friend’s land that abuts the Lincoln Mountain State Forest and we found this marker on the property border. Hoping you can help identify what this was used for and what year it is from. MAISIE WRIGHT | SARATOGA SPRINGS

The sign is more than 50 years old. The Conservation Department became part of the Department of Environmental Conservation in 1970, as the new agency was being created. The Conservation Department used the round blue signs with yellow lettering to designate land classifications and boundary lines. Most of the lands in the State Forest were acquired during the Great Depression and were replanted. —McCrea Burnham, DEC Division of Lands and Forests



A Crappie Moment

I wanted to share this photo of my daughter Cameron with a crappie she caught while we were enjoying some winter fishing. VIRGINIA ACKERKNECHT | STILLWATER

Thanks for the great photo—from the smile on her face, it looks like she was really enjoying herself. Don’t forget to follow all regulations and safety recommendations when out ice fishing; visit our website at www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/7733.html for more information.



Capturing the Perfect Shot

I started out the day looking for snowy owls along Lake Ontario in Western New York. I pulled into a parking lot along the shore and noticed approximately 50 cedar waxwings having a feast on juniper berries. I was able to hide behind a transformer box and then crawl closer to capture this picture. When I got back to the car I chuckled, realizing how foolish I must have looked; thankfully no one was around. DAVE LEMKE | CLARENCE

Thanks for sharing this great shot with us! People don’t often realize what it takes to get the “perfect shot.”



Beautiful Berries

I came across this woody vine with white seed pods containing bright red seeds. Quite a pretty sight climbing an old willow along the Lake Ontario State Parkway Trail. I cannot identify it. Can you help?
FRED SAUTER | ROCHESTER

This is Euonymus fortunei, winter creeper, an invasive vine that is common in the Lower Hudson area, Long Island, and a few places around Rochester and Buffalo. It was introduced as an ornamental over 100 years ago, but now causes problems in woodlands, where it can smother wildflower and tree growth. It should be removed. —Steve Young, Chief Botanist, NY Natural Heritage Program



First Steelhead

Here is a picture of my 10-year-old grandson, Luke's, first steelhead—a healthy, 9-pound Cattaraugus Creek beauty. He released it alive. I'm not sure who was more excited, Luke or Boppa.
BOB THARNISH | ELMA, NY

What a great catch! Thanks for sharing the photo with us. We are pleased to hear your grandson had such an exciting time.



Ask the Biologist

Q: I took this picture of a partridge in full strut in the last week of October, near Moravia. He seemed to be courting a hen which was perched on a limb above him. I thought partridge mate in the spring like other birds. Why would he be courting a hen in the fall?—
EDWARD SNYDER | WILLIAMSON

A: *Nice photo! While ruffed grouse breeding behaviors, like drumming and displaying, peak during the spring breeding season, they can occur to a lesser degree throughout the year. The other grouse may have been a hen, but could also have been another male bird, and this bird was being territorial.*
—MICHAEL SCHLAVONE, DEC WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

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Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

Snowfall and Cross-Country Skiing—Perspectives of a Floridian

By Tony Colyer-Pendas

“Only 18 inches,” my son reported, disappointed, after measuring the snowfall.

On December 17, 2020, we received a foot and a half of snow, and my son was disappointed. Other parts of New York State received more—44 inches in Tioga County, 42 inches in Binghamton, and 36 inches in Delaware County—but *only* 18 inches here in the Capital Region. It made me laugh. I know many folks cringe at the thought of that much snow—my former self included—but others, like my son, actually welcome and enjoy that much snow, especially skiers.

Being born and raised in South Florida, snow was an unknown experience to me in my youth. I was too young to remember the one time that it snowed in Miami (January 1977), and it was probably just a dusting. I didn’t grow up skiing, building a snowman, or playing in the snow. On the other hand, I never had to shovel snow off my driveway; not an easy task with 18 inches of snow, even as an adult.

I moved to New York State after college. I quickly discovered that even though I grew up in Florida, I actually enjoy the snow and prefer the cold. Of course, I could do without clearing snow from the driveway, but I know that when it’s cold outside, I can always just add another layer; I’m fine wearing gloves and a hat.

My wife is from Saratoga Springs. She’s been playing in the snow as long as she can remember; she was in her school’s ski club and skied any time she got the chance. She even taught me how to ski, both cross-county and downhill.

I’m not tall, and I quickly learned that when it comes to skiing, having a lower center-of-gravity and being closer to ground has some advantages.

While I love the thrill of downhill skiing, I really enjoy gliding on the snow and the sights and sounds of cross-country skiing. It’s a great way to spend time outdoors in the winter, and there’s nothing like being outside on a clear, sunny day after it snows. I try to identify animal tracks we see on our skiing adventures, and I like the twinkling of more snow landing on a fresh downfall. Plus, there’s nothing like that cup of hot cocoa after spending some time in the snow.

We bought our house about 15 years ago—the property is rectangular and about five acres, bordered by a stream.

The land is mostly flat, with some gentle hills—perfect for cross-country skiing. After a snowfall, we used to ski around our property, just doing laps while avoiding the stream. It’s great exercise and it’s an activity that can be enjoyed by people of all ages and all abilities.

I had to leave the sport of skiing following a car accident. I’m not as agile as I used to be, and I have some trouble with balance. But my wife is a go-getter and loves to keep our son and me active no matter what the season.

This winter, I plan to try some cross-country skiing again. Our son has lived in New York State his whole life; he prefers the cold and loves playing in the snow, so we wanted to introduce him to the sport, and even bought him skis, poles, and boots for Christmas. I look forward to this winter adventure and know he’ll love it—

and I hope to be out there with him enjoying the fun.

Tony Colyer-Pendas is an Assistant Editor of *Conservationist*.



Bring Beauty to Your Land with Trees and Shrubs from DEC's Nursery

Last year, most of us spent much more time at home than usual. Many people seized the opportunity to tackle home projects that improved the function and enjoyment of their space. This spring, why not do the same for your land?

DEC's Colonel William F. Fox Memorial Saratoga Tree Nursery has been providing low-cost seedlings for conservation plantings for more than 100 years. Planting trees improves wildlife habitat, protects water quality, and reduces heating and cooling costs. Trees can also provide a much-needed mental and physical boost for those times when we are stuck at home. You'll be wowed by the number of species that can bring spring flowers and fall colors to your property.

DEC's Nursery has dozens of tree and shrub species available through the annual spring seedling sale, going on now through May 12. Get ready to beautify your property by checking out species, prices, and ordering information on our website at www.dec.ny.gov/animals/9395.html. Note that species are sold in bundles of 25 seedlings or more, with some smaller, mixed species packets available. If 25 is too many, consider splitting an order with a friend to spread the beauty!

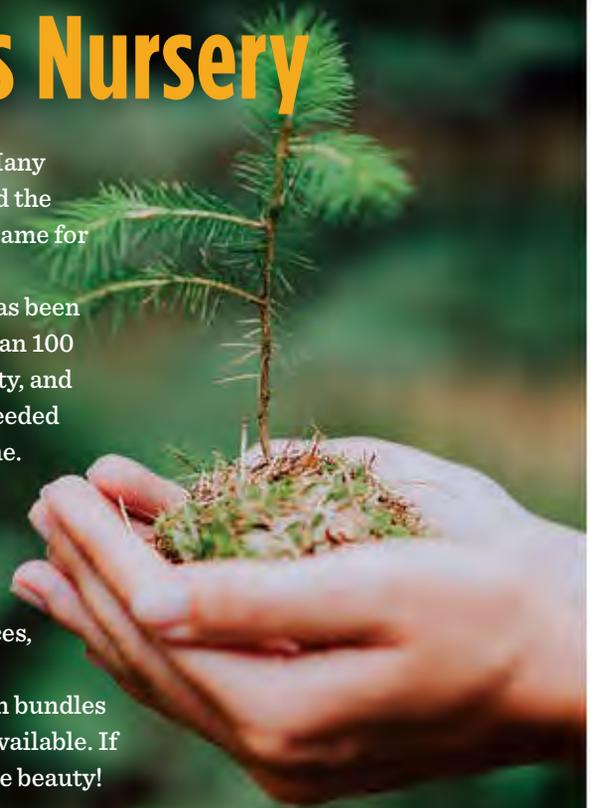


Photo credit: Judy Gallagher



Winterberry

A nursery favorite, winterberry has bright red berries that are a treat for wildlife. This shrub will bring fall color that lasts deep into the winter.



Flowering Dogwood

A popular pick every year, this small tree has flowers that will charm you and your pollinator friends.

WANT FREE TREES FOR YOUR CLASS OR YOUTH ORGANIZATION?

Sign up for the Nursery's FREE School Seedling Program. Any school or youth-based organization in New York State may participate. Applications are accepted now through March 31. Visit our website at www.dec.ny.gov/animals/9393.html to learn more and to apply.



See page 16

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