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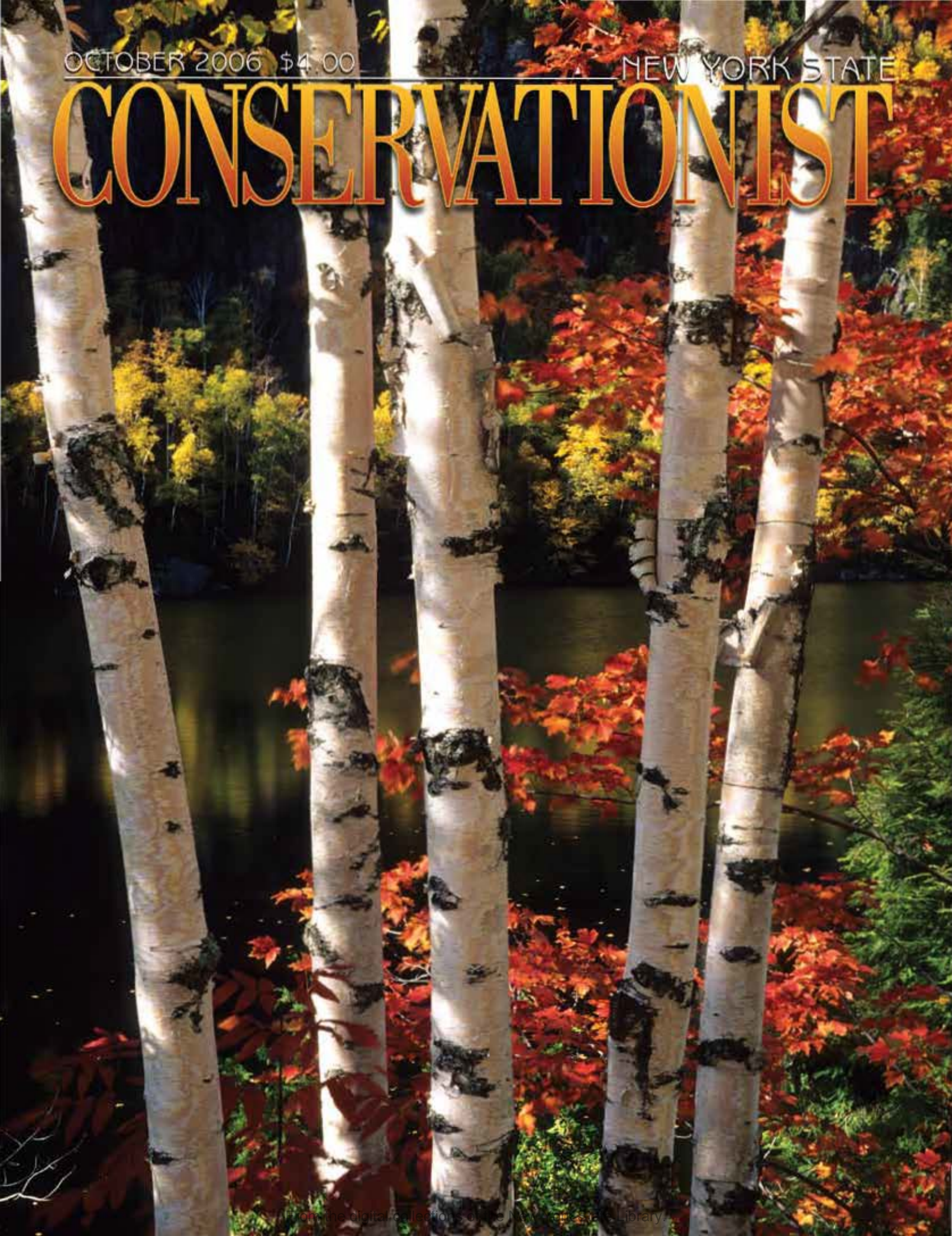

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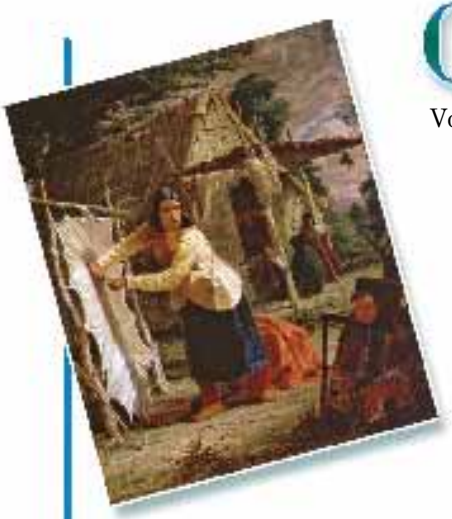

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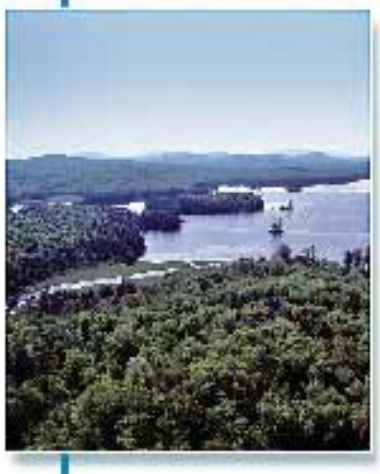

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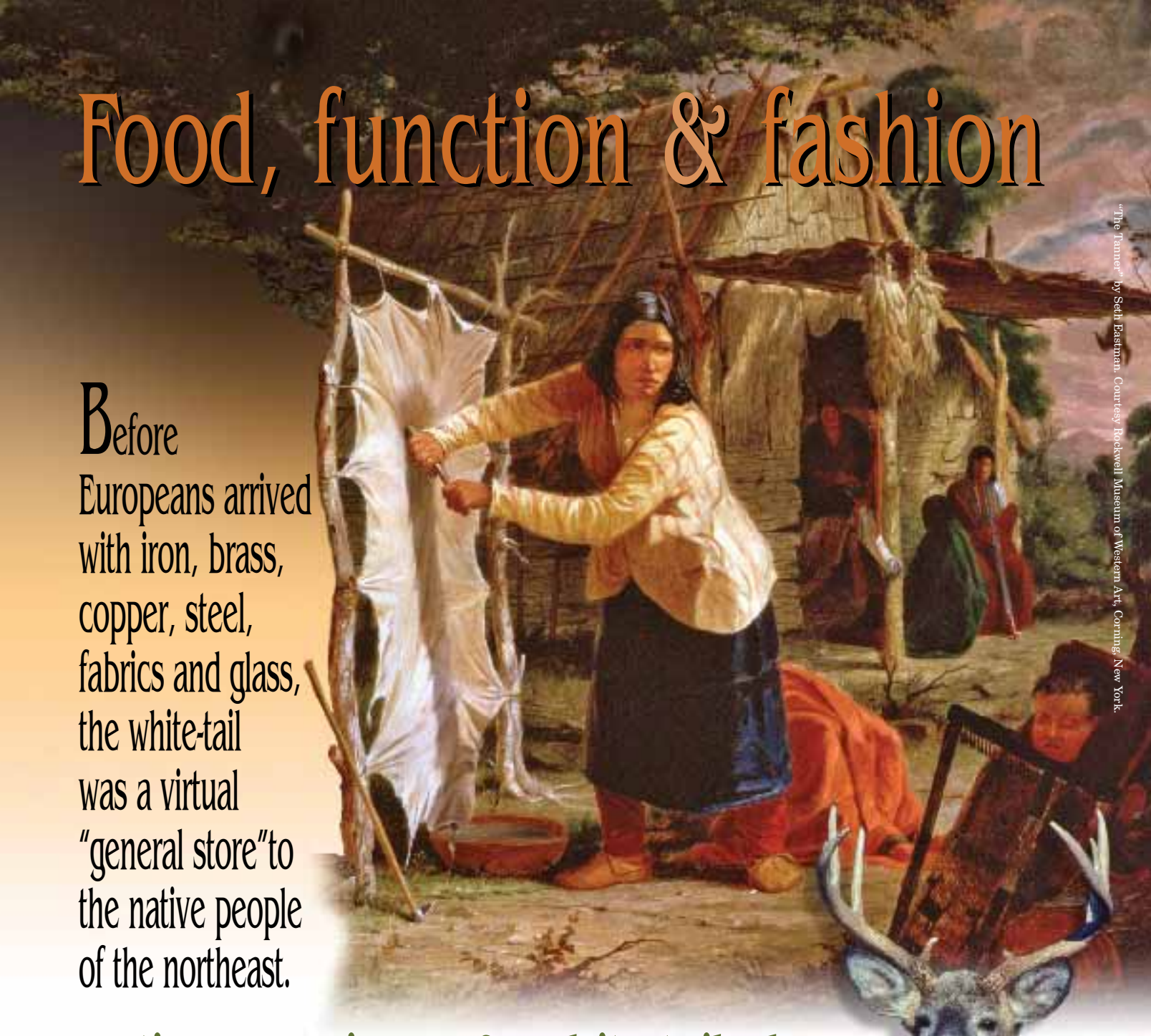
Food, function & fashion



"The Tanner" by Seth Eastman. Courtesy Rockwell Museum of Western Art, Corning, New York.

Before Europeans arrived with iron, brass, copper, steel, fabrics and glass, the white-tail was a virtual "general store" to the native people of the northeast.

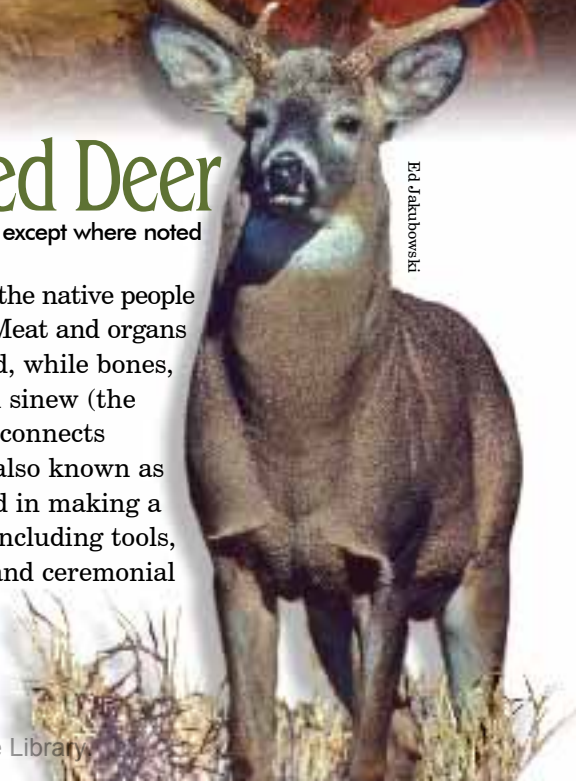
Native Americans & White-tailed Deer

by Paul Trotta

Photos by Jim Clayton except where noted

The lives of Native Americans and white-tailed deer have long been intertwined. To eastern woodland tribes, deer were essential for survival, providing everything from food to weapons. In fact, with the exception of the bison and the Plains Indians, the white-tailed deer probably did more to sustain and nurture Native Americans than any other single animal species.

Before Europeans arrived with iron, brass, copper, steel, fabrics and glass, the white-tail was a virtual "general store" to the native people of the northeast. Meat and organs were used for food, while bones, hides, antlers and sinew (the tough tissue that connects muscle to bone—also known as tendon) were used in making a variety of items, including tools, clothing, arrows and ceremonial implements.



Ed Jakubowski

THE HUNT

Although deer were plentiful, it took skillful hunters to capture enough deer to provide an adequate supply of meat and other goods to sustain the tribe. Hunters would go out in groups, or individually to locate and harvest these animals. Once killed, deer would be butchered and broken down into component parts. Everything that could be turned into functional items was used, and very little went to waste.

A smoked, brain-tanned buckskin shirt.

HIDES

Deer hides were an important source of clothing for Native Americans. After an animal was skinned, the hide was processed by first removing the hair and any residual meat and fat left on the "flesh" side. This was often done after the hide had been stretched out on a rack or frame. Next, the hides were "tanned" by scraping off the epidermis and endoderm (the outer and inner layers of skin), and then rubbing brains into the skin. This "brain-tanning" process resulted in a soft, milky white, and very supple skin, which was used to make clothing and bags. To help repel water and keep the tanned hides soft and supple after exposure to moisture, the brain-tanned skins were smoked on a rack or otherwise suspended over a smokey fire until the oils from the smoke evenly penetrated the skin. This turned the skins a beautiful golden brown color, and gave them a very smokey smell.

An interesting by-product of the tanning process was made by placing hide scrapings in a pot of water and slowly cooking the mix down until a thick and sticky, syrup-like glue was formed. Layers of this glue could be applied to a short stick and allowed to dry, until a relatively thick mass of glue was obtained. This "glue stick" could be carried in a pouch or quiver until it was wetted for use to repair equipment.

Clockwise: ceremonial instruments made from white-tailed deer; pipe (calumet); knee rattle with hooves; rattle with shells; leg bone rattle; a bone whistle atop a rawhide drum.

Stick with glue made from hide scrapings.

Sometimes hides were not put through the tanning process, but simply left on the rack to dry. When this was done, the resulting material was known as rawhide. Rawhide was used for many things including cordage, bindings, bow strings, snowshoe webbing, drumheads, and sheaths for knives.

BONES

Deer bones were cleaned and processed into a wide variety of tools and implements. For instance, the top portion of a skull could easily be made into a spoon, while leg bones were fashioned into knife handles. Longer leg bones were cracked and broken into pieces with a "hammer stone," and then made into sewing awls and needles, and fleshing tools for tanning hides. These longer bones were also used for making rattles by suspending clams, mussels or other shells from leather thongs at the end of the bones.

Bone fragments and pieces were used to produce arrowheads, fish spears and sharply honed knives. Producing these weapons was very labor-intensive and time-consuming, and required rubbing the pieces of bone against gritty blocks of sandstone, known as abrading stones.

SINEW

Sinew, or tendon, is the very tough connective tissue that attaches muscle to bone in most animals. In deer, there are two large tendons that run down each side of the spinal column. Native Americans would remove, clean and separate these tendons into small strings that could either be made into cordage or used as sewing thread. Sinew cordage was used for making bowstrings, and for lashing spear points to spears. Sinew thread was used to sew clothing and moccasins, and as binding material for tying arrowheads and feathers to arrows.

ANTLER

White-tailed deer antler is a very hard material that was difficult to shape using primitive tools. However, their hardness and rigidity made them an excellent material for making certain tools. The larger, basal portion of an antler could be turned into a "billet,"or hammer, to be used to chip stone tools from flint or chert. Antler tines were used as "pressure flakers" to

Above: slate and flint knives with jaw, antler, or bone handles. Below: A rawhide haft.

Below: antler used as chipping tool for stonework; spoon made from top of deer skull.

Above: deer bone fish point; antler arrowhead; bone arrowhead; flint arrowhead; flint drill point. Below: flint point with spear fore-shaft bound by deer sinew; hammer with rawhide hafting.

facilitate removal of smaller finishing flakes, and for making notches in the sides of projectile points and knife blades. These side, or corner, notches made it easier to attach the stone points to wooden shafts or handles. The tips of antlers were also used as arrowheads and daggers.

CEREMONIAL ITEMS

A number of items used in ceremonies, such as drums, rattles, pipes, and whistles, were made from the materials manufactured from deer parts. Drum heads were made from wet rawhide stretched over a frame and allowed to dry. As the rawhide dried, it would tighten around the frame, resulting in an excellent drum. Rattles were made using many raw materials, including leg bones (for handles), and dried hooves and shells for the rattles. Whistles and flutes were made from leg bones, and smoking pipes were decorated with fur and feathers using sinew or rawhide to tie these items to the pipe stem.

Flintknapping enthusiast **Paul Trotta** is DEC's Regional Forester in Stamford.

For more information on primitive technology, visit the following web sites:

- New York State Museum at: www.nysm.nysed.gov/IroquoisVillage/
- The Society of Primitive Technology at: www.primitive.org
- The World Atl Atl Association at: www.worldatlatl.org

If primitive tools interest you, plan on attending the Annual Stone Tool Craftsmen's Show held each year at the High Banks Recreation Area in Letchworth State Park, near Mt. Morris, New York. In 2007, it will be held on August 24, 25 & 26. For more information, send a SASE to:
Genesee Valley Flintknappers Association, P.O. Box 527, Belfast, New York 14711.

LAND FOR THE FUTURE

Jim Clayton

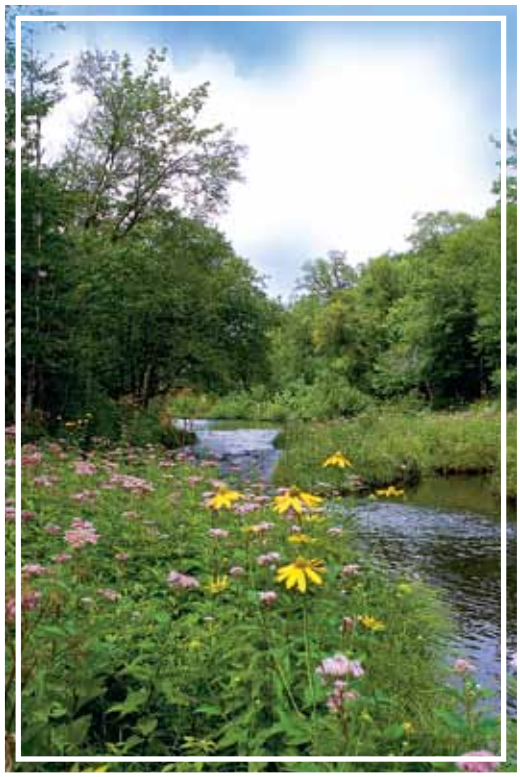
Blue Mountain Lake Islands, Hamilton County. Castle Rock, a popular hiking destination on the north shore of Blue Mountain Lake was added to the Forest Preserve along with 15 undeveloped islands for public use in hiking, fishing, primitive camping and canoeing.

by Jeffrey Mapes

In the past eleven years, New York State has invested almost $600 million to conserve nearly one million acres of open space, including important wildlife habitat, working farms and forests, and recreational resources such as lands for hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, trapping and snowmobiling. The New York State Open Space Conservation Plan serves as the blueprint for protecting New York's diverse open space resources in partnership with local governments, not-for-profit conservation groups and private citizens. This fall, Governor Pataki will sign the fifth edition of the Open Space Conservation Plan, setting the future agenda for open space conservation. As part of this agenda, the state's working forest conservation easement and farmland protection programs will be enhanced to ensure the future economic viability of the state's natural-resource-based economy in the face of ever-increasing development pressures.

Enhancement and consolidation of land holdings within existing state forests, wildlife management areas, forest preserves and state parks will provide expanded public recreational opportunities. Recreational opportunities near the state's urban centers are important to the quality of life of New York's urban residents. The Open Space Plan also makes a priority of stewardship of state and private lands that provide multiple benefits such as maintenance of air and water quality, wildlife habitat, biodiversity, recreation and continued economic success. Through the conservation and stewardship of our natural resources we are creating a lasting outdoor legacy for current and future generations of New Yorkers.

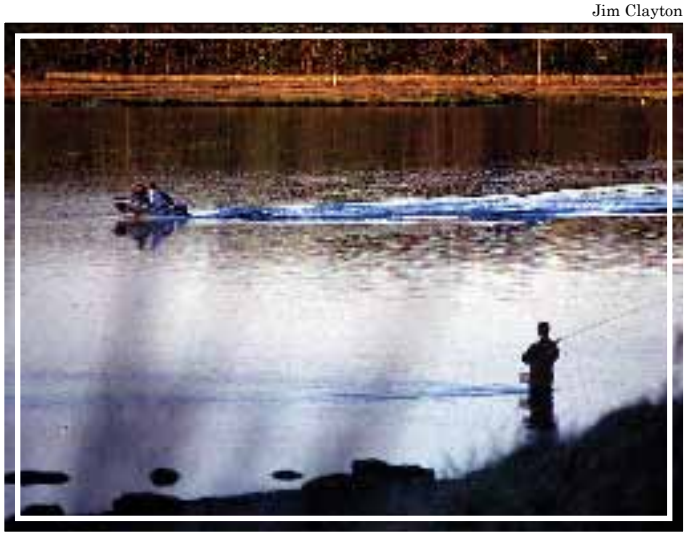
Jeffrey Mapes works for DEC's Division of Lands and Forests in Albany.



Jim Clayton

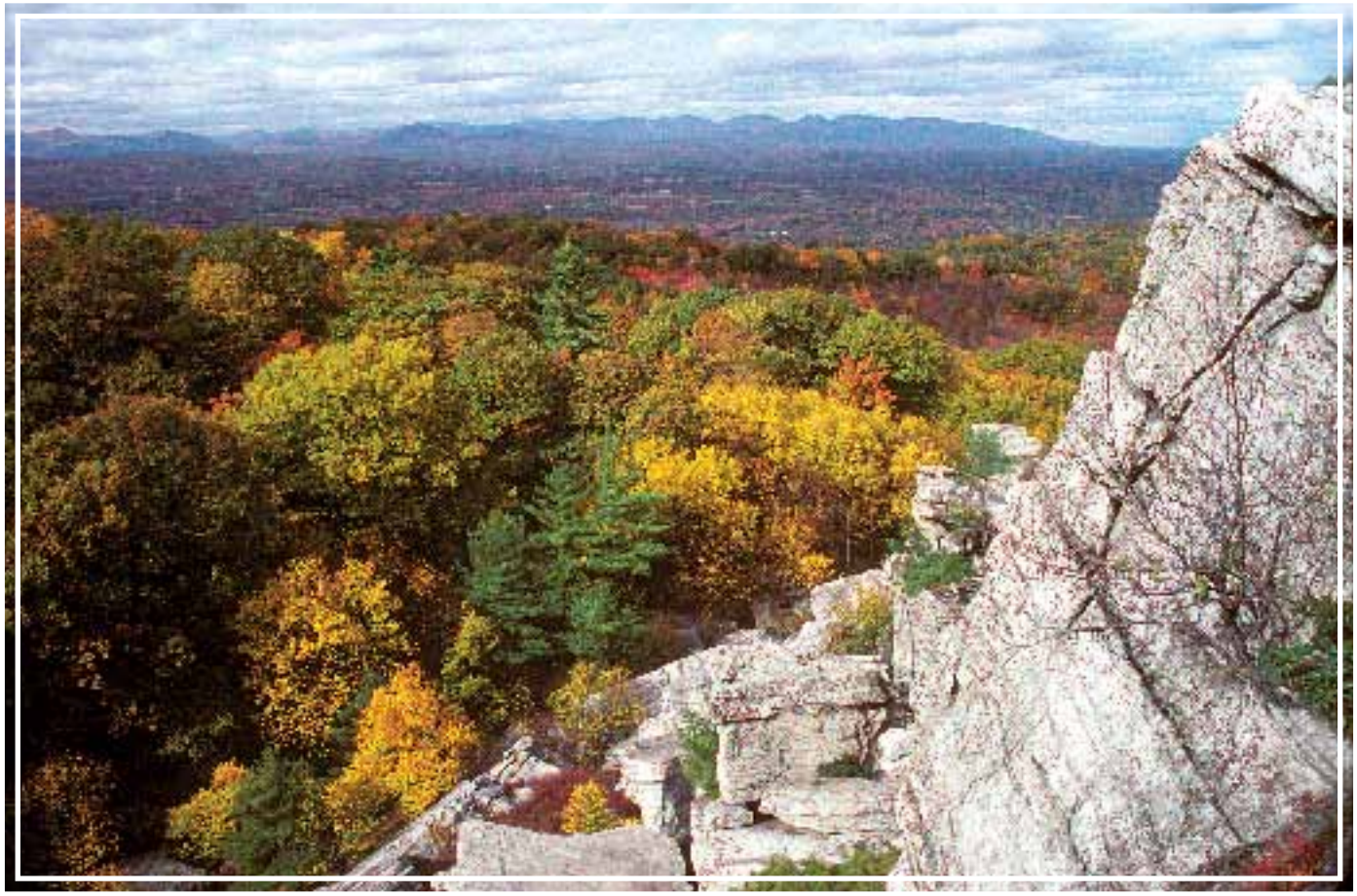
East Branch Fish Creek, St. Lawrence County. A combination of working forest conservation easement and purchase in fee protects 44,650 acres of forest lands along the East Branch of Fish Creek in St. Lawrence County. It provides a variety of public recreational uses including hiking, camping, canoeing, hunting and fishing, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and snowmobiling.

Jim Clayton



Nissequogue River State Park in Suffolk County was formerly part of the Kings Park Psychiatric Center. It provides significant bird and wildlife habitat, waterfront areas and wetlands. The shoreline has been designated as a Bird Conservation Area.

Frank Knight



Catskills/ Shawangunks, Ulster, Sullivan and Orange Counties. The Shawangunks support outstanding biodiversity including eight rare natural communities, seven rare animal and 27 rare plant species. The "Gunks" are a popular rock-climbing destination that also provide opportunities for hunting, hiking, and birdwatching.

Neil Satterly

Mount Loretto Unique Area, Richmond County. Mount Loretto is a 145-acre jewel of undeveloped open space along Staten Island's south shore, overlooking Raritan Bay. The property contains extensive meadows and sensitive shorefront with freshwater and tidal wetlands that contain grassland species, a rare ecosystem type in New York City. DEC manages it to conserve these important natural resources and to provide exciting new outdoor educational opportunities for New York City residents.

Jim Clayton

Long Island South Shore, Suffolk County. The state-designated Long Island South Shore Estuary Reserve is a 326-square mile area that encompasses south shore bays and watersheds from the East Rockaway Inlet, approximately 75 miles east to Heady Creek at the eastern end of Shinnecock Bay. Protected areas include Amsterdam Beach, Lido Beach, Camp Hero State Park, Captree State Park and several small acquisitions to protect exceptional habitats for fish and shellfish, waterfowl, migratory shorebirds, rare plants and federally listed sea turtles.

Jim Clayton

Sandy Island Beach State Park in Oswego County is part of the eastern Lake Ontario dune and wetland system, a 17-mile stretch that extends from the Town of Richland, Oswego County, north along Lake Ontario to Jefferson County. The area is the only significant freshwater dune site in the northeastern United States and offers many opportunities for hikers, birdwatchers, canoeists and kayakers.

Jim Clayton

Tahawus, Essex County. The Open Space Institute purchased the 10,000-acre Tahawus property and is working with the state to add 6,000 acres to the Forest Preserve. The remaining 4,000 acres will be subject to a conservation easement and remain a working forest and about 200 hundred acres will become an historic district including the abandoned Village of Adirondac, the McIntyre Iron Works, which is the best preserved nineteenth-century iron works in North America, and the site of the former Tahawus Club where Theodore Roosevelt received word that President McKinley had made a turn for the worse after being shot by an assassin.

Jim Clayton

Champion, Franklin County; A Working Forest Conservation Easement that protects 110,000 acres of former Champion International lands of the Adirondacks in three separate tracts: Santa Clara, Tooley Pond and Croghan. The easement prevents future development, requires sustainable forestry practices and gives the public recreation rights for hiking, hunting, camping and nature observation. Along the Deer, Grasse, St. Regis and Oswegatchie rivers, the State purchased 29,000 acres in fee to protect ecologically sensitive wetlands and boreal forest.

William C. Whitney Wilderness Area, Hamilton County. Centered around Little Tupper Lake, the area includes 20,500 acres with canoeing, fishing, hiking, camping and hunting opportunities.

Jim Clayton

THE LONGTAIL WEASEL

Story and photos by Eric Swanbeck

Survival chooses many colors, and for the longtail weasel—*Mustela frenata*—those colors are white and brown.

Survival chooses many colors, and for the longtail weasel—*Mustela frenata*—those colors are white and brown. I was lucky enough to "meet" a longtail weasel late last year, and it was an experience I'll never forget.

Longtail Weasel: Facts

Most of the year, the longtail weasel is brownish in color; however in winter the northern species turns all white except for the tip of the tail, which is black. Its southern relative remains a brownish color year round. The weasel ranges in length from 12 to 15 inches and weighs 3 to 12 ounces. Males weigh approximately twice as much as females. The longtail weasel can be found from British Columbia through the United States and as far south as Bolivia. Its habitat includes forested, brushy, and even open areas preferably near water. Its diet consists of mice, voles, rabbits, shrews, chipmunks, rats, birds, poultry, insects, and earthworms; however, as I discovered, the weasel is also a scavenger.

Our Introduction

The longtail weasel I encountered was living on a rocky hillside covered with moss. I happened on this particular weasel when I was driving home after a day of photographing wildlife. I spotted a long, white object slithering though the woods, but it was at such a distance that identification was nearly impossible. Nearing the spot where I lost sight of the creature, I pulled my car over and curiously strolled to the wood's edge. There, feeding on a deer carcass, was a small, white, furry creature which I discovered to be a long-

tail weasel. Our first sighting of each other was shocking for the weasel—and amazing for me. The weasel didn't wait long before scurrying back up the hill toward his den. I followed him, hoping to get a lucky shot of the elusive creature, which until then I thought only existed in books and magazines. After I searched the hillside for several minutes, the weasel appeared directly in front of me wearing a look of curiosity. He held his head slightly upward and appeared to be sniffing the air to get a better idea of who was trespassing on his turf. I didn't think I would have time to position my tripod, so I quickly readied my camera for any available shot. Thinking this would be the only shot I would get, my first picture was rushed. I soon discovered this normally shy creature would turn out to be quite accommodating to my presence.

Learning More

Over the next several weeks I had many opportunities to photograph the weasel. I learned a lot about its behavior and habits. It fed twice a day, usually around the same time, but the weather seemed to influence its arrival at the carcass. If the weather was warm, the weasel arrived a little early and if cooler, it arrived a little later. The weasel was tolerant of my presence as long as I remained on one side of the carcass and he on the other. Sometimes, curiosity seemed to get the best of the weasel, as it would come close enough to sniff my feet but always under the protection of the branches next to the carcass. True to the weasel's nature, as a nervous and skittish creature, I found it to be a difficult subject to photograph as it never remained still for long. It barely stopped long enough for me to focus my camera!

Wild and Wary

The weasel never completely let go of his fear of humans. His path to the carcass was down the hill from his dwelling in the rocks to a large rock—a place of safety—near his food. He would spend a brief moment or two under its cover, checking to see if the coast was clear. Then he would leave the rock, pass an oak tree, and cross some limbs to get to the carcass, again stopping briefly to check for danger. I was amazed at how he adapted when I altered his environment slightly to suit my needs. When I cleared a few limbs to get a better shot, he would take another "safer" route to the carcass.

Initially, he would eat from the opposite side of the deer carcass and would not pay me much attention. As I switched camera positions he took a smaller piece of meat several feet away to a safe spot under some dead branches. When I cleared more branches, he dug a cave in the nearby hillside. I "adapted" to this by taking shots of the weasel pausing at the entrance of the cave as he scanned for danger. The weasel always seemed to be one step ahead of me in this adaptation game.

In the weeks that I spent photographing the weasel, I was amazed at the "intelligence" he seemed to show, the adaptability to what the animal perceived as a predator, and his curiosity. Though I meant him no harm, his survival instincts would not let him trust me completely. Yet, we developed a shaky truce. One that allowed me to get my pictures and him an easy meal to gorge at his pleasure.

Eric Swanbeck is a wildlife photographer. He currently resides in Idaho, and this is his first contribution to *Conservationist*.

The weasel fed twice a day, usually around the same time, but the weather seemed to influence its arrival at the carcass. If the weather was warm, the weasel arrived a little early and if cooler, it arrived a little later.

EMPIRE STATE ADVENTURES

Fall Foliage Tours

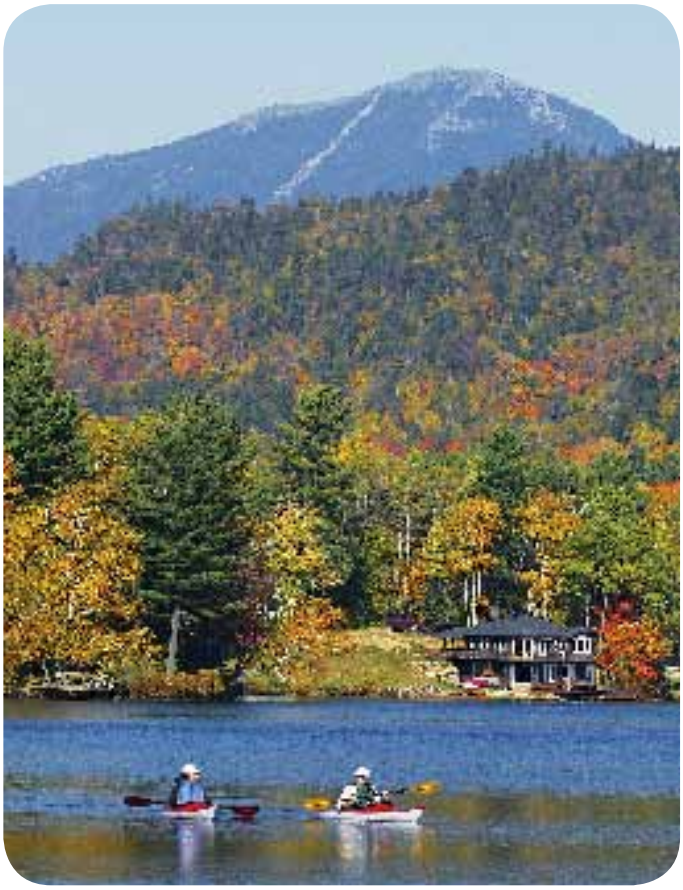
by Bernadette LaManna and Mary Ellen Walsh

If you're a resident of New York State, particularly the eastern part of the state, you've been conditioned to believe that New England — notably Vermont — is THE place to view truly stunning fall foliage. And if you're typical, you head in that direction every autumn despite encountering bumper-to-bumper traffic on virtually every main thoroughfare, especially on weekends.

Well, it's time for a change, and not just to the leaves. Turn yourself around and take "the road less traveled" to a few places in our own state that may not be as well-known but still have a lot to offer. Routes leading to more urban areas like Long Island, and roadways in western and central New York, offer leafy vistas every bit as beautiful as those east of the state line. And, of course, there are the Adirondacks — always beautiful in any season.

Long Island Lighthouses

For decades, even centuries, Long Island lighthouses guided passing ships. Now they serve as destinations themselves as travelers seek the nearly two dozen lighthouses found here. Begin your quest by driving east along the Northern State Parkway and then head north toward the lighthouses in Cold Spring Harbor, Lloyd Harbor and Eaton's Neck. In addition to the



Darren McGee © NYSDED

With Whiteface Mountain in the background, kayakers paddle on Mirror Lake in the Village of Lake Placid.

foliage along the way, breathtaking vistas await you at each lighthouse. Continue on the North Fork to Orient Point, from which you'll enjoy a wonderful view of Long Island Sound.

The South Fork's eastern tip is the site of one of Long Island's most famous lighthouses at Montauk Point State Park. On your way there, visit the lighthouses at Shinnecock Bay and Cedar Island. For a different perspective, rent a boat and gaze at the land from the water instead. Then travel to Jones Beach State Park, home to one of the largest public beaches in the world. Have a picnic and then take a stroll along the six miles of sandy shores. It's the perfect way to end an autumn evening in these environs.

If lighthouses aren't your thing, how about the Long Island Fall Festival at Huntington? This two-day outdoor family event is held in Heckscher State Park in early October, and admission for the public is absolutely free. In addition, a number of orchards on

Long Island also offer apple and pumpkin picking for those who want an outdoor experience during what is arguably the prettiest time of year in the Northeast.

After all that fun and frivolity, a variety of Long Island bed and breakfast facilities—Victorian and country inns and, in wine country, a farmhouse-style inn—offer comfortable accommodations and a chance to refresh and refuel yourself amidst autumn's splendor.

Finger Lakes Foliage

During foliage season, why not journey through the Finger Lakes wine region? Begin in Corning, where you also can visit the Rockwell Museum of Western Art and the world-recognized Corning Museum of Glass. Then take routes 414 and 14 north along the west side of Seneca Lake, the deepest of the Finger Lakes.

About halfway along Seneca Lake, one of the area's largest wineries can be found in Dundee. Back on Route 14, wind your way to the historic Belhurst Castle, which is on the National Register of Historic Places. From Geneva, head south on routes 14A, 54A and 54, for a captivating view along Keuka Lake. You'll find many restaurants, shops and wineries on your journey, as well as overnight accommodations.

© NYSDED

© NYSDED

A tour boat passes in front of Bridal Falls, one of the three waterfalls that comprise Niagara Falls.

Niagara Frontier Wonders

From Medina, home to the largest freight depot museum in the country, go north to the Great Lakes Seaway Trail, a national scenic byway. Revel in the dazzling foliage along the coastline of Lake Ontario. The signed driving route connects historic villages and vibrant cities with scenic landscapes and diverse destinations.

Then visit one of the natural wonders of the world—Niagara Falls. These awesome cascading waters, actually comprising three separate waterfalls, are further enhanced by autumn's palette and can be viewed from a cave underneath the falls or from the river via a boat cruise. Or take a scenic walk along the side of Niagara River Gorge.

Travel south to another natural wonder, Letchworth State Park, known as the "Grand Canyon of the East." This scenic park, celebrating its centennial this year, is magnificent in autumn, with the Genesee River carving a miles-long canyon through the park.

Darren McGee © NYSDED

Letchworth State Park, graced by Middle Falls, will celebrate its centennial as of January 2007

Letchworth's 14,000 acres offer a wide variety of family activities and accommodations, including cabins, campsites and an inn. The park has more than 60 miles of hiking trails. Activities include horseback riding, hot air ballooning over three waterfalls and whitewater rafting through the Genesee River Gorge. You'll return home invigorated and refreshed.

Adirondack Adventure

Whether driving, bicycling or hiking, you'll find yourself surrounded by glorious foliage in virtually every area of the Adirondacks. Set your own pace and take a bike tour from the village of Lake George through the surrounding countryside. Or from Warrensburg, drive along Route 9 and turn onto Route 73. There, a national scenic byway winds through quiet mountain towns and along clear streams to the storied Village of Lake Placid, best known for having hosted two winter Olympics. Lake Placid is compact and charming, and it's only a short drive from the village to nearby Whiteface Mountain, where you can get the proverbial bird's eye view of fall foliage while riding inside a gondola.

Then again, you could hike Cascade Mountain in Keene Valley, a challenging yet accessible climb that will reward you with colorful vistas all around. Or, for those who prefer riding to climbing, enjoy the foliage from your seat on the local scenic railway, which offers a 20-mile round-trip from Lake Placid to Saranac Lake. Meander through downtown Saranac Lake, or head north toward Malone and the Salmon River.

Whatever your destination, most would agree that travel in any direction during this wonderful season is its own reward. So grab a light jacket, get outside and enjoy the natural wonders and adventures in New York State!

For information about travel in New York State, visit **www.iloveny.com**, or call 1-800-CALL-NYS (225-5697).

Bernadette LaManna is a contributing editor to *Conservationist*.
Special thanks to **Mary Ellen Walsh**, Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Media for NYSDED.

Darren McGee © NYSDED

Exploring caves in the Central Leatherstocking Region is a good alternative activity if inclement weather changes your plans for viewing fall foliage.

The American woodcock is one of New York's most unusual upland birds. Approximately the size of a mourning dove, the woodcock has a bill that looks too long for its body, and ears that are placed forward on the face, between the eyes and the bill. To help guard against predation from above, its eyes are set high on the back of the head. The woodcock's odd appearance has inspired many local names like timberdoodle, bog sucker, mud bat, mud snipe and Labrador twister.

The brain of an American woodcock is unique among birds. The cerebellum, which controls muscle coordination and body balance, is located below the rest of the brain and above the spinal column. For most birds, the cerebellum occupies the rear of the skull. One theory suggests that as the woodcock evolved, its eyes moved back in the skull, its bill lengthened and the nostrils approached the base of the bill, allowing for better ground-probing abilities. As a result, the brain was rearranged, and the modern bird, in essence, has an upside-down brain.

The woodcock requires a diverse mix of habitats to thrive, including riparian shrublands and forests (land along riverbanks), as well as upland shrublands, early successional forests and forest thickets. Within these areas, second growth hardwoods provide important nesting habitat, while areas with thick cover and moist fertile soil with abundant worms are used as feeding grounds. In addition, the woodcock uses new clear-cuts, large fields or pastures for night roosting, and males need small openings in the forest to sing over.

Migratory birds, woodcock spend each spring and fall traveling between their breeding grounds in northern North America and their wintering grounds in the southern United States. They fly only at night, typically migrating at low altitudes of 50-100 feet. They may fly alone or in loose flocks called flights. If you are walking near moist thickets during these migration times, you might see signs of the woodcock: silver-dollar-shaped white splashes on the ground—the droppings or 'chalk' of these birds.

Woodcock are most active at dawn and dusk, usually searching for a meal. Their long bill is specially adapted for probing into moist fertile soil for their preferred food of earthworms. A single bird can eat its weight in worms each day. Woodcock also eat other invertebrates, and have been known to eat ants from ant hills during times of drought.

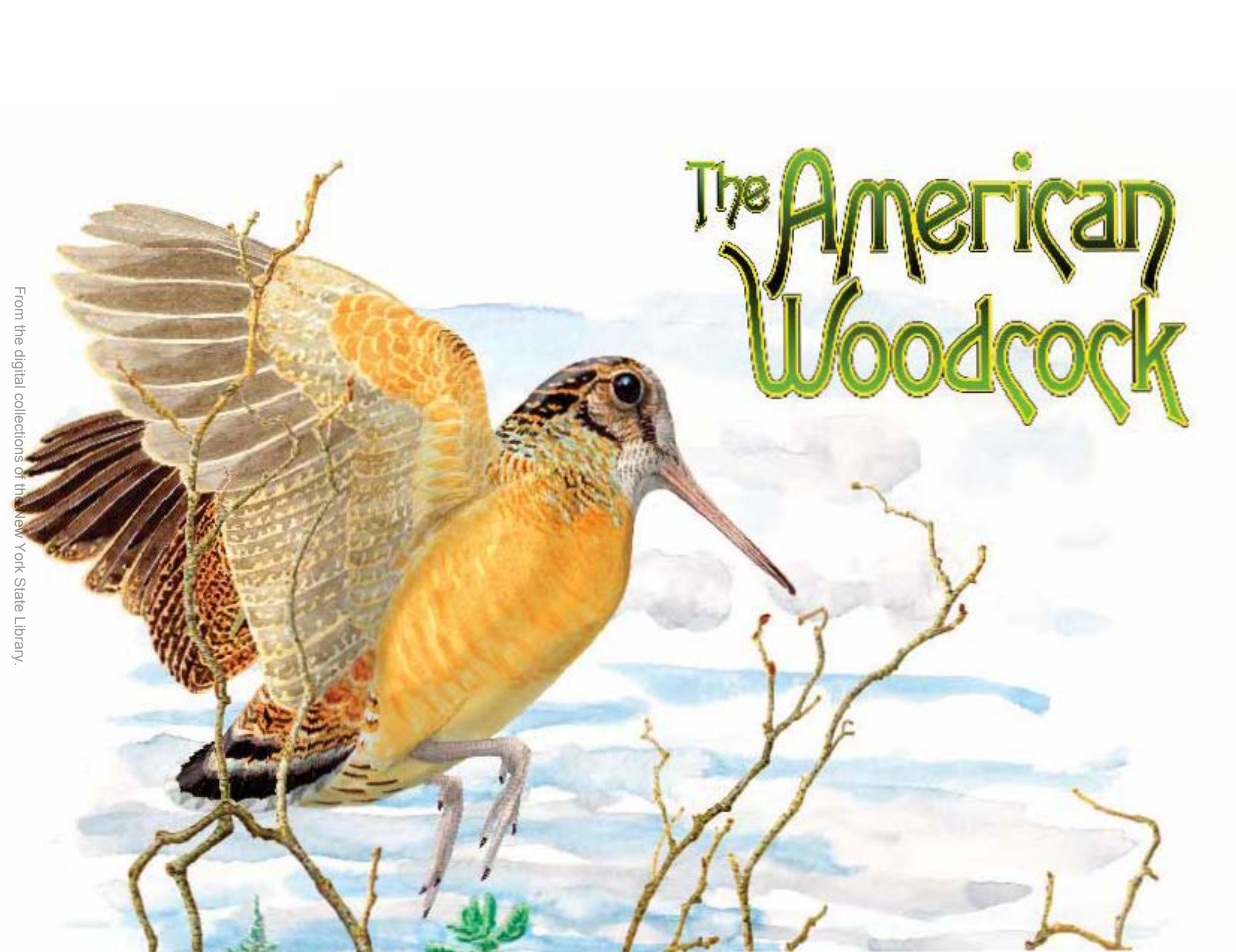
Each spring, male woodcock perform an unusual courtship ritual in an attempt to attract mates. At dusk, a male will sit on the ground in an opening or small field and repeatedly utter a low, nasal, almost insect-like 'peent.' He then takes off low and spirals upward on whistling wings to heights of 100-200 feet before spiraling back down and landing near where he took off. He makes a chirping sound during this downward spiral. Males repeat this act again and again until well after dark.

Nesting occurs from mid-March into June. Females lay their eggs—one per day—in shallow depressions on the ground among dead leaves. Most nests have four eggs, and incubation takes approximately 21 days. The chicks are precocial and can move around and follow the hen soon after hatching. Chicks grow very rapidly on a diet of earthworms and insects. By the time they are four weeks old, it is difficult to distinguish the chicks from adults. Male woodcock are not involved in nesting or brood rearing.

The woodcock's mottled brown to black body enables this bird to blend in with the forest floor. As such, they are difficult to spot and will often startle you if you walk by them. When flushed from the ground, these birds flutter up through the thick canopy, level off over the top and then fly away. Wind moving through their wings makes a whistling sound as they go. Although they sometimes fly considerable distances, they usually only fly short distances of 10 to 20 yards.

Woodcock are a popular gamebird in New York and are pursued by many hunters. The hunting season for them is relatively short (30 days) and runs from early October into early November. Hunting woodcock is not for the faint of heart. The habitat of these secretive birds is usually very thick and difficult to walk through. As such, woodcock hunters often go out with a well-trained dog, which makes it easier to find the birds.

The American Woodcock



Woodcock Populations

Woodcock populations have been declining in the eastern United States for several decades. Annual spring surveys of their breeding grounds show that woodcock numbers in the eastern flyway and in New York have been falling by about 2 percent since the 1960s—a loss of over 55 percent in the last 40 years. As a result, national and international bird conservation organizations consider the American woodcock a species of continental concern, and protecting the woodcock is a high priority.

The woodcock's decline is attributed to loss of upland and wetland habitat due to development, succession, and forest maturation. In addition, the reduction in forestry practices, especially in riparian areas which are critical for breeding and migrating woodcock, also contributes to the loss in woodcock numbers. Woodcock depend on trees and shrubs that require full sunlight and open canopies. This only comes from disturbance to forests, which has been dramatically reduced by fire supression and the reluctance to fell trees. This reluctance is based on the misconception that cutting trees is bad for birds and wildlife. While cutting trees can negatively impact some wildlife species, proper forest management actually increases the abundance and diversity of some birds and forest wildlife in an area.

Woodcock are not alone in this struggle. There are many other species that rely on the early successional shrub and forest habitats. In fact, most of New York's shrubland and early successional forest bird species are experiencing widespread declines. Ironically, the bird and wildlife species of mature forests, often touted as threatened, are actually doing well overall; it is the early successional species that need more help and habitat.

Fortunately, woodcock populations, as well as other early-successional-forest species, can often be readily restored through proper harvest management of forested lands. Cutting small 5-10 acre patches or strips through the forest in rotation creates a mosaic of different age forests with diverse structures. These areas provide everything the woodcock needs to survive and prosper—good cover, abundant food, and openings for singing males.

Woodcock Facts

- The woodcock's long bill has a flexible tip specially adapted for probing into moist soil in search of earthworms.
- It can eat its weight in worms each day.
- Its large eyes have nearly 360° vision.
- It is capable of flight speeds of 30 mph.

An adult American woodcock measures:

Weight: 8-12 ounces
Length: 10-12 inches (including bill)
Wingspan: 17-19 inches

Author: Timothy J. Post
Artwork by Jean Gawalt, Graphics & Layout by Frank Herec

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION

Witch Hazel

(Hamamelis virginiana)

By Barbara Nuffer

As you walk through the woods of New York this fall, keep your eyes open for witch hazel, the last blooming "wildflower" of the year.

Found from Nova Scotia south to Georgia, the woods-loving witch hazel is a 10-15 foot tall shrub that sports unusual yellow flowers in autumn. Spidery and fragrant, the yellow flowers are produced in clusters on the branches at the same time as its leaves are turning golden and gently floating to the forest floor.

The petals of witch hazel flowers have the unique ability to curl up into a protective "bud" when exposed to cold temperatures, and to unfurl again as the temperature warms. Translated from Latin, the genus name Hamamelis means "together with fruit," referring to the fact that the fruit (in the form of a seedpod), the flowers, and next year's buds all appear on the branch together. When fully ripened, witch hazel seedpods explode, hurling seeds as far as twenty feet from the plant.

This year's flower appears on the stem with last year's fruit.

Native Americans made poultices of witch hazel leaves and bark to cure swelling. The natives passed this knowledge on to early European settlers. Settlers soon learned how to extract essential oils from the plant. Witch hazel extract is still used as a skin astringent and to soothe skin irritations and sunburn. These seemingly "magical" curative powers of this shrub, combined with the use of hazel branches for dowsing, let to the common name "witch" hazel.

Dowsing is an ancient way to search for water or minerals under the ground.

Halloween is a perfect time to search for this yellow-flowered "witch" that haunts the woods of New York.

Wildflower enthusiast **Barbara Nuffer** is a scientist in DEC's Division of Air Resources.

The leaves of the witch hazel in the forest understory.

STANDING THE TEST

OF TIME

DONALD WHARTON
PHOTO: ED JAKUBOWSKI

Still-Hunting the Adirondacks

Adirondack deer hunting has changed considerably since the days of guides like Mitchell Sabattis, John Cheney and French Louie. Gone are hounding, floating and jacklighting; they've been illegal for more than a century. Today, practices such as rattling antlers, calling, and bowhunting have gained a following among North Woods hunters. There is one method, however, that hasn't changed since those early days: still-hunting.

When Still Isn't

Contrary to what the term might imply, still-hunting does not involve sitting motionless on a log or stump and waiting for a deer to come along. When still-hunting, a hunter moves carefully and quietly through the woods with the object being to spot a deer before it sees him. This is easier said than done! If you make a mistake, chances are the deer, and a trophy buck in particular, will be on his way on the double. All you will see is that white tail or "flag" bouncing off down into the swamp or far up the ridge.

Where to Hunt

The first thing to look for is an area suitable to still-hunting. Thick areas of spruce, balsam or beech are generally unsatisfactory because it is impossible to move through them quietly. The older timbered sections of the Adirondack State Forest Preserve are my favorite areas for still-hunting. These areas tend to open up as they mature, as blowdown and occasionally insects and diseases produce just the right amount of vegetation to suit deer's needs for food and cover. And, unlike the thick areas mentioned above, these areas are also open just enough to allow a hunter to maneuver silently through them. Thicker cover is often best left to other hunting methods like group drives, or hunting from a stand.

I like hunting the State Forest Preserve because of the low overall hunting pressure. Other forms of deer hunting often benefit from other hunters roaming about the woods, but in still-hunting, solitude is preferred.

Wily Animal

There are many areas in the Forest Preserve where deer seldom, if ever, cross tracks with a hunter. The reasons for this are many, but the species' considerable senses of smell, hearing and sight top the list. A hunter must pay attention to wind direction and hunt quietly. The whitetail does have one weakness—deer do not recognize stationary objects well. This undoubtedly relates to the fact that deer don't usually face danger from a predator unless there is movement. This is one reason for moving slowly, carefully examining the ground ahead before moving on.

The eastern coyote or "brush wolf" as it is often called in the Adirondacks is another reason why north country deer are a challenge to the hunter. On more than one occasion while hunting I've seen deer take evasion action, often entering a stream, pond or river in an attempt to shake a coyote off their trail. As a result, deer are acutely aware of their surroundings and that includes two-legged hunters as well as the four-legged variety. Old-time deer hunters will tell you that today's whitetail is a more difficult animal to hunt as a result.

Weather Factors

The weather is a major factor in successful still-hunting. Dry, crunchy leaves and crusty snow are definitely not conducive to this method—again, a deer will almost always hear you first. Perhaps the best conditions for still-hunting are a light rain or drizzle. Precipitation deadens the leaves and twigs and enhances a quiet approach. Deer seem to be less cautious about predators in damp weather. Some of my best hunts have taken place in quite miserable weather.

A few inches of fresh snow on the ground provides a great still-hunting situation. Not only is hunting on snow quieter, but it also adds the advantage of permitting a hunter to see farther. Snow makes it obvious where the deer have been traveling, feeding and resting, and makes hunting more interesting because you can see any fresh deer tracks. Nothing ignites a hunter's interest more than the deep imprints, long stride, and dragging footprints of a big buck in the snow. Twice last fall I crossed the track of just such a buck in the Siamese Ponds Wilderness Area. I studied his tracks, and figured he weighed more than 200 pounds dressed. In fact, the smaller, seven-point buck that I eventually took from that area had been fighting—and had lost an eye—and I assume he tangled with the big fellow during the rut.

Look for Parts

When still-hunting, it's important to look for parts of a deer rather than the whole animal. In heavy woods, you seldom see a deer standing out like the so-called "stag at bay." Many times I have seen just a leg, an ear, a tail or even an antler before I finally made out the complete animal. I have heard the term "hunter's eyes" used in connection with still-hunting. You have to look into the forest, not at it, and that is not an easy task.

Maps, Compasses

Maps and compasses are essential elements in still-hunting, especially in a big-woods environment like the Adirondacks. I almost always have a look at the map before starting out on the day's hunt. I often like to get on high ground and work my way down later in the day. This technique gives me the advantage of hunting from above, and I can see how to go about this with a quick check of the map. Also, with some experience, a hunter can pick out things like deer

There is a sense of remorse when you kill an animal. Countering that emotion, there is the satisfaction in knowing you've just secured a winter's supply of venison. The author is pictured after a succesful hunt near West Canada Lake circa 1970.

(Photo: Don Wharton)

crossings or runways, feeding grounds, and areas of shelter along beaver meadows and streams in case of inclement weather. Of course, the most important reason for carrying a map and compass (or a modern-day GPS unit) is an assurance that you will, in fact, get back to your camp or car at the end of the day. To me, my compass is just as important as my rifle, and probably more so.

Outdoor Experience

When still-hunting, you are likely to encounter wildlife other than deer. Over the years I think I've seen just about every form of Adirondack wildlife there is, from spawning brook trout to a tundra swan. Last fall, I was sitting on a log along the East Branch of the Sacandaga River and I noticed a ruffed grouse poking along through the woods. I quickly froze and squinted, hoping she wouldn't see the whites of my eyes.

She continued along, occasionally stopping to pick something out from among the leaves until she was about 15 feet from me. At that point, she stopped, looked right at me, and continued on her way, eventually disappearing over a small knoll. I have seen a lot of partridge or ruffed grouse in the Adirondacks over the years and this is the only one that simply walked away from me. All the others departed with their trademark thundering takeoff.

Successful Hunts

I think every still-hunter experiences a variety of emotions when one is successful in bagging a trophy buck. I often hunt alone, and my first reaction invariably is, "What do I do now?" Dragging or carrying a deer anywhere is work. In the big woods, where the nearest road may be miles away, it can be hard work. Sometimes it seems as if the deer is glued to the ground. In the case of last fall's seven-pointer, however, I had the best of all worlds: 1.5 miles downhill on slippery, wet snow. Dragging a deer under those conditions was actually a pleasure.

There is inevitably a sense of remorse when you kill an animal, and my buck last fall was no exception. With a rich, brown coat and a nice rack, he was a good-looking animal. Countering that emotion, there is the satisfaction in knowing you've just secured a winter's supply of venison. Almost every hunter enjoys preparing a tasty venison dinner procured through his own diligent efforts.

Finally, I think there is the realization that you've succeeded as a hunter. Many a hunter can attest to the fact that it is no small feat to take a wily Adirondack buck on his home turf.

Don Wharton is a graduate of SUNY ESF and a native of Amsterdam. He has published several books and is a frequent contributor to many hunting and fishing magazines.

OUTDOOR DISCOVERY

Tom Lindsay

Nature's Color Palette

by Abby Alger

Autumn in New York means a dazzling display of fall foliage; the rich tones of red, orange, yellow and gold make the world seem alight. It's one of nature's most impressive scenes, and also one of her most closely guarded secrets. Like a skilled magician, she makes the impossible seem simple. Only close examination of the process reveals its complexities.

Summer Splendor

The brilliant green of summer foliage is little more than a mask for the fiery hues that lie underneath. The leaves of the sunny seasons are rich in chlorophyll, a common green plant pigment. Chlorophyll is essential to the plant's survival. It plays a vital role in photosynthesis, the tree's food-making process that takes place in the leaves. The pigment absorbs energy from sunlight, fueling chemical reactions that break down chlorophyll and produce simple sugars and oxygen from carbon dioxide and water. The oxygen is released to the environment, but the sugar is saved as fuel for the tree. The energy, in turn, allows the tree's chlorophyll to be replenished.

Hidden to our eyes—but still present in the leaves—are yellow and orange pigments known as carotenoids. They also absorb energy from sunlight, and that energy is then passed along to chlorophyll so photosynthesis can take place. Carotenoids are chemically stable, and so they don't naturally break down at a high rate like chlorophyll. As a result, they're in the leaf from when it buds to when it falls from the tree. But in the leaf's version of an eclipse, the chlorophyll hides the carotenoids' colors until fall arrives.

...Becomes Fall Foliage

The spring-to-summer cycle of a tree's life is well-understood. It's the transformation to fall—really, why leaves change color—that sparks debate. Trees "sense" the change of season as days shorten and temperatures cool. Energy pools start to drain; with fewer daylight hours, there's less opportunity for photosynthesis, and therefore less sugar and chlorophyll produced. If it is to survive the impending winter, the tree must use its remaining resources to gather nutrients. More than half of those in the leaf are shipped to the tree, and cell layers begin to grow at the leaf's stem to start severing it from the tree. The tree can survive on stored sugar for the winter, but it can't keep its leaves alive with it.

Even while the leaves are "shutting down" for winter, they are making a new type of pigment in the fall. Known as anthocyanins, this group of pigments is responsible for red and violet hues. Its production begins in the late summer. Anthocyanins play an important part in the life of the aging leaves: they are a natural sun-block. Since levels of chlorophyll are depleted, the leaf cannot use all the sun energy that hits it. Anthocyanins absorb the excess so that the sun's rays don't damage leaf tissues.

As chlorophyll becomes less present in the leaves, the brightness of their underlying colors appears. This transformation is broken into a "fall color wave" sweeping from north to south; first yellow, then orange, and then red hues paint the landscape. The colors result from the interaction of carotenoids and anthocyanins, which are dominant. Leaves with mostly anthocyanins are red; those with very little are yellow, and the ones with a mix of the two pigments appear orange.

New York State Conservationist, October 2006

Best Weather

The intensity and duration of autumn foliage is affected by a number of factors, including temperature, sunlight, and soil pH. The best weather for brilliant fall colors is undoubtedly dry, bright days with cool, frost-free nights.

The largest variants in fall color are anthocyanins, since they are the only pigments actually produced in the fall. Lower temperatures and dry weather favor their production; and, as an added "bonus," hasten the destruction of chlorophyll. Soil pH will also influence anthocyanins, not in quantity but in color. At the extremes of pH "highly acidic and highly basic" anthocyanins are blueish, while at the middle of the spectrum they take on violet undertones.

Frost and rain will do the most damage to a beautiful autumn landscape. Freezing temperatures harden the cell layer between leaf stem and tree faster; as a result, colorful leaves will stay on the tree for shorter time periods. Rainy weather will also "leach" the water-soluble anthocyanins from leaves, and have an overall dampening effect on the fiery colors. Rain can also strip leaves off the trees.

Did You Know?

For decades, the changing colors of fall were accepted as merely a by-product of leaf death. However, in the 1990s, discussion and debate were revived to focus on a series of still unanswered questions. Simply, why would leaves change color? Is there an evolutionary benefit? And doesn't the production of additional pigments, anthocyanins, imply that there is a purpose?

Tom Lindsay

Nature trades her green summer dress for a bright and colorful fall gown.

The "leaf signal" theory is one of two that predominates scientific discussion. Dr. Marco Archetti (University of Fribourg, Switzerland) and Dr. Sam Brown (University of Texas) proposed it in a paper published in 2000; the idea first came from their late professor, Dr. William Hamilton (Oxford University). They argue that leaves take on bright colors in the fall to ward off insects seeking a winter home. The shades have long-been the warning sign of poisonous species, so their position is that fall foliage is the "war paint" of trees.

However, in 2002, Dr. David Wilkinson (Liverpool John Moores University, England) and Dr. H. Martin Schaefer (University of Freiburg, Germany) argued against this conclusion, and offered their own explanation. Rather than war paint, they say, leaves are sun-block in the fall. Anthocyanins are produced because they absorb excess sunlight, and prevent damage to the leaf. The brilliant coloration is merely incidental: the yellows and oranges appear after natural destruction of chlorophyll, and the reds only because anthocyanins are essential.

Abby Alger recently finished her summer as a *Conservationist* staff assistant. She is currently a sophomore at Duke University.

What do you think?

Write to us at *Conservationist*, re: Leaves, 625 Broadway, Albany, NY, 12233-4502.

Ray Minnick

RANGERS TO THE RESCUE

Compiled by Lieutenant Chris Liebelt

Editor's Note: These are actual accounts about DEC Forest Rangers and their work.

Wildfire—Washington County

In September 2002, Forest Ranger Steve Guenther was on an aerial fire detection flight in the Lake George area of the eastern Adirondacks. Rangers were using aerial detection due to extremely dry conditions and recent lightning storms. Ranger Guenther spotted a fire on the summit of Sleeping Beauty Mountain on the east side of Lake George and radioed in the coordinates. Forest Ranger Jaime Laczko was dispatched to hike to the summit of Sleeping Beauty to size it up. He found a four-acre fire spreading rapidly into a pine stand. The fire was remote, and Ranger Laczko called in a helicopter to drop water on its perimeter. The helicopter was equipped with a "bambi bucket," a 300-gallon fabric bucket suspended by a cable. Bambi buckets are lowered into a water source, filled, carried to the drop point, and opened mechanically to release the water from the air. Ranger Laczko directed the water drops by radio from the ground and successfully slowed the fire's progress until crews of firefighters reached the scene and contained the blaze.

Flood Brothers—Broome County

In June, flooding had stranded many residents of the Conklin area. Strong currents and debris-strewn waters made boat rescues virtually impossible. Broome County EMS contacted Forest Rangers for assistance and a crew led by Ranger Jim Prunoske responded with a DEC air boat. The air boat is a flat-bottomed boat that can operate in very shallow water. The motor and propeller are mounted above the water allowing the boat to operate on water, ice, and swift moving rivers. Ranger Prunoske and his crew worked with other emergency agencies performing residential rescue and evacuation missions. When the day was over, Rangers had helped more than 60 residents to safety.

Deep Woods Hiker—Hamilton County

In July, a 15-year-old boy was hiking on a remote section of the Northville-Placid Trail. An experienced hiker, the boy nevertheless slipped and fell, injuring his lower back. His injury did not seem serious at the time, but his hiking companions wisely called Forest Rangers using a cell phone. The hiking group gave their location as somewhere near South Lake—15 miles from the nearest road. Forest Ranger Greg George knew the area and decided to use a float plane service to fly to South Lake. When the plane arrived, the hikers could not be found. The pilot searched other nearby lakes with no success. Severe thunderstorms hit and the plane headed for home. The stranded group reached the Rangers by phone and were able to determine their actual location to be 1.5 miles from South Lake on a remote pond. They spent the night waiting for rescue.

The next morning, Rangers flew back to the area and met one of the hikers on South Lake. Rangers canoed across the lake to the injured hiker. Forest Rangers stabilized him and prepared him for a long evacuation. He was carried and canoed back to the waiting float plane, then flown to Eighth Lake. An ambulance took him to the hospital. He was treated and released.

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Back Country Tip

Check the local forecast before your trip and assume the worst. Rain gear is a must. If the forecast calls for flurries, expect a blizzard. In cold, wet weather, wear wool or synthetics. Do not wear cotton (e.g. blue jeans) as it absorbs moisture and drains body heat. Your head and neck can radiate up to 40 percent of your body heat, so a hat—especially one that covers your ears—is very important in cold weather.

On Patrol

Real stories from officers in the field

Compiled by Bob Lucas
Director of Law Enforcement

Bear Baiting—Greene County

In early October, ECO Mike Arp received an anonymous tip stating that there was illegal baiting activity occurring in the Town of Halcott. Information indicated that the owner of a hunting camp had been baiting bear with apples, corn, bagels, and doughnuts near his camp. The tipster said the camp owner intended to shoot the bear before opening day.

ECOs Mike Arp and Mike Terrell set up surveillance in the vicinity of the camp. It wasn't long before ECO Arp spotted the camp owner dragging a large bear across the property. Caught in the act, the man admitted his guilt and explained how he had shot the 500+ pound bear as it stood in the middle of the bait pile. The camp owner was charged with numerous violations of the Environmental Conservation Law. He pled guilty to all charges, was fined $1,450, and his hunting privileges were revoked.

Not Fishing—Oswego County

ECOs Robert Higgins and Steven Shaw patrolled the Salmon River in plainclothes looking for illegal fishing. They heard yelling and splashing on Trout Brook, a tributary that flows into the Salmon River. Walking up the brook to investigate, the officers found four fishermen on the bank of the stream. From a concealed position, the ECOs watched as two of the men "herded" spawning salmon with sticks. The other two were attempting to foul hook salmon as they were forced into the open. After watching this illegal activity for some time, the ECOs arrested the quartet. They were charged with engaging in actions to frighten fish from concealment and attempting to take fish by snatching. The cases are pending.

Heap of Trouble—Cortland County

The owner of an unregistered auto dismantling facility in the Town of Cuyler had been cited for numerous environmental violations over a period of years.

Recently, while working an undercover operation, ECO Jim Milewski was able to purchase auto parts at the scrap yard, observe the operations of the yard, and converse with the owner's wife and his employees. ECOs Paul Blanton and Tom Fernandes patrolled the area and interviewed vehicle operators that had visited the yard.

With the information gathered, a search warrant was secured and executed at the facility. Among offenses documented at the site were: open burning for salvage; open burning for disposal; endangering public health, safety and the environment 4th degree; contravention of water quality standards, unlawful storage and disposal of automotive batteries, unlawful disposal of solid waste, and storing more than 1,000 tires without a permit. If convicted, the owner faces significant fines and possible imprisonment.

Ask the ECO

Q: Can I still use lead sinkers for fishing?

A: Yes. But beginning in May 2004, the **sale** of lead sinkers weighing one-half ounce or less was banned in New York State. This law does not limit the **use** of these sinkers, but studies have found that small lead sinkers (a.k.a. "split shot") lost in the state's waters are often ingested by waterfowl that feed underwater. This can result in illness or death. Wildlife managers hope that the ban on the sale of small sinkers will benefit waterfowl populations.

—Lt. Ken Didion, Supervising ECO, Wyoming County

Report Environmental Crimes. Call: 1-800-TIPP-DEC

Deer Management

by Jeremy Hurst

UPDATE

DMPs

New York's deer population weathered the worst of the storms that caused population and harvest declines since 2002. Many New York Wildlife Management Units (WMUs) were in a stage of intentional herd reduction when severe winters hit, and the impact on the deer population was greater than DEC anticipated.

Reduced antlerless harvests in 2004-2005, coupled with the mild snow depths last winter, should offer an opportunity for deer populations to increase throughout much of the state. It's a good time for these conditions, as about two-thirds of New York's WMUs still have deer populations below objectives.

To allow for population increases, DEC plans to slowly increase the availability of Deer Management Permits (DMPs) in these units. Portions of the Catskills and Rensselaer and Columbia Counties need more time without DMPs to allow the herd to increase. Other areas, most notably the lake plains stretching from Niagara County to Wayne and Seneca Counties, have deer populations well above objectives. DEC will continue to manage for herd reduction in these areas and as a result significant DMPs will be available there.

Pilot Program

For nearly 100 years, a "legal buck" in New York has been a deer with at least one antler that is three inches long or longer. However, in recent years, other states have experimented with programs to change the age structure of bucks. These programs have been well received, and DEC is trying something new.

DEC initiated the Antler Restriction Pilot Program in 2005 in WMUs 3C and 3J, primarily located in Ulster County. This new strategy requires that bucks taken in the pilot area have at least three antler points on a side. Because most local hunters approve, the antler restriction pilot will expand to include WMUs 3H and 3K (primarily Sullivan County) in 2006. In the first year of the pilot program, buck harvests were down 65 percent in WMU 3C and 40 percent in WMU 3J. This was expected, but DEC expects buck takes will return toward normal levels in 2006 and 2007 with a larger number of older bucks seen and taken by hunters. DEC predicts the same trend for WMUs 3H and 3K as well.

Chronic Wasting Disease

After the discovery of Chronic Wasting Disease (CWD) in New York in March 2005, DEC increased its tissue collection and CWD testing program. DEC also established a CWD containment area in Oneida and Madison counties and checked of all deer taken from the area. In 2005, biologists sampled more than 8,000 wild deer statewide, including more than 2,000 from the containment area. As of June 2006, only five captive and two wild deer in New York had tested positive for CWD. No new cases have been discovered since March/April 2005.

Eric Dresser

New York's deer populations are on the rebound.

In 2006, DEC will continue to look for CWD by collecting tissue samples from about 5,000 deer throughout the state and all deer harvested in the CWD containment area. For more information on CWD visit our website: www.dec.state.ny.us

Deer Population Survey

In summer 2005, DEC launched a new program in WMUs 3C, 5A, 7J, and 8H. The program enlists volunteers to record deer observations at a site of their choosing on three occasions from mid-August to mid-September. Anyone interested in participating in the survey this year should contact DEC for more information:

WMU 3C - Region 3	845-256-3098
WMU 5A - Region 5	518-897-1291
WMU 7J - Region 7	800-388-8244 ext.240
WMU 8H - Region 8	585-226-5461
Bureau of Wildlife - Albany	518-402-8867

You Are Invited

DEC is inviting you to join *New York Big Game*, DEC's newest outlet for information on black bear and white-tailed deer in New York State. Subscribers will periodically receive email from DEC about bear and deer biology, management, research, regulations and hunting. To subscribe to *New York Big Game*, visit our website at: http://lists.dec.state.ny.us/mailman/listinfo/nybiggame

Jeremy Hurst works for the NYSDEC as a wildlife biologist, specializing in deer and bear management.

Compiled by Melissa Albino

New License Plates

The Marine and Coastal District of New York license plate is the newest in the "special causes" series. Joining plates that support open space conservation and cancer research—among others—it raises both money and awareness for a unique area of the state. $20 of the $25 annual renewal fee goes to a fund for conservation, education, and research related to the marine and coastal environment. The license plates, which depict a striped bass and the Montauk lighthouse, are available through the DMV Custom Plates office (518-402-4838).

New Nature Center

After years of planning and one year of building, the Montezuma Audubon Center is scheduled to open this fall. Located in the Northern Montezuma Wetlands Complex, the center is Audubon New York's first environmental interpretation and educational facility in central New York. It boasts a 2,000-square-foot exhibit hall with information about wetlands, habitat restoration, and wildlife migration. A short walk outside its doors brings more opportunities to learn, in a wide range of habitats, from marsh to meadow, natural lake to upland forest. The center plans to draw in the public for research opportunities. High school and college students will work through the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, while "citizen scientist" programs will monitor wildlife populations in conjunction with DEC and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services (USFWS).

DEC and USFWS will share an advisory role in planning exhibits and education programs, while Audubon New York will run the center. It is located in Wayne County, on Route 89 one mile north of Savannah. For more information, please visit the center's website at Audubon New York at http://ny.audubon.org/montezuma.htm

Botulism in Lake Ontario

DEC is investigating the deaths of birds found along the shores of Lake Ontario and the Thousand Islands area of the St. Lawrence River. Gulls and terns collected from Little Galloo Island in July were infected with Type E Botulism. This strain most commonly affects fish-eating birds. It causes paralysis and is almost always fatal. The first Great Lakes outbreak of Type E Botulism occurred in Lake Huron in 1998. There have been no reports of associated human illness, but DEC advises hunters and anglers to not harvest waterfowl or fish that are sick or behaving abnormally. A sick fish often has difficulty remaining upright, swims on its side or belly up, or flounders on the surface trying to swim down. Cooking does not destroy the botulism toxin.

If you must handle dead or dying fish or birds, use rubber or plastic protective gloves or a plastic bag. Any dead or distressed fish or wildlife, such as water birds showing signs of "limberneck" (paralysis of the neck muscles), should be reported to DEC's Division of Fish and Wildlife offices in Allegany (716-372-0645), Avon (585-226-2466), Buffalo (716-851-7010), Cape Vincent (315-654-2147), Cortland (607-753-3095), Syracuse (315-426-7400), or Watertown (315-785-2261).

New State Symbol

The striped bass and the snapping turtle have joined the beaver, brook trout, bluebird, and others as official New York State symbols. The state's new official marine fish, the striped bass, is an important commercial and recreational fish in New York waters. It averages 18 to 55 inches in length and weighs up to 70 pounds. Snapping turtles can live more than 30 years and can weigh more than 35 pounds.

Rest Stop Rattlers

Raymond Dimick

Snake sightings in mid-July prompted the closing of a rest area near Corning, just west of Exit 43 on Interstate 86. Public Works employees found two timber rattlesnakes—the state's largest venomous snake—sunning themselves by the area's picnic tables. The Department of Transportation (DOT) immediately closed down the rest area while DEC removed the rattlesnakes; DOT decided to reopen the area later that week. Timber rattlesnakes are found in isolated groups in southern portions of the state. Their size, head, and color help distinguish them. Due to their small population, they are a threatened species in New York. It is illegal to track, harass, or injure the snakes; killing one is punishable by a fine of up to $1,000.

Write to us at: *Conservationist* Letters, NYSDEC, 625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-4502
or e-mail us at: magazine@gw.dec.state.ny.us

Government Flies?

For the past week we have been inundated with large flies. We have heard stories that flies have been released to kill off the gypsy moths that are infesting the mountains. Please give us any pertinent information.

Pat and Bert Ketchum
Shokan, Ulster County

The flies are a native species that parasitizes the forest tent caterpillars' pupae. The caterpillars have been very abundant for two years, so the flies are becoming the same; eventually, though, they will help end the caterpillar outbreak. The species is Sarcophaga aldrichi, *known as the "friendly fly" for a habit of landing on people in great numbers during an outbreak. Some call them "government flies," but they are native and have not been reared or released by the state or federal government—it just isn't necessary.*
—Jason Denham, Senior Forester

Fox Trot

We have an old bird feeder we don't use any more, so we use it to feed stray cats in our area. We put two bowls of cat food in the feeder and every morning they are empty. So we watched one night and this is the culprit, a grey fox. Here is the proof. We definitely enjoy watching the little guy.

Mr. and Mrs. Wayne Saddlemire
Clifton Park, Saratoga County

Like other wild members of the dog family, the grey fox (our smallest fox) is an "opportunistic" feeder. Depending on season and abundance, it will eat plant and animal material, and also adapts easily to foods for other animals. While the grey fox is an interesting animal to observe, I recommend that you slowly discontinue providing food in this way. When food near a home attracts wild mammals, it may lead to property damage or threats to humans. For example, raccoons attracted to a yard may eventually damage the home itself. Enjoy wildlife from a distance and let them stay wild. I hope that this grey fox will soon learn that it is better off in the wild than in your yard.
—Gordon Batcheller, Certified Wildlife Biologist

Here Kitty, Kitty

A few days ago, my neighbor claims to have seen a mountain lion cross a field near his house. He said that it was bigger than his dog. I wasn't convinced until I came across a deer carcass that had been dragged from a creek bank to an area under an apple tree. Is it possible for mountain lions to be in the Mohawk Valley?

Bill Banaszewski

Gerald Cramer
Palatine Bridge, Montgomery County

The deer carcass may have been moved by coyotes, domestic dogs, or humans. It is unlikely a cougar moved it, but DEC wildlife offices—and wildlife agencies across the eastern United States—receive many reports of mountain lion sightings. Unfortunately, these sightings are often reported long after good field evidence remains. In most cases, the animal was a dog, bobcat, house cat, or fisher. A young mountain lion in poor condition appeared a few years ago in Saratoga County, but turned out to be an escaped or released captive. DEC maintains that mountain lions do not exist in the state as a sustaining population; any individual that turns up is likely to have been captive originally. If you find evidence of an unidentified large mammal, get pictures (with a ruler or object in the picture for scale) and contact your regional DEC Wildlife office. Staff will assess the details and try to confirm the animal's identity.
—Scott Van Arsdale, Fish and Wildlife Technician

Gobble, Gobble

I have been a turkey hunter for more than 25 years and I have shot my share of turkeys. I am now 63 years old and retired; the only turkeys I shot this year were with a camera. My wife once told me that she figured the cost of me getting a wild turkey is about $500 per pound. But I have had a lot of fun trying. I enjoy turkey hunting, and I'd like to thank all of those that helped bring the sport back. I have also figured out how to take it with me when I go. My headstone will read: "Heard a gobble, gone ahead."

Tom Cole
Kingston, Ulster County

Bobcat

I was lucky enough to catch this bobcat in my backyard.

John Kimble
Addison, Stueben County

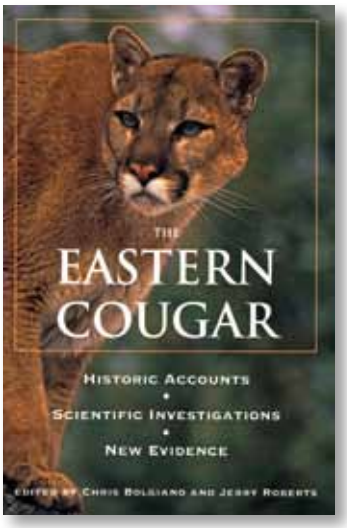
Bobcats are solitary animals and generally avoid people, so you were very lucky to catch a glimpse of one. This particular animal looks fairly young, which would explain why it hung around long enough to let you snap this photo.
—Melissa Albino, Letters and Reviews editor

REVIEWS

The Eastern Cougar: Historic Accounts, Scientific Investigations, and New Evidence

Edited by Chris Bolgiano and Jerry Roberts
246 pages, softcover $19.95
Stackpole Books
www.stackpolebooks.com
Reviewed by Scott VanArsdale

As the title indicates, this book is a compilation of newspaper articles, scientific papers and accounts regarding cougars (or mountain lions) in the east, interspersed with commentary from the editors. People with an interest in cougars will find some accounts interesting, but those with strong opinions about whether the cats sustain a breeding population will be disappointed that the debate isn't settled here. Readers who actively follow the topic will be familiar with the material, and those just looking for an entertaining read will find it hard to not skim past the slow sections.



The collection is ordered by subject, and starts with the time when cougars were certainly part of eastern fauna. Stories of sightings and physical evidence (complete with speculation) are followed by an exploration of the possibility that cougars exist in the wild. While I read, I felt it was biased towards the "yes, they are here" side; towards the end, opposing arguments were covered, but not always in depth. For true balance, the book needed an account of sightings that proved to be mistaken identities.

A warning to those whose interest is limited to New York cougars: the accounts are scattered throughout the eastern half of Canada and the U.S. with little from New York. Some are even from midwestern states, where wild cougars have been documented, but evidently wandered from established populations further west.

Perhaps it is better to think of this as a single source of reference and research material; as that, it is the most comprehensive collection I know of. For those who want to research the topic, this book provides a great deal of material.

Scott VanArsdale is a fish and wildlife technician in DEC's Stamford office.

Sunday Too Soon

by Jim Sollecito

"You just can't beat a dog's happy face, vibrating tail, pink tongue, and soft fur."

I stopped counting how many pheasants I shot in a season when I turned 50. There really didn't seem to be much point in keeping score anymore. Over the years I graduated from a 12-gauge 870 to my Beretta 20 over-and-under, and my boots are Gore-tex. Now it's about the enjoyment shared in the field with my dog. Stuffing a downed bird into my sack was anticlimactic, and almost sad sometimes.

My dogs were, and still are, Brittanys. My friend Bob Peel turned me on to them the year my father died, and I thank him almost every day.

Most of the times afield, Lady led us, followed by Jasmine, and I trailed behind. For 22 years the pride and pleasure of working my own dog was worth whatever it cost for vet bills, food, and toll on the backyard landscape. You just can't beat that kind and happy face, vibrating tail, pink tongue, and soft fur.

My family doesn't want to be without a dog, so when the sound of nine bells chimed for Lady, we brought another into our lives. Jasmine was very gracious in accepting a frisky new pup, Stella D'Oro, into her domain. The entire family, Megan, Hannah, Rachel and I, loved them equally.

I introduced a number of others into the fold. Over the 11 years that Jasmine roamed the woods and fields of central New York with me, she was responsible for more than 47 people, many of them new hunters, to have shot their first pheasant over her steady point. To her it didn't matter; she treated them all with the same enthusiasm and respect. It was all about the experience.

To the best of my knowledge, other than dogs owned by a hunting preserve, there isn't another dog around who was responsible for so many first-time pheasant shooting experiences. Her last, in September of 2005, was with a group of youngsters at Whispering Pines in Lyons.

After a four-month battle with spleen cancer, Jasmine slipped into her final sleep on a quiet Sunday afternoon. She lived life fully to the end. A lot of emotion and a pond full of tears went with her. After hundreds of hunts and thousands of points, a chapter in our book had closed forever.

You may have heard that dog is God spelled backwards. The lessons of loyalty, perseverance, singleness of purpose and poise were taught backwards from Jasmine to me. When I was too weary, the snow too deep or the rain too hard, she kept me in the game. For that I am indeed fortunate, and grateful. I had been planning on a couple of more years together, that's all. I wasn't prepared for Sunday to come so soon.

She pardoned my misses, and I overlooked her lack of retrieving. Every year she'd retrieve one bird, just one, to show me that she could, but chose not to. This year she did it twice in the same day, just to get out of the swamp at Three Rivers, I think. For the rest of more than 500 pheasants, she'd find them, catch them, and then stand on them and wait for me.

When something that we've enjoyed is taken away, we mourn the loss. Youth, hair, kids leaving home, a friend moving away, and certainly the death of our dog. We'd like to think that our days are without limit, but of course everything is finite on this planet.

And now the memories of being afield with Jasmine, on a cool October afternoon as leaves began to fall, will be with me for life. She helped me realize that, in its truest form, hunting is not human beings having a spiritual experience, but rather spiritual beings having a human experience. Goodbye, Jasmine.

Certified Landscape Professional **Jim Sollecito** is state promotion chairman for the NYS Nursery Landscape Association and President of Sollecito Landscaping Nursery.

2005 Big Buck Club Winners

Paintings by Wayne Trimm

Each year since 1972, the Big Buck Club has recognized the hunters who take the largest trophy bucks in New York State. The winner in each category receives an original painting by renowned artist and former *Conservationist* art director Wayne Trimm.

2005 Record Archery Deer
Score 198 4/8
Taken in Steuben County Near Campbell
by Rex Taft on November 3, 2005

2005 Record Gun Deer
Score 192 6/8
Taken in Ontario County near Farmington
by Andy Hall on November 19, 2005

For more information write to:
NYS Big Buck Club
Records Office
PO Box 451
Vernon, NY 13476
or visit their website:
www.nys-big-buck.org

Artist and biologist Wayne Trimm has done paintings for each winner since the club was formed.

Are deer populations set to rebound? See page 28.

Photo © Thomas D. Lindsay

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