



A Successful Harvest

I'm submitting some photos of our local berry picking harvest. We find that berry picking is a good social distancing outdoor activity that can provide you with fresh fruit, jelly for home canning, and a good hike for exercise. Does DEC endorse berry picking as an environmentally friendly activity?

MIKE LUKE | POUGHKEEPSIE, NY

Those look delicious. Picking local berries is certainly an environmentally friendly alternative to buying them at the grocery store. If you are picking them on private land, make sure you have the permission of the property owner first. On State land, people can forage for "personal consumption." They can pick berries and eat them themselves, but they can't pick them and sell them or distribute them. Of course, if a plant is protected, that would not apply.



Under Construction

I found this unusual looking nest being built on my neighbors' sill. I was wondering what type of wasp or other insect builds these? I have never seen anything like this before. It starts normal and then has a 1-inch cylindrical shoot hanging down about 15 inches.

JOE LUKER | NEW HARTFORD, NY

This appears to be a bald-faced hornet nest in the early stages of construction. As construction progresses, it should take on the more normal, round appearance.



Ask the Biologist

Q: I have seen many bobcats over the years but never one with this coloring. What are your thoughts?

GERT FEDERICI | CHENANGO COUNTY

A: *It's interesting, I've been sent quite a few pictures of bobcats with minimal spotting lately. I'm not sure why that is. Bobcats, in general, range from very spotted to almost no spots, and we do have a good number in New York that have minimal spotting. Generally, the older animals tend to be a bit darker in color and have less spotting than younger individuals.*

—AMANDA BAILEY, DEC WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST



Birds of a Feather

My husband and I watched two juvenile ruffed grouse make themselves right at home in our Thousand Island (Wellesley Island) cottage garden. They were so comfortable that I had time to grab my camera and shoot photos (with a telephoto lens). It was quite a show! The first one we noticed was flinging dirt every which way, as it took a sand bath, never leaving the depression it created in the garden soil. We didn't see the second one at first, as it was resting in a depression of its own in a shady spot, but then it got up, puffed up its plumage, and went about exploring the garden, at one point walking to within 15 feet of where I was standing.

Based on the ruffed grouse information on the DEC website, we believe we might have witnessed some atypical public behavior by two unusually fearless juveniles.

ERIN GREENE | JEFFERSON COUNTY

These appear to be young birds taking advantage of a "nice spot" (dust bathing and foraging on seeds and insects), who haven't learned to be as wary as their adult counterparts. I wouldn't be surprised if there was an adult hen or other brood mates somewhere in the vicinity.

—MICHAEL SCHIAVONE, DEC WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST



A Great Catch

I thought I would share a picture of a great day of fishing I had in Putnam County with my son and daughter last August. After helping me land a 16-inch rainbow trout on my fly rod, my daughter Juliet landed this beautiful 19 ½-inch brown trout (first trout) on her new spinning rod. This incidentally was her last cast of the day, which she pleaded with me to let her try one more time.

Thank you for the great fishing New York has to offer!

JAMES QUERCIA | HOPEWELL JUNCTION

Thanks for sharing this great photo with us, and congratulations to Juliet on her catch. Fishing really is all about the smiles (see the June/July issue for an article on the topic).

Room With a View

This spring, a pair of ravens built this nest atop our 80-foot tall silo ladder. They successfully raised and fledged three chicks, and all five birds remain in the area. Will they return next year to nest, like our local flock of Canada geese does?

BILL SIEBELS | GOUVERNEUR

Yes, ravens will often use the same nest site in successive years, but not necessarily every year and not necessarily the exact same birds. It is possible that one of the juveniles will return as an adult to use the nest site at some point, unless the adults are still claiming the territory for themselves.



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