

Camping Traditions | Homegrown Foliage | Fishing Lake Ontario

NEW YORK STATE

# Conservationist

JUNE 2009

Echo  
The  
Earth  
Biomimicry

**Tubular!**  
FUN ON THE ESOPUS





Dear Reader,

Happy Summer! Whether it's swimming, hiking, fishing, camping, canoeing or just enjoying a barbeque with family and friends, summer is a time to take advantage of a great array of outdoor experiences across the state. DEC's 52 Adirondack and Catskill campgrounds are a great option for an outdoor getaway, offering spectacular landscapes, lush forests and a wide variety of experiences, including island and tent and trailer camping, hiking trails and beaches. Nature recreation programs are offered at many facilities, and campers can also enjoy the many events, historical sites and restaurants of nearby towns and villages.

If you'd like to learn more about DEC's campgrounds, read the article *Home Away From Home* in this issue, or check out the new and improved 2009 New York State Camping Guide, which includes beautiful photos and descriptions of every campground. You can find the guide online at [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov), or call 518-457-2500 to request a copy.

For many, camping is a lifelong tradition, with memories passed down from one generation to the next. Whether you are a backyard camper or prefer the remote setting of an Adirondack or Catskill lake, I encourage you to start your own camping tradition this year. Most important of all, have a safe and happy summer!

Sincerely,

Commissioner Pete Grannis

NEW YORK STATE  
**Conservationist**

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Susan L. Shafer

June 2009 Volume 63, Number 6

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*Make Way for*  
**Osbrey**

by Blanche Town

65 0000 002





**The office phone rings.** A voice at the other end of the line enthusiastically reports that a pair of osprey is building a nest. The caller continues, "They are just down the road from our house. We love watching them. They're bringing in sticks this morning." Next comes the bad news: "The nest is on a power pole. You aren't going to let them tear it down, are you?"



Jeff Nadler

Calls like this are becoming more common in DEC's Region 6 office in the St. Lawrence Valley. Historically, ospreys nested at natural sites, such as in white pine trees "topped" by the elements, in large dead trees near lakes and rivers, or in standing, dead timber in flooded wetlands. More and more, ospreys are finding manmade structures to their liking. Since 2001, 60% of the osprey nests identified in northwestern New York (primarily St. Lawrence and Jefferson counties) are found on power poles, navigation cells, cellular phone towers, chimneys, and "goose tubs" (artificial nesting structures intended for use by geese).

Nesting on power poles can be bad news for both ospreys and electric customers. If sticks or other nesting material touching the lines cause a short circuit, the



result can be a fire or an explosion, loss of power and electrocuted or injured birds. In this part of New York, National Grid is working closely with DEC to prevent these problems, by erecting nesting platforms

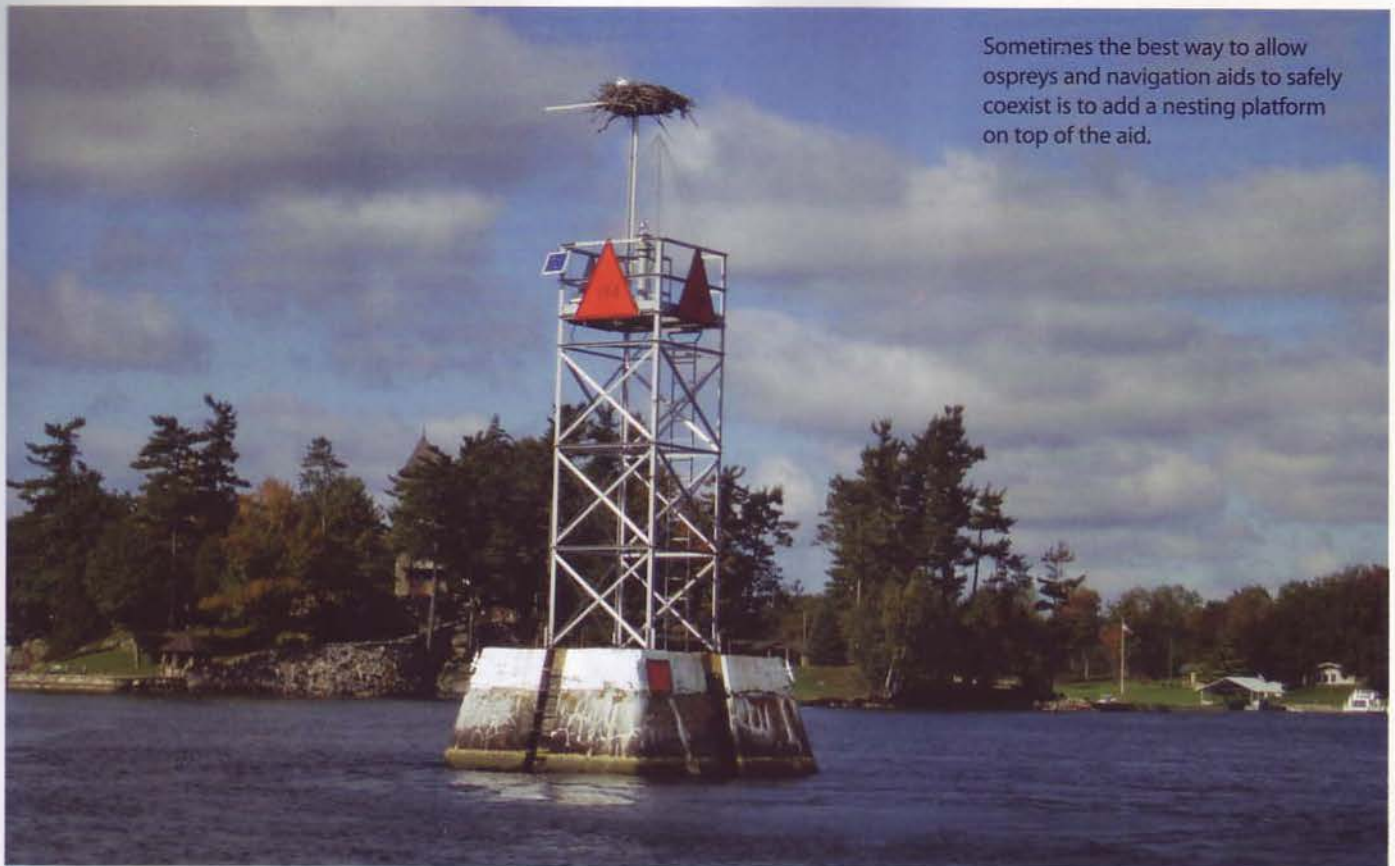
**Ospreys feed primarily on fish, which they catch by plunging into the water feet first.**

adjacent to the poles, or by modifying the power poles themselves. This allows nesting to take place safely without loss of power or injury to the birds.

Power poles aren't the only structures that bring ospreys into conflict with people. These large birds of prey sometimes build their nests on navigation cells in the St. Lawrence River. They frequently choose a nesting location that hinders maintenance and sometimes operation of the light. It is important that the lights are not compromised, as they serve a critical safety and commercial function—guiding ships and other boat traffic away from shoals and allowing them to safely navigate the St. Lawrence Seaway. The St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation has been very cooperative in modifying navigation cells by adding nesting platforms mounted atop a structure. This allows birds to nest safely away from the electrical equipment.



Power poles are dangerous spots for osprey nests because debris from the nest may hit the wires, causing fire, loss of power and injured birds.



Sometimes the best way to allow ospreys and navigation aids to safely coexist is to add a nesting platform on top of the aid.

Blanche Town

Ospreys feed primarily on fish, which they catch by plunging into the water feet first. With needle-sharp hooked talons, and zygodactyl feet (two toes face forward and two toes face backward), they extract their prey from the water. Like other fish-eating species, osprey populations declined drastically between 1940 and 1970 as a result of DDT-induced egg-shell thinning. When the pesticide DDT was banned in 1972, osprey populations rebounded. Once listed as “endangered” in New York and some other states, the osprey is now more favorably listed as a species of “special concern.”

Ospreys are typically found in our area from April to September. Satellite telemetry conducted with adult ospreys nesting on the St. Lawrence River and the Perch River Wildlife Management Area (Jefferson County) revealed that our summer residents migrate to South America for the winter months, returning as spring comes to the north country.

So, the next time you see a large bird of prey near a major watercourse, look

closely. If it has a dark eye stripe, and holds its wings in an arched fashion, you may be looking at an osprey—a fine example of a bird that has figured out how to thrive in close proximity to human kind.

**Blanche Town** is a fish & wildlife technician 3 with DEC’s Bureau of Wildlife. She monitors bald eagle and osprey activity in the western Adirondacks and St. Lawrence River Valley.

*DEC wishes to acknowledge the proactive and necessary cooperation and efforts of National Grid and the St. Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation as we work together to find ways to ensure a viable osprey population, without compromising public safety.*



National Grid and DEC are working together to keep osprey safe by erecting nesting platforms away from electrical equipment.

Blanche Town



Gary Lee



Phyllis Samson



DEC photo



Jack Hoyle

# Home *away* from Home

By Ellen Bidell and Brian Scott

**The smell of the campfire, the call of the loon, the camaraderie of friends, and the solitude of the woods. These are the things that keep people coming back to DEC campgrounds year after year.**

Nearly 100 years ago, the first recreational campers in New York State packed up their cars with a weekend's worth of food, headed to a rural or wooded area, and often just pulled to the side of the road when they found the "perfect" camping spot. Those outdoor adventurers set up a simple shelter made of canvas held between several poles in which to spend the weekend. Today, accommodations run the gamut from a single-person nylon tent to large motor homes with a number of amenities and modern conveniences. While the gear has changed considerably over time, the reasons that people choose to camp have not, and camping is now one of the most popular outdoor vacation activities in the United States.

DEC operates 52 public campgrounds throughout the Adirondack and Catskill parks. Most campgrounds open

in mid-May and half stay open through Columbus Day. Depending on the campground, the number of campsites ranges from only a few dozen to more than three hundred. Most can accommodate RVs, but several are only accessible by foot or boat. None offer water or electric hookups (these are available at some campgrounds administered by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation), but most have modern restrooms with showers.

DEC campgrounds provide a wide variety of experiences, including island camping, tent and trailer camping, boat launching facilities, hiking trails, beaches, and day-use areas with picnic tables and grills.

According to the U.S. Travel Association, one third of U.S. adults say they have gone on a camping vacation in the past five years and only six percent of people who have

*New York State Conservationist, June 2009*





Gerald Gimpelowski



Thomas Burger



John L. Mitchell



Thomas Burger

While the gear has changed through the years, the reasons people camp have not, and camping is one of the most popular outdoor vacation activities in the U.S. today. (Photos, clockwise from bottom of page 6: Bear Mtn. Park, circa 1940s; Point Comfort, Piseco Lake, circa 1930s; Eighth Lake, circa 1930s; Hearthstone, Lake George, circa 1930s; Eighth Lake, 1966; Limekiln Lake, 1987; Limekiln Lake beach, 1987; Brown Tract Pond, 1982)

gone camping said it was not for them. But to some, camping is more than just a vacation, it is a lifelong tradition.

Thomas Burger and his family, of Canandaigua, New York, have been camping at DEC campgrounds every year for 44 years. They generally stay one or two weeks at Limekiln Lake, but

In addition to making lifelong friendships that started around a campfire, Thomas also recalls teaching his son how to canoe on Limekiln Lake. "In years past, black bears would roam the campground freely, adding to the Adirondack experience. It has given me a great appreciation for nature," he said. It does trouble

bear containers for food storage, and the creation of a new program for children to learn about nature," explained Thomas. "I would like to see more people appreciate these improvements and work to keep our campgrounds as beautiful and serene as they can be, so that they may be enjoyed for years to come." He says that

### To some, camping is more than just a vacation, it's a lifelong tradition.

have also visited Lewey Lake and Rollins Pond in years past. Limekiln Lake is located near the village of Inlet in the Adirondacks. Thomas prefers it there because of the location—there are many activities nearby, including a water park, antique shops, restaurants, museums, golf and hiking. There are 271 large campsites, a guarded swimming beach, and boating is allowed on the lake.

Thomas to see some of the changes that have come with the passing of four decades. He feels that people don't appreciate enough what the campground offers and don't fully understand their responsibility to help care for and maintain it. "I have watched the excellent staff at Limekiln Lake continually improve conditions at the campground, adding a shower building, improved fireplaces,

his camping experiences have encouraged him to do what he can to help preserve the Adirondacks.

Another long-term camping family, the Fentons of West Winfield, New York, also prefer Limekiln Lake for their camping vacations. They have been returning to the campground for the past 35 years. In recent years, their trips have lasted the entire two weeks

allowed at DEC campgrounds. Like the Burgers, the Fentons enjoy the campground's large sites. "Limekiln Lake Campground has big, roomy campsites in a variety of settings. Some are close to the water and the beach area, while others are way back in the woods," Tom Fenton explained.

"We generally try to make at least one trip to Limekiln around the 4th of July. On this trip, it has become a tradition to watch the fireworks in the evening at the public beach at Inlet. Another tradition has been to climb Rocky Mount at least one time on each trip. It is an easy climb, but the view of Fourth Lake and the surrounding mountains is spectacular," Tom recalls.

"For us, camping has changed over the years, mostly as we have progressed from tents to a 5th-wheel camper. But even though our accommodations have become more comfortable, we still enjoy camping for the same reasons: hiking, canoeing, kayaking, building campfires and just spending time outdoors with our children, grandchildren and friends. We have made good friends that we keep in touch with throughout the year, and acquaintances that we only

see during the summer, but we are often able to renew our friendships while we are camping. Either way, the experience will never grow old for us," Tom said.

Brenda Carmer has spent a lifetime camping. She first camped at DEC's Sharp Bridge Campground as a child in 1932, and has returned every year since. There were neither paved roads nor electricity at the campground when her family started visiting. Brenda has special memories of the swimming hole where she spent much of her time, wet wool bathing suit and all. Her father helped build a diving board made of lumber from a nearby mill and installed it at the swimming hole. "Sometimes, the campground was so busy during those early years that if the campground was full, people were willing to share their site with another family, rather than turning them away," recalled Brenda. She added that each campsite used to be marked with the names of the families who stayed there, rather than a number.

Located along the banks of the Schroon River, Sharp Bridge Campground started in 1920 with a single campsite. The summers spent at Sharp Bridge remain so much a part of Brenda, now 84 years

Camping offers the opportunity for families to reconnect with nature and each other. A number of DEC campgrounds offer activity programs for children.



Darren McGee



Susan Shafer



Susan Shafer



Susan Shafer

old, that she is currently writing a memoir about her camping experiences. She even wishes her ashes to be spread over Sharp Bridge when she passes away.

What keeps people like Brenda Carmer, the Fentons and the Burgers returning to the same campground? For many, it is more than just the beauty of a particular location. Nearby activities and attractions can enrich the camping experience and keep people coming back year after year.

**Ellen Bidell** is a citizen participation specialist in Public Affairs and Education and **Brian Scott** is a conservation operations supervisor in the Bureau of Recreation in DEC's Albany office.

## Connect to Nature

Reservations for DEC state campgrounds are made through ReserveAmerica, either online at [www.ReserveAmerica.com](http://www.ReserveAmerica.com) or by calling 1-800-456-CAMP (2267).

Daily site fees range from \$14 to \$22. Visit DEC's website at [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov) to view the *2009 New York Camping Guide*, which has photos and descriptions of all 52 campgrounds and their amenities.

### **Remember: Don't Move Firewood!**

Make sure to buy firewood near the campground for your nightly campfires. A new state regulation prohibits importation of firewood into New York unless it has been treated to kill pests. The regulation also limits transportation of untreated firewood to fewer than 50 miles from its source.



## DEC Campgrounds: More Than Just Camping

While most every camper enjoys being outdoors and sitting around a campfire, different campgrounds offer unique appeal depending on a camper's interests. Check out some of the following campgrounds to see if one might be a future destination for you and your family.

### **Boaters of All Kinds: Fish Creek Pond and Rollins Pond**

Fish Creek Pond and Rollins Pond are located in the Adirondacks on State Route 30 north of Tupper Lake. The two campgrounds are adjacent to each other, and combined offer nearly 650 campsites, accommodating everything from tents to 40-foot RVs. Fish Creek Pond Campground offers a natural sand shoreline and water access for most campsites. Motorized boats are allowed on both Fish Creek Pond and Square Pond, as well as on Upper Saranac Lake. For those who prefer canoes and kayaks, Rollins Pond Campground has several ponds and the St. Regis canoe area is nearby. Favorites of many campers, Fish Creek and Rollins Pond both offer a variety of boat rentals.

### **Families: Moffitt Beach**

A popular family campground, Moffitt Beach is located near Speculator in the Adirondacks. The campsites are nestled in a grove of 70-foot tall white pine trees, and many are at the water's edge. During summer months, the campground offers several activity programs for children, including nature hikes, crafts, games, and live entertainment. There is a guarded swimming beach on the shores of Sacandaga Lake also.

### **Serious Hikers: Devil's Tombstone**

Devil's Tombstone Campground is located in the Town of Hunter in the Catskills. It is one of the oldest campgrounds in the Catskill Forest Preserve, and an ideal base camp for serious hikers. The trails lead to some of the preserve's highest peaks, including Hunter,

Indian Head and the West Kill Range. With only 24 tent and trailer sites, Devil's Tombstone is one of the smaller DEC campgrounds, and the camping is primitive, with no shower facilities and no swimming or boating on the small lake. The area is rich in history, and legend has it that the rugged mountain pass was a favorite haunt of the Devil when settlers first arrived in the Catskills.

### **A Camping Adventure: Lake George Islands**

Located in the middle of Lake George in the Adirondacks, the forty-four Lake George islands offer great camping for those seeking privacy. There are 387 shoreline campsites accessible only by boat. All sites have a dock for at least one boat, a fireplace, picnic table and toilet facility. Lake George is renowned for some of the best recreational boating in the Northeast. There are more than 50 miles of trails nearby for hiking to many of the mountains overlooking the lake.

### **Fisherman's Paradise: Wilmington Notch**

Wilmington Notch is located in the Adirondacks just east of Lake Placid on NYS Route 86. The campground lies on the shores of the West Branch of the Ausable River, a favorite spot for anglers looking to challenge the riffles in search of a great catch. If the fish aren't biting, campers can visit any of the nearby attractions: Olympic venues, Santa's Workshop or High Falls Gorge. The 54 campsites are situated in a birch and pine grove at the base of Whiteface Mountain.



# Blazing Trails

By Robin Dropkin and Wally Elton

## New York is building a statewide trail network one locality at a time

*Imagine stepping out your door* and finding a convenient and comfortable pathway that leads to your workplace, community library, local school, or favorite shopping area. Or hopping on your bicycle and following a paved but traffic-free route to a more distant park or the restaurant you've heard about in the next town over.

Across New York today, many local citizens are doing more than envisioning an enhanced quality of life through multi-use trails in their communities—they are banding together to make it happen. Recognition that fuel prices are likely to rise again, the growing awareness of global climate change, the health risks posed by sedentary living, and the economic boost trails can give communities have strengthened the resolve of these advocates and attracted new allies from business, government and healthcare providers.

Often, potential corridors for these community trails are already in place, thanks to abandoned rail lines, utility rights-of-way or canal towpaths. In some cases, there may even be trail segments in use that simply need to be connected. Yet, progress is often slow, in part because local residents don't know how to mobilize constituencies, overcome obstacles that nearly always emerge, or find adequate and appropriate funding. But there is help available.

A statewide effort called Healthy Trails, Healthy People is enabling novice trail advocates in communities small and large to tap into, and learn from, the experience and expertise of others who have already successfully met similar challenges.

New York State already boasts an extensive system of rail and canal trails—1,200 miles currently in place, with more under development—as well as such renowned hiking trails as the Finger Lakes Trail, part of the Appalachian Trail, and the spectacular footpaths of the Adirondacks. All of these provide important recreational opportunities for New Yorkers and draw thousands of tourists to the state each year.

Over the past two decades or so, however, interest has grown in creating trails that are closer to where people live and work. Trails that offer both recreation and alternative transportation to a range of users, from walkers and bikers to stroller-pushing parents and



The extensive trail system in New York offers more than 1,200 miles of trails for recreation and transportation.

in-line skaters. Often called multi-use, shared-use or community trails, these have become an important component of nationwide efforts to decrease traffic congestion and air pollution, and to address the well-documented health risks of our generally inactive lifestyle.

In 2004, with funding from the Department of Health, Parks & Trails New York launched its Healthy Trails, Healthy People program by helping five local community groups develop trails. Today, through this program, citizen groups and local governments in nearly 30 cities, villages and towns across the state are in various stages of developing



## Trails offer both recreation and alternative transportation to a range of users, from walkers and bikers to stroller-pushing parents and in-line skaters.

multi-use trails that will help revitalize their communities and improve the health of their residents. These projects are laying the foundation for a statewide trail network of the future, and it is hoped that such work will inspire others to do the same. Here are few examples:

### Peru's River Trail

Like many New York communities, the hamlet of Peru in Clinton County grew along a river that provided power for grist mills and sawmills. In turn, these mills supported early settlers and later bustling local industries (here, lumber and iron). Today, there are few signs of the earlier economy that once sustained the village. But the river, the Little Ausable, remains. Now a group of residents, Friends of the Little Ausable River Trail, seeks to restore the river's central role in the community by creating a 3.5-mile trail along it that will connect three town parks with a school and other destinations.

Through the leadership of Adele Douglas of the local friends group, the Town of Peru recently received a federal Transportation Enhancement grant of more than \$500,000 to build the first 1.5 miles of trail. Combined with sidewalks, this trail will complete a loop through the historic mill area and the hamlet's center. With easement agreements from key private landowners in hand, and final approval from the State Department of Transportation expected soon, construction is likely to start this summer. Then, once again, the Little Ausable will bring vitality to the community and its people.

Says Douglas, "We had this opportunity for a really nice trail right in the hamlet that could link past and present while connecting other major destinations. There were many hurdles to jump, but now that we see construction ready to begin, we know it was worth it. Support

from the community, the town board and Parks & Trails New York kept us going."

### Chenango Canal Trail

More than a century ago, the Chenango Canal served as a vital transportation link between Utica, on the Erie Canal, and Binghamton, 97 miles to the south on the Susquehanna River. The railroad ended the canal's useful life, and more recently, highways put the railroad out of business. Today, residents of several communities believe that this historic route can once again connect and invigorate communities through its transformation into a trail.

Since 2001, the Chenango Canal Association has worked to preserve and restore the one intact, five-mile section of the original canal in the town of Madison. The association developed a trail along the old canal towpath that provides walkers, bikers, equestrians and skiers with a scenic recreational

## Interactive website showcases 110 community trails:

Begin your exploration of New York State's multi-use trails with Parks & Trails New York's new online TrailFinder site. Interactive maps provide detailed information for 110 multi-use trails across the state, including trailhead parking areas and nearby Bed and Breakfasts that welcome bicyclists. Check it out at [www.ptny.org/greenways/maps.shtml](http://www.ptny.org/greenways/maps.shtml).



resource and a chance to explore a bit of the past.

But association president Diane Van Slyke has a grander vision. In her plan, the abandoned 19th- and 20th-century canal and rail corridors, including the existing towpath trail, can be brought back to life as a non-motorized transportation link spanning nearly 20 miles between the villages of Clinton and Hamilton. Local advocates and municipal officials have mapped specific routes, identified adjacent landowners and funding sources, developed community support, obtained needed permits, and are ready to begin construction.

Meanwhile, 25 miles to the south in the city of Norwich, the Chenango Greenway Conservancy is creating another link in the chain. Although little evidence of the old canal remains there, the group is developing about six miles of trail along the Chenango River. This trail can connect with the former canal and railroad routes both north and south of Norwich, thus bringing another segment of this historic transportation corridor back to life.

### Chittenango Creekwalk Trail

For three decades, residents of the Madison County village of Chittenango sought unsuccessfully to create a trail that would link neighborhoods and



Trails aren't just old train tracks or canal towpaths; many communities have integrated them as valuable recreation and transportation devices in urban settings.

Parks & Trails New York

destinations along Chittenango Creek. But when a 2003 village revitalization study proposed the trail again, residents Donna Lynch and Bill Nickal rose to the challenge, and this time, new interest in the multiple benefits of trails resulted in a favorable outcome.

The project's goal was to create a 3.3-mile Chittenango Creekwalk & Neighborhood Trail System that linked neighborhoods to parks, schools, the business district, and the Erie Canalway Trail. Unsure how to proceed, the group working on the project held a workshop to solicit ideas and generate support.

The outcome was a report that presented recommendations for trail development, promotion, partnerships, and funding. As a result, the village government became a committed partner and now provides an annual budget and the assistance of the public works department. Property owners have agreed to easements for the first trail segment. With \$70,000 in hand from fundraising events, legislator support, local donations, and grants, including \$37,000 from the Central New York Community Foundation, the first trail section will be built this summer, and local leaders are confident that the rest of the network will follow.

According to Creekwalk co-chair Donna Lynch, the assistance of Healthy Trails, Healthy People gave the project credibility in the community and among potential supporters. "Their technical support showed us the way forward and gave us the confidence to proceed," she added.

### Robert Moody Trail

High above Canandaigua Lake in the western Finger Lakes, residents of the rural town of Gorham envisioned using an abandoned rail bed to create an easily accessible trail for walking and biking. Thanks to a generous donation, the town



Trails are an important component of a nationwide effort to get people outside and active.

Parks & Trails New York, Rick Manning



## Help Build the Network

**Get out.** Visit trails and see how they connect and benefit communities.

**Get smart.** Learn about the benefits of trails. Some good references can be found on Parks & Trails New York's website ([www.ptny.org](http://www.ptny.org)).

**Get together.** Find others in your community with similar interests and form an advocacy group.

**Think big.** Create a vision that will spark people's imaginations.

**Look around.** Build on what is special about or already exists in your community.

**Reach out.** Hold an event to engage people and promote your vision.

**Branch out.** Identify others who may support your goal (e.g., health groups) and work together.

**Speak out.** Express your support for trails to public officials; write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper.

**Broaden horizons.** Join a state-wide, regional or national organization that supports trails; learn from counterparts in other communities.

*New York State Conservationist, June 2009*

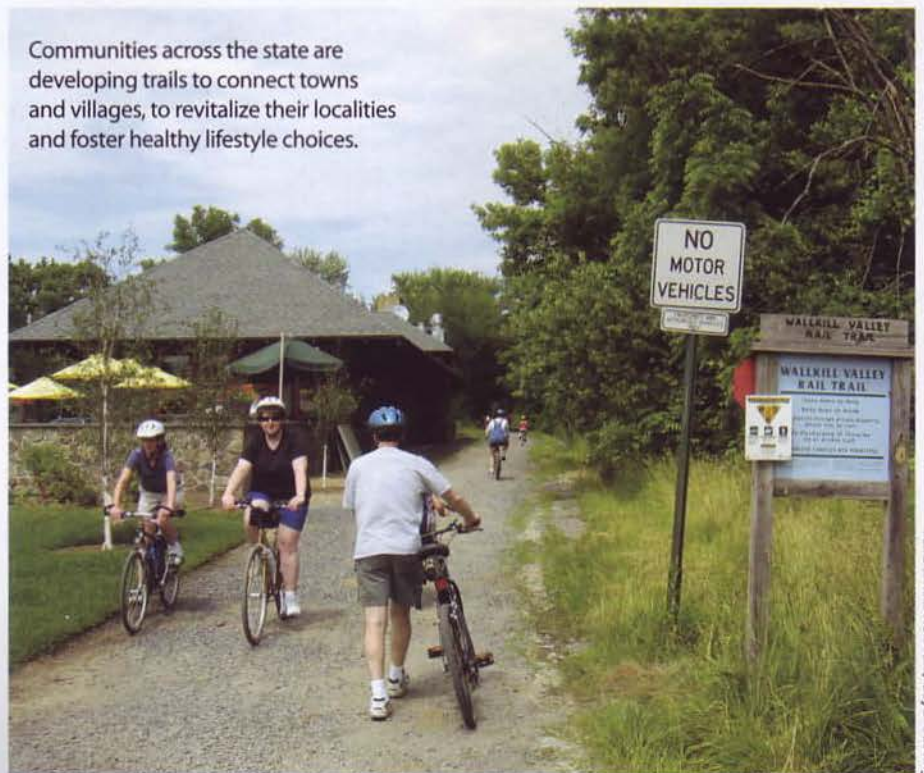
already owned the 1.1-mile corridor along the West River in the heart of the village of Rushville, but the corridor was heavily overgrown and three critical bridges were deteriorated or missing.

Undaunted, community leaders like Town Supervisor Richard Calabrese found ways to jumpstart the project. Community college students prepared a comprehensive plan for the trail, an engineering firm donated its services to assess the condition and needs of the three bridges, school groups and community members cleared vegetation from the corridor, and the town government and local watershed organization pledged financial support. Three new bridges were built of steel beams donated by Ontario County, with financial support from New York's Environmental Protection Fund and the Coca-Cola Corporation. A mini-grant from Parks & Trails New York and the service of an Eagle Scout made trail kiosks possible. Today, the Robert Moody Trail is open and residents of the community are now enjoying the newest recreational resource in town.

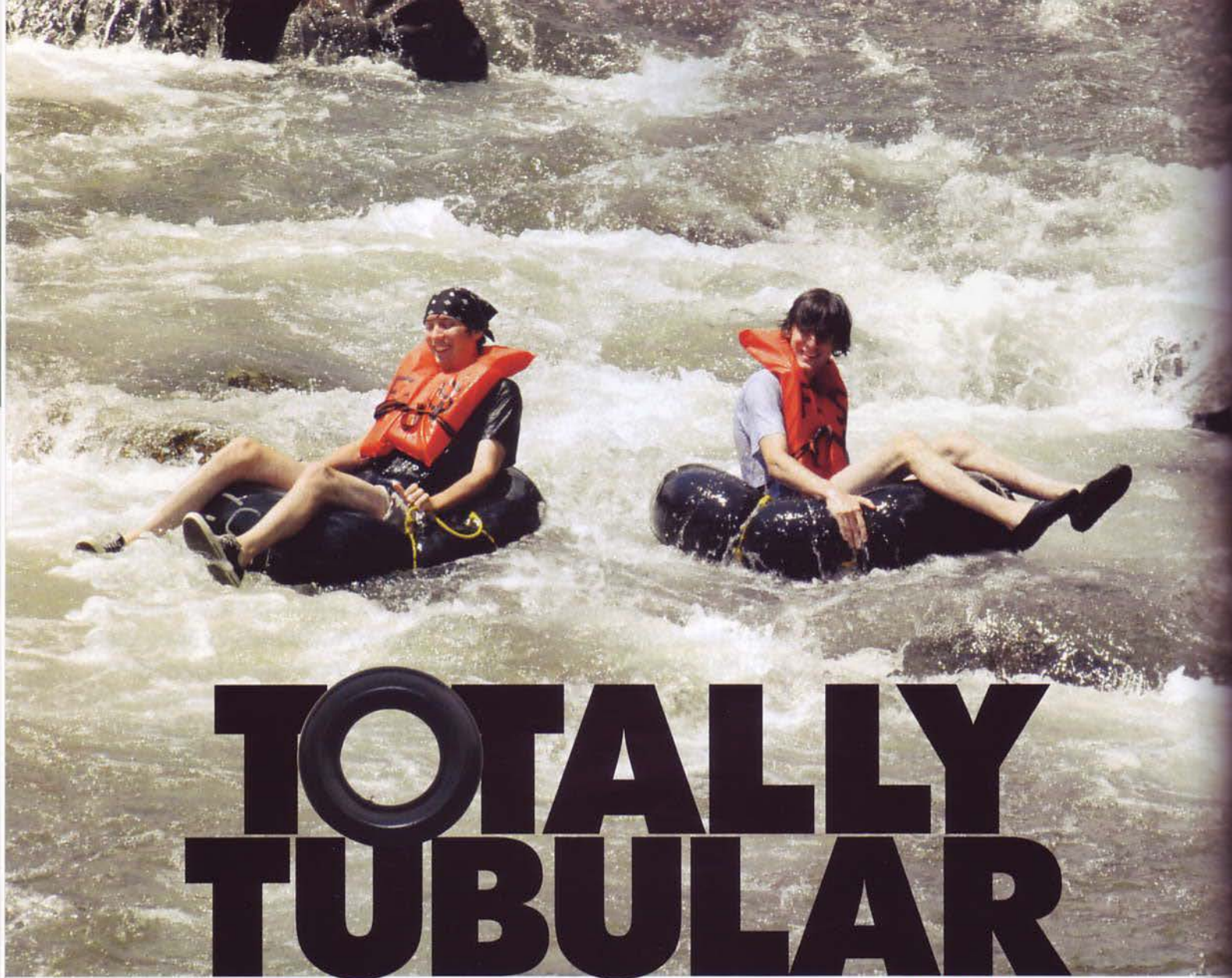
Similar success stories can be found in many other communities across New York. When these accomplishments and dreams are plotted on a map, the shape of a future trail network tying together regions and municipalities across the state comes into focus. There will be primary corridors, similar to major highways, along the New York State Canal System, the Hudson and Susquehanna rivers, and elsewhere. Branching from those will be secondary and local routes like the old Chenango Canal corridor and the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail. On a local scale, this network will enable New Yorkers to travel within and between adjacent communities without reliance on motor vehicles. At a regional scale, it will become an international bicycle tourism attraction, pumping new dollars into the economies of communities along its length. The possibilities are amazing. If everyone works together, perhaps we can bring this vision to fruition.

**Robin Dropkin** is executive director and **Wally Elton** is project director for Parks & Trails New York in Albany.

Communities across the state are developing trails to connect towns and villages, to revitalize their localities and foster healthy lifestyle choices.



Parks & Trails New York, Boyd A. Loving



# TOTALLY TUBULAR

Susan L. Shafer

by John Razzano

**THE SCENE:** A day off in the middle of the week—a sunny, warm, July day, with big, puffy clouds rolling through a clear blue sky. My two sons, Matt and Greg, are home from college. It's a perfect day for a father-and-sons outdoor adventure. The problem: Finding a way to cool off, have a little fun in the water, and spend some time enjoying a beautiful natural area. The solution: Tubing.

Next to swimming, tubing (also known as innertubing) is about as basic as a water sport can be. All you need is a tube and a stream of suitable size. Anything from the classic black rubber, truck tire inner tube, to a variety of commercially available doughnut-shaped floats will suffice. Truck tubes, however, are very sturdy and well suited for bouncing off boulder-strewn mountain streams. You can either buy your own or rent at many locations throughout the state (for suggestions, see "Go Tubin'" on page 16). We chose to rent.

Soon, we were on the Thruway driving to the sleepy village of Phoenicia, nestled in the foothills of the Catskill

Mountains. We were heading for Esopus Creek, famous for crystal-clear water, trout fishing, natural beauty, and tubing.

The Esopus is well-known for tubing because its flow is predictable. It's part of the New York City water supply system and usually receives scheduled releases from the Schoharie Reservoir. I say usually, because the day we went releases had been temporarily suspended. We had to rely on the generosity of Mother Nature, which fortunately cooperated the previous weekend with a good dose of rain.

Phoenicia is about midway between Albany and New York City. In little more than an hour and a half from our Capital



District home, we were pulling into the lot at F-S Tube Rental, one of two businesses in Phoenicia where thrill-seekers can take a wild ride down the Esopus. It was mid-morning and just starting to get hot.

We clambered out of the car and approached a red barn filled with orange life vests, plastic helmets, wet sneakers drying in the sun, "I Tubed the Esopus" T-shirts, and the requisite inflated inner tubes. A white-painted block wall was filled with graffiti, saying things like, "Bhalla Family, New Delhi, India," "Will be back! Cheryl," and, "My leg! Diego." We laughed nervously at that one.

At the rental counter, we met F-S Tube's proprietor, Richie Bedner (also known as "The Tube King"). Richie was the first to set up a rental business on the Esopus more than 30 years ago, after seeing how much fun local teens were having tubing the creek. Now in his 50s, head shaved bald, he smiles broadly as he says in a thick Brooklyn accent, "The 'F-S' stands for Fantastic Service."

We paid our fare and changed into our swimsuits. Richie gave us a quick rundown on the two routes we could take: the Upper Course is recommended for teens and adults, with more frequent and larger

rapids. The Lower Course is more suitable for families with younger kids. Personally, I would not allow a child younger than 12, depending on size and ability, on the Lower Course (see the sidebar "Safety First"). The trip on either course lasts about an hour and forty-five minutes.

The basic rental fee covers an inflated inner tube rigged with a board in the middle that you sit on and rope handholds on the sides, plus a shuttle bus to the launch site for the Upper Course, or back to F-S Tube for the Lower Course. Personal flotation devices (PFDs, also known as life vests), helmets, and even sneakers are available for rent at small additional fees. If you want to bring your own tubes instead of renting, F-S Tube charges a per-person facility-use fee which includes the shuttle bus service.

Wetsuits are also available for an additional charge, but are unnecessary in hot summer weather. Water temperatures range from highs in the 60s to lows in the 50s (°F) when cold reservoir-release water mixes with natural stream flow.

Anxious to hit the water, we climbed aboard the bus for the trip to the launch site, about three-and-a-half miles upstream. The road followed the creek

## Safety First!

Tubing is done at your own risk. Streams like the Esopus are not water-park rides. They are wild waters that should be treated with caution and respect. Fast, swirling currents, rocks, submerged obstacles, and overhanging limbs can be dangerous if you're not careful.

Even though streams are often shallow enough for a person of average height to stand in knee-deep water, it's hard to get a firm foothold on slippery rocks in fast currents. So, to tube safely, you must know how to swim. You should also wear a personal flotation device (also known as a life vest), sneakers to protect your feet, and a helmet.

Lastly, never tube alone!



Susan L. Shafer

Whenever tubing, it's important to be safe. While many novices and first-timers choose not to wear a helmet, most experienced paddlers and tubers feel it is a must.



and gave us a glimpse of some of the whitewater we would soon face. It also gave us a chance to appreciate the beauty of the Esopus: a fly fisherman waded in the tea-colored water, whipping his line high overhead; a yellow swallowtail butterfly fluttered over wildflowers on banks flanked by cool green pines, maples and poplars; a man paddled a kayak through frothy rapids swirling around huge boulders.

Reaching our destination, we donned our PFDs and unloaded our tubes. Our driver showed us how to sling them

***Paddling furiously to take the best path, you're forced to surrender to the speed and power of the water, spinning in whatever direction waves and rocks dictate.***

behind us and carry them on our heads...funny looking, but comfortable and effective. On our way to the water, we listened to some last minute instructions: paddle with your hands to position yourself before taking rapids; hold on to the rope handles to stay with your tube if you fall out; move to the right side of the stream in the beginning to avoid an overhanging tree; get out at the rock with the word "OUT" painted on it, and it's only a short walk back to F-S Tube from there.

We slapped our tubes onto the water and pushed them toward the right side, as instructed, before jumping in. The initial shock of the cool water soon wore off and we were on our way.

Initially, the current takes you along at a leisurely pace, enabling you to relax and enjoy the sights, sounds and sensations...rushing water, cool arms and back, warm sun on your face and chest, mountains wrapped in their summer green velvet. Ahhh! Life is good!

Suddenly, you're picking up speed! The stream is descending more steeply and you spy your first whitewater in the distance. Paddling furiously to take the best path, you're forced

to surrender to the speed and power of the water, spinning in whatever direction waves and rocks dictate. Thank God for that board in the middle of the tube!

Lesson 1: Tubing is not for control freaks. It's difficult to control a doughnut-shaped float. Though you can paddle or even get out to reposition yourself, you're at the mercy of the current most of the time. The sport's charm lies in the feeling of abandon that comes from letting yourself go.

Once you get through your first rapids, it's back to smooth

sailing. "That wasn't too bad," you say to yourself. These breaks in the action are good for regrouping. You can slow yourself down by paddling toward shore or dragging your feet, enabling your fellow tubers to catch up. Once again, you can commune with nature. Above us, flitting and hovering as they swooped after flying insects, were dozens of cedar waxwings...a species that I was unfamiliar with at the time, but which was entrancing to watch. The creek serves many invaluable functions for both people and the wild creatures that depend on its life-giving water.

The next set of rapids is coming up. This time, they're larger and more challenging. Both of my sons flip out of their tubes. They come up laughing and clamber aboard again. Whew! What a relief. I stayed aboard, but not because of my age and experience. Let's just say I have more gravity, and leave it at that.

Lesson 2: Wear a helmet! When you're whirling around big rocks, it's no time to be macho. Tubing may seem relatively tame as sports go, but it involves very real risks.

## ***Go Tubin'!***

*There are a number of good tubing waters located across the state and numerous accompanying outfitters where you can rent equipment. For more information, check out the following websites:*

In Phoenicia, **F-S Tube Rental:** [www.fstuberental.com](http://www.fstuberental.com)  
and The Town Tinker Tube Rental: [www.towntinker.com](http://www.towntinker.com)

**Sacandaga Outdoor Center** in Hadley offers whitewater tubing on the Sacandaga River and Lower Hudson River Gorge in the Adirondacks: [www.4soc.com](http://www.4soc.com)

**Hudson River Rafting** offers whitewater tubing on the Middle Hudson River Gorge in North Creek, or on the Sacandaga River in Lake Luzerne: [www.hudsonriverrafting.com](http://www.hudsonriverrafting.com)

**Battenkill Riversports** in Cambridge offers easy, flat-water tubing on the famous Battenkill River: [www.brsac.com/tubetrips.html](http://www.brsac.com/tubetrips.html)

**Ausable Chasm Campground** in Ausable Chasm offers easy, flat-water tubing on the Ausable River through the famous chasm: [www.ausablechasm.com](http://www.ausablechasm.com)

**Adirondack Exposure** in Old Forge offers whitewater tubing on the Middle Moose River in the Adirondacks: [www.adirondackexposure.com](http://www.adirondackexposure.com)

**Kittatinny Campgrounds** in Barryville or Pond Eddy offers easy whitewater tubing on the Delaware River: [www.kittatinny.com](http://www.kittatinny.com)

We regrouped and continued, a bit chastened by the experience. Another tranquil stretch revealed another beautiful bird. A great blue heron disturbed by our presence lumbered into the air and glided majestically over our heads on its way upstream.

Suddenly, I wasn't moving. I drifted over a shallow area and my aforementioned "greater gravity" had me stuck on the bottom. My two boys drifted past and, before I could get free, were several hundred feet away and going through the next stretch of whitewater. Matt went through OK, but Greg flipped over again. It was a little scary being so far away from him when it happened, but he popped up right away, his ego bruised more than anything else.

Lesson 3: Pay attention to the depth of stream to avoid getting hung up and separated from the rest of your group.

I caught up with the boys and we floated on. At this point, there were no calm stretches left. We rounded a bend and hit two sets of rapids following quickly one after the other...the biggest so far. We had been forewarned about this stretch, but that didn't stop us from feeling a rush of adrenalin as we ricocheted like human pinballs from one boulder to the

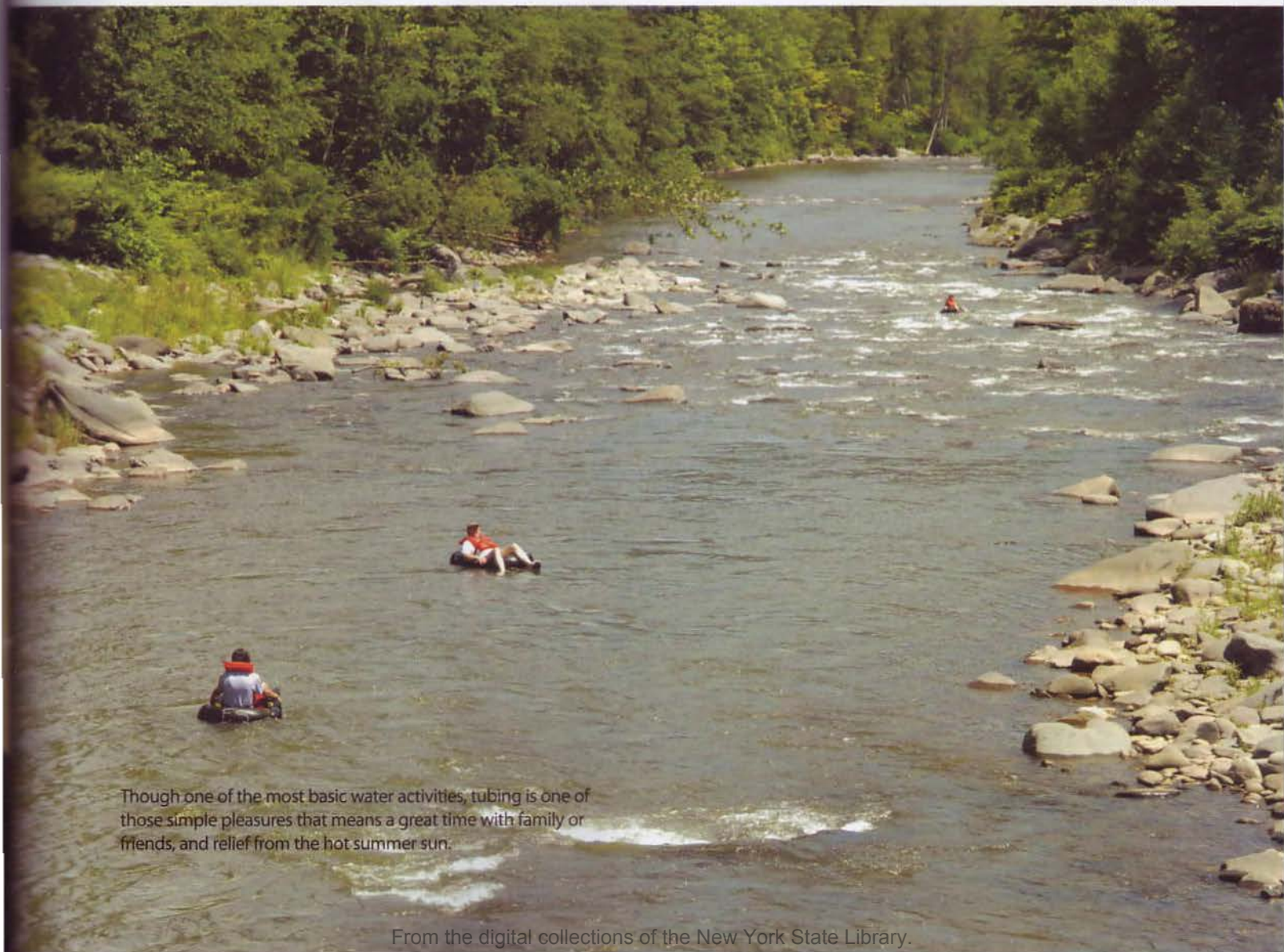
next. Having learned some lessons from the previous rapids, this time, everyone stayed with their tubes.

Wet and weary, we drifted on for another half-mile before the rock painted with the word "OUT" appeared and we made our exit...not very gracefully mind you, as we dragged our tubes to shore, floundering in the swift current. Safely back on shore, we slung our tubes up on our heads and walked back to the car, hashing over a thrilling couple of hours in a beautiful mountain setting.

If you're looking for a great way to get in touch with your wilder side, let me recommend seeking out one of the many beautiful New York State streams where tubing is offered. For my boys and me, it was a memorable experience that introduced us to a nearby natural treasure and left us looking forward to another sunny, hot, summer day when we can do it again.

**John Razzano** is a contributing editor to the *Conservationist*.

Susan L. Shafer



Though one of the most basic water activities, tubing is one of those simple pleasures that means a great time with family or friends, and relief from the hot summer sun.

extraordinary leaves



photographer: Stephen Green-Armytage; leaf by Dennis Schrader

About the authors:

Stephen Green-Armytage's previous books, *Extraordinary Pheasants*, *Extraordinary Pigeons*, and *Extraordinary Chickens*, proved that there is much unappreciated beauty in the natural world around us. His photographs have appeared in many other books and magazines including *Sports Illustrated*, *Life*, *Fortune*, and *The Smithsonian*.

Dennis Schrader runs a major greenhouse on Long Island. A professional horticulturalist, he is a regular television guest on *Martha Stewart Living*, and frequently seen on *Today* and HGTV. Schrader is the author of *Hot Plants for Cool Climates: Gardening with Tropical Plants in Temperate Zones*.

While working on *Extraordinary Leaves...* [we] gained a new appreciation for all leaves, not just the peacocks of the plant world, but the sparrows as well.

[We] concentrated on leaves that are beautiful and interesting. The subtle details, characteristics and intricacies of simple leaves are indeed astonishing, and with the addition of some color, a few well-placed indentations or possibly some thorns or hairs, a leaf morphs into an entirely different thing.

# extraordinary leaves



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White oak (*Quercus alba*)





Eastern Canada and the northeastern United States have become international destinations for leaf tourists due to colorful foliage...When summer's end approaches, temperatures start to drop and leaves slowly stop producing chlorophyll...With the chlorophyll gone, the other pigments—the yellows and oranges that were there but hidden throughout the whole season—are revealed on the leaves. Sometimes pigments combine and create intense colors like deep orange, burgundy-red and golden-bronze.



Northern red oak (*Quercus rubra*)

When it comes to originality, oaks, members of the genus *Quercus*, are a perfect example of the possible diversity of margins within a single genus.



Swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*)

Ostrich fern (*Matteuccia struthiopteris*)



Ferns are among the plants that have the most beautiful foliage. Their leaves come in a wide variety of sizes, shapes, and colors—some round, some delicate as a snowflake, and some even antler-like in appearance.

Bloodroot (*Sanguinaria canadensis*)



A leaf's shape, venation and texture can surprise and give [one] a deeper appreciation for the unadulterated, simple beauty of the leaf itself.



Virginia creeper (*Parthenocissus quinquefolia*)



While most leaves grow in a largely three-dimensional space, vines sometimes climb and spread in two dimensions, creating interesting and attractive designs.

# Friendly Flies

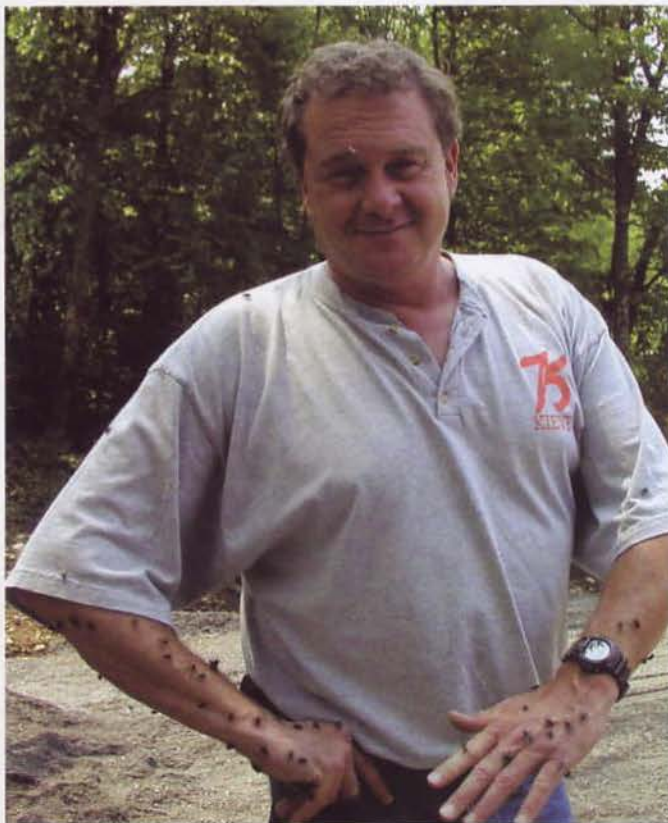
What's all the buzz about?



James Clayton

By Karin Verschoor, Gloria Van Duyne, and Dave Nelson

Basket in hand, I approach the picnic table, thoughts of traffic on the ride here quickly fading into the background. Eagerly, I anticipate the summer's first picnic; good food and drink in a beautiful outdoor setting. As I carefully weave my legs under the table, I discover this spot seems to be enjoyed by other creatures, smaller than my family and me. But it's not ants that are spoiling my lunch; these are flies, and lots of them. Almost a swarm, in fact, but they aren't biting, they're just annoying.



Eric Meyer

It's my turn to meet one of nature's oddities, the "friendly fly." A relative of the house fly, friendly flies are so named because they like to land on people; they don't bite, and they stay unless brushed off. They are too tame and friendly to leave on their own.

Friendly flies can be infuriating, especially when large numbers of them suddenly appear at your outing. Having hundreds of flies swarming around and landing on you is not

*A relative of the house fly, friendly flies are so named because they like to land on people.*

much fun. But aside from their sometimes irritating behavior, friendly flies are harmless to people. They are not known to carry dangerous diseases. In fact, friendly flies are actually a blessing—they keep forest tent caterpillar populations in check, and thereby save our valuable woodlands from total defoliation.

You see, friendly flies are natural predators of the native forest tent caterpillar, and the two species' populations are tied together in a classic predator-prey cycle. Forest tent caterpillar outbreaks occur every 10-15 years. At its peak, the population gets so dense that there is massive forest defoliation. Entire

Identifying a friendly fly isn't difficult. It resembles a large house fly, but when it lands on you, it tends to stay unless brushed off. If you take a closer look—and a friendly fly is sure to remain still long enough—you can see that it



**HI!** sports a striped thorax (middle-section) and a checkered abdomen, a fashion mismatch of stripes and checks (see above image).

hillsides of trees will be completely stripped of leaves, as we've seen over the last few years in parts of New York.

During the height of the caterpillar's cycle, trees may be defoliated for two or three years in a row, causing some trees to die. Others will recover, but defoliation is a big setback. Loss of foliage means starvation for a tree; without leaves, a tree cannot make food. While trees can produce a second set of leaves after a caterpillar attack, doing so is a major drain on their energy reserves. These stressed trees may not be able to produce as much wood or seed, and they are also more susceptible to other harmful factors like drought and disease.

The caterpillar populations may cause significant tree damage, but to the

friendly fly (the specialized insect that feeds on them), they represent a bountiful buffet. As caterpillars increase in number, the predator species responds rapidly to this abundant food source. On the other hand, few bird species will eat the caterpillars because they are covered with irritating hairs.

Friendly flies lay eggs on forest tent pupae, the stage in which the caterpillar transforms into a moth. The eggs hatch and the larvae eat the pupae, then drop to the ground to form their own pupae, which emerge the following spring as adult flies.

This predator-prey relationship forms a "boom-and-bust" cycle. Usually the year after a prolific forest tent caterpillar

outbreak, friendly flies seem to be everywhere. Suddenly prey numbers crash because of high predator populations. In response to a declining food source, predator numbers dwindle. At the "bottom" of the cycle, it would be difficult to find either caterpillar or fly.

Understanding the important role that friendly flies play in nature's web of life may help you accept their presence, knowing that the trees around you will be better off as a result!

So, maybe they aren't so annoying after all.

**Karin Verschoor** and **Gloria Van Duyne** work for DEC's Division of Lands and Forests in Albany, and while both are students of the natural world, they prefer picnics to flies. **Dave Nelson** is Editor of the *Conservationist*.

Susan L. Shafer

## Government Flies?



Frank Herec

Because of a persistent myth that the government releases them to control forest tent caterpillars, friendly flies are sometimes called government flies. Although they do control forest tent caterpillars, they aren't from any sort of government release program. And while DEC does not release friendly flies, presence of the flies is welcomed by forest landowners and those who monitor forest tent caterpillar outbreaks.



Lou Pixley

# The Good ~~Old~~ <sup>New</sup> Days

*Although Lake Ontario's trout and salmon fishery has undergone changes through the years, fishing has never been better.*

*By Al Schiavone*

It was a cool, brisk morning with early hints of dawn barely providing enough light to organize my equipment for a day on Lake Ontario. Interrupting the brief moments of solitude were sounds of the day's start—rumbles of nearby charter boats preparing to leave the dock, anglers loading and launching their boats, and excited voices anticipating the day's catch. As I prepared to head out onto the lake, I wondered what the day would bring. Would I catch many

fish? Would I break a state record? Would I be able to add a coho or steelhead to my typical catch of browns?

Steering the boat towards my favorite offshore spot, I reflected on my years of fishing this spectacular Great Lake. I remember well when New York State DEC started to ramp up their Lake Ontario trout and salmon stocking program in the late '70s and early '80s; it seemed as though everyone was anxious to test their

fishing skills on this newly created "gold mine." The completion of DEC's Salmon River Hatchery in 1980 was cause for celebration among anglers—more than six million fish were being stocked annually into the lake at the stocking program's peak. And more fish stocked meant more fish caught.

As the fishery took off, new fishing techniques and equipment were introduced to my part of the world. Local

*New York State Conservationist, June 2009*

tackle shops now sported such unfamiliar items as downriggers, dodgers, flashers, deepwater trolling rods and reels. It didn't take long for word to spread of the great bounty that Lake Ontario offered, and the pure adrenaline-pumping joy you felt when a 35-pound king salmon stripped line off your reel faster than you could imagine. There were days when there were so many boats on the water that trolling amongst all the boats and fishing lines became chaotic.

The new fishery was a welcome boon for the local economy. New businesses catering to anglers seemed to appear overnight, and every port had more charter captains than you could shake a stick at. There was plenty of good fishing to be found, and like many other local anglers, I took full advantage of the opportunity. In spring, right after ice-out, we'd catch brown trout close to shore. Later, we'd shift our attention to cohos and rainbows. Lake trout were our "go to" fish; they were more predictable and always seemed available when other species weren't.

The "big daddies" and stars of the new Lake Ontario fishery were Chinook salmon (or kings), and every angler, myself included, wanted to catch one of these giants. Kings hit hard from July right through "staging" in late August/September when they congregated near shore prior to making their fall spawning runs up lake tributaries. During spawning runs, tributaries like the Salmon River were packed with anglers standing shoulder-to-shoulder. The fishing was incredible and every roadside and parking lot sported more out-of-state than in-state license plates. Never before had we seen fish this big, some 40 pounds or more, swimming up creeks you could almost jump over! In fact, apart from a few of us who had ventured to Alaska or Lake Michigan, no one had ever experienced this type and quality of trout and salmon fishing.

Fishing remained great, and over the years I caught lots of large fish. But as time passed, many peoples' interest in the

sport seemed to fade. By the early 1990s, I noticed there were fewer boats out on the water, even though the fishing was good. My fishing buddies said that things had dropped off on the tributaries as well, and we'd discuss what this meant. After much debate, we came to the conclusion that the novelty had simply worn off and anglers were choosing to fish closer to home. While this may have been bad for local businesses, some of us anglers were secretly happy because fewer fishermen meant more fish for us.

*...in my experience, trout and salmon fishing is actually better now than in "the good old days."*

A decline in the number of anglers fishing wasn't the only change occurring in the Lake Ontario fishery at the time. Better wastewater treatment was improving water quality, which meant fewer nutrients like nitrogen and phosphorous entering the water. At the same time, two new invasive species—zebra and quagga mussels, introduced into the lake by overseas cargo ships—were filtering small plant life out of the water. Before the mussels arrived, you couldn't see the

lake bottom in 15 feet of water; after they colonized, you could see bottom in 40 feet of water in some areas. This meant a huge change in the lake's ecology.

Scientists studying the lake were concerned for the fishery, saying that the "productivity" of the lake was declining, somewhat like a garden lacking fertilizer. The large populations of bait fish (mostly alewife) that trout and salmon relied on for food began to decline. Scientists felt there were too few alewife to support the number of trout and salmon, and in

1993, the DEC reduced the number of fish being stocked into the lake. To say this was a controversial decision would be an understatement. As you can imagine, anglers and local businesses largely opposed the stocking cuts. It was all over the media. Most of us thought it would be the end of the fishery as we knew it, but we were wrong.

Looking back now, I, as well as most of my fishing buddies, recognize that the quality of the fishery really didn't decline

Lou Pixley

There's nothing like seeing a child's face light up when they get a big fish on the line.



## Connect to Nature

If you'd like to try your hand at trout and salmon fishing, but you're not sure how, check out [www.ilovenyfishing.com](http://www.ilovenyfishing.com). There's information on how and where to fish, locations of marinas and tackle shops, fishing charters, lodging, derby information, contact numbers for County Tourism Offices, and more.





DEC photo

During spawning runs, tributaries can be packed with anglers hoping to catch a large salmon.

like we thought it would. Yes, the number of anglers fishing the open lake continued to decline, but we chalked it off to the negative publicity of the stocking cuts. Later, DEC increased the number of trout and salmon stocked, and we all thought that would bring anglers back in numbers, but it didn't. It turns out that a decline in fishing participation was happening all across the nation, not just in the Great Lakes. In fact, New York State has actually lost fewer anglers overall than any of the other Great Lakes states.

The real culprit in the declining number of anglers may be that kids just aren't getting outdoors to enjoy nature like they used to, and that's too bad. I love to take my grandkids and their friends fishing; there's nothing like seeing their faces light up when they get a fish on the line.

Having fished Lake Ontario's waters for many decades now, I know one thing to be true: the only thing predictable about Lake Ontario is its unpredictability. Change seems to be the only constant. After zebra and quagga mussels, overseas cargo ships accidentally introduced spiny water fleas, round gobies, and now bloody red shrimp into the Great Lakes watershed. The subsequent effects to the lake's ecology have scientists concerned about the stability of lower food webs that feed the lake's top predators, as well as the long-term effects of these invasives on the quality of the sport-fishing industry. Alewife numbers never did return to their former abundance, and my biologist friends at DEC say they are still worried about creating

an imbalance between numbers of alewife and their trout and salmon predators. Just a few years ago, the alewife population in Lake Huron crashed, resulting in three-year-old king salmon that weighed less than ten pounds—half of what they should be. I heard that a lot of charter boat operators and other businesses had to close up shop. My buddies don't think that could ever happen here, but I suppose that's what the folks on Lake Huron used to say, too.

I know that DEC and other agencies are keeping a close watch on the fishery (i.e. lower food webs, alewife numbers, salmon growth), and they say our Chinooks are still the biggest of all the Great Lakes—averaging over 20 pounds for three-year-olds. I can attest to that. In fact, in my experience, trout and salmon fishing is actually better now than in “the good old days.”

Occasionally, when I come off the lake from a day of fishing, I'll get asked a bunch of questions by DEC angler survey agents. They want to know how long I fished, what I caught, and whether I released any fish. Often they'll ask to measure my fish. The survey's been running since 1985, and DEC gives anglers a summary of the results every year. So even though it's sometimes inconvenient to stop and talk when all I want to do is get home and clean my fish, I don't mind too much. Heck, I figure if it helps DEC keep the fishing good, then it's well worth my time.

And the fishing is great. Over the past six years, fishing for Chinooks has never been better, and anglers have broken the

records for both coho salmon and rainbow trout. On top of that, I can't remember many years that had better fishing for brown trout. While I don't fish Lake Ontario streams in the fall like I used to, my buddies say the fall salmon runs have been as good as ever, and they can't remember seeing more steelhead in the streams than they did this past spring. For an angler, life is good.

At last, reaching my destination for today's outing, I pulled my thoughts back from reminiscing and into the present. I put the engine into neutral and surveyed the scene. Good, only a few boats in the area. Readying my downriggers and looking out on the beautiful day, I was struck by the thought—why don't more folks fish this gold mine in our own backyard?

Easing the boat into gear and beginning to troll, I began to anticipate what today would bring. It made me think about all the times I've been out here, and all the fun I've had. Letting my mind wander again, I reflected on how one of the good things about getting older is being able to look back on your life and think about all of the changes that you've lived through. My buddies are always grumbling how much better things were in the good old days, and most times I can't argue with them. But when it comes to fishing Lake Ontario, make no mistake, these are the good old days!

Longtime angler **Al Schiavone** continues to fish small and large waters in New York's north country. He recently retired from DEC where he was the Region 6 natural resources supervisor, and before that the regional fisheries manager.



Michael Steden



William Thielicke

# Inspired by Nature

By Deborah J. Knight

I love sunny summer mornings. They beckon me to head out to the garden, coffee cup in hand, to soak in the peacefulness of the surrounding nature. Whether it's a spider web bejeweled with beads of morning dew, a butterfly fluttering by, or a long-awaited lotus flower blooming on the backyard pond's surface, mother nature never fails to delight me.

Aside from the beauty of these seemingly ordinary sights, there's a lot to be learned from what we observe. In fact, if you look closely, nature can provide creative and innovative solutions for making life safer, simpler, and healthier for both us and the environment.

Take that spider web, for example. Spider web "silk" is five times stronger than Kevlar®, the artificial fiber currently used in bulletproof vests. Haven't you ever wondered how something as delicate-looking as a spider web, can capture fairly large, fast-moving insects? It's because spider silk can absorb five times the impact force of an insect hitting it, without breaking. Spider silk is incredibly elastic—it will stretch 40 percent longer than its original length and then bounce back. When compared to the man-made fabric nylon, spider silk is 30 percent more flexible.

With this in mind, scientists are studying how they can translate this natural wonder into a practical use to benefit mankind. Take Kevlar® for example. Kevlar® is a petroleum-based fiber whose manufacturing process requires high energy inputs and produces toxic by-products which

can pollute our environment. In fact, our fiber industry is heavily dependent on petroleum, a diminishing resource. Scientists are conducting experiments to determine whether they can replicate the biological process a spider uses to build its web to create a similar fiber to make such products as parachutes, bulletproof fabrics, cables for suspension bridges, artificial ligaments, and sutures. This process of imitating or taking inspiration from nature's models to solve human problems is called biomimicry.

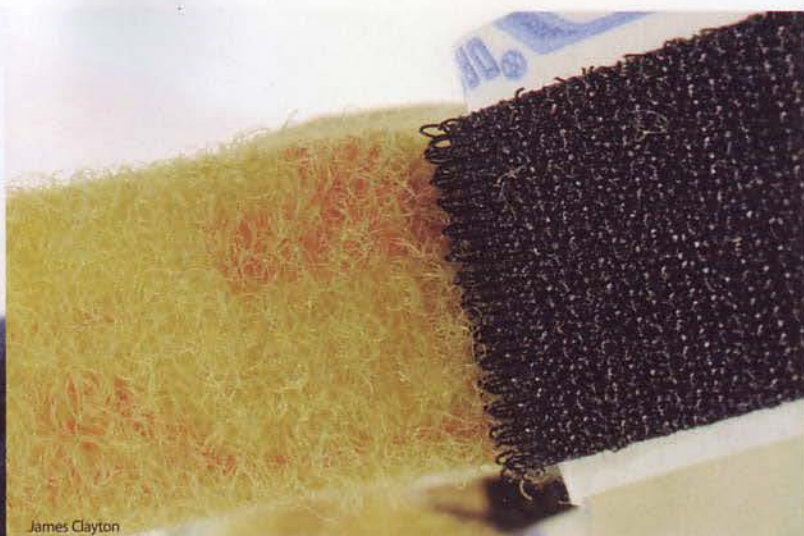
Janine Benyus, a biologist and author of the book *Biomimicry: Innovation Inspired by Nature*, is a national leader in promoting the biomimicry movement to science and industry. She says we shouldn't look at what we can extract from nature, but what we can learn from it. After 3.8 billion years of evolution, nature has "learned" what works, what is appropriate, what lasts, and what survives. She further explains that nature is a model of efficiency, where virtually nothing is wasted, and where natural systems work in harmony with each other, in communities. One species cannot occupy a place on our planet that uses up all of its resources to support its own expansion at the expense of the destruction of other communities, says Benyus. "Look around you! What you see are nature's success stories...the failures are the fossils."

Looking closely at the lotus flower in my backyard, I marvel at its design. It's not just the beauty of the flower that astounds, but that such beauty can originate from a plant that thrives on being rooted in the bottom of





James Clayton



James Clayton

(Facing page) Scientists studying the self-cleaning aspect of the lotus leaf discovered that at the nanoscale level the leaf's surface is actually made up of many bumps which facilitate water rolling off the surface. (Above) The tiny hooks on the cocklebur were the inspiration for Velcro®.

pond muck. The flower and the leaves look so clean, so sparkling. In fact, have you ever noticed that after a rain, everything seems so refreshed and clean? How is it that leaves look so fresh—who is dusting Mother Nature's plants?

As it turns out, some scientists have been studying the lotus's self-cleaning mechanism and discovered that the seemingly smooth surface of the lotus leaf, at the nanoscale level, is actually made up of many bumps. These bumps are what make the leaf water-repellent—water simply rolls along the surface, taking bacteria and soil off in the process. This model of nature's self-cleaning, dubbed the "lotus effect," has already been the inspiration for new products. For example, a paint called Lotusan® was developed in 1999

*Nature can provide creative and innovative solutions for making life safer, simpler, and healthier for both us and the environment.*

for use on building exteriors. Like the lotus leaf, the paint contains microscopic bumps that induce raindrops to roll off, wetting the dirt and rolling it off the building's painted surface. Cleaner surfaces means less use of cleansers and water, and less need to repaint.

The lotus effect has also inspired the development of a product called GreenShield™, a fabric finish that creates water- and stain-repellency on textiles. This biomimicry-inspired product has resulted in a decrease in the use of environmentally harmful fluorocarbons, which is the conventional way of ensuring repellency in fabrics. General Electric global research scientists in Niskayuna, New York are also studying the lotus effect to manufacture nano-treated surfaces that will repel water from titanium slabs to

allow turbines and engines to operate more efficiently.

Butterfly wings are another of nature's inspirations. Research has shown that the color found in butterfly wings is the result of two different things: the physical make up of the wings (i.e. nanostructures on the scales), and the wings' color pigmentation. The iridescence, reflectivity and optical features of butterfly wings may hold the key to figuring out improvements in LED lighting, anti-reflective coatings, brighter screens for cell phones and even chemical-free anti-counterfeiting technology.

Many products we use, or will use in the future, are derived from biomimicry-inspired research and adaptation. Velcro®, for instance, was inspired by the tiny hooks on

the cocklebur. Remember how annoying it was to get burs tangled in your hair when you were a kid and how much it hurt when your mother tried to comb those stubborn burs out? Well, Velcro® is the result of taking nature's form and translating it into human function.

In the Namib Desert, one of the hottest places on the earth and where water is scarce, there is an insect species that serves as a source of inspiration. The Namibian beetle has an ingenious way to fulfill its need for water in this harsh climate. Mist contained in periodic fog-laden winds settles on the beetle's back, which is covered with tiny bumps. Like on the lotus leaf, these bumps facilitate the formation of water droplets, which then slide down the beetle's body in "waxy troughs" to the insect's mouth. In a water-thirsty world,



To learn more about biomimicry,  
check out these websites:

[www.biomimicryinstitute.org](http://www.biomimicryinstitute.org)  
[www.asknature.org](http://www.asknature.org)



(Facing page) The iridescence, reflectivity and optical features of butterfly wings may hold the key to improvements in LED lighting and brighter screens for cell phones. (Above) Spider web silk is incredibly strong and scientists are researching how to replicate this feature to create a stronger man-made fiber for use in bulletproof vests and parachutes.

scientists are researching the potential to develop a fog-catching device that mimics this water-harvesting technique to get water in arid areas.

In Zimbabwe, Africa, the architectural design of the Eastgate Centre, a mid-rise office complex, was inspired by the structural qualities of termite mounds found in the desert. These mounds can maintain a constant temperature and humidity despite the extreme temperature variations found outside the mound. This is accomplished via the perpetual opening and closing of a series of heating and cooling vents throughout the

*Nature is a model of efficiency, where virtually nothing is wasted, and where natural systems work in harmony with each other.*

mound over the course of the day. The termites constantly dig new vents and plug up old ones, circulating the air which is sucked in at the lower part of the mound, and then flows down into enclosures with muddy walls, and up through a channel to the peak of the termite mound. Using this model, the Eastgate Centre's ventilation system operates in a similar way. Outside air is drawn in and then either warmed or cooled by the building's mass, depending on which is hotter, the building concrete or the air. Fresh air steadily replaces stale air that rises and ultimately exits the building through chimneys. Eastgate Centre uses less than 10% of the energy of a conventional building its size—both an environmental and an economic win.

Another biomimicry-based innovation that has been a plus for green building is the development of new types of bio-based glues. These glues were developed by a scientist interested in the adhesive qualities of mussels attached to ocean rocks. Bio-based glues are non-toxic alternatives to conventional chemical-based glues, and are used as adhesives in construction

materials such as particle board. This is a plus for those consumers who are allergic to the chemicals found in traditional glues. The use of bio-based glues can also reduce the amount of hazardous waste that occurs at the end of the product life cycle of these construction materials.

In a world with growing energy concerns, scientists again look to nature for inspiration, with sunlight as a focus. Solar technology is a perfect example of biomimicry in action, and scientists have been working for years to fully replicate photosynthesis—a very efficient process that plants use to convert

light energy into chemical energy. At Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, for example, the Baruch '60 Center for Biochemical Solar Energy Research was recently created to develop the next generation of solar technology. Research at the center will include using plant photosynthesis as a biometric model to point the way to developing solar cell systems which can convert light into useable, more efficient energy sources.

Ultimately, biomimicry has the potential to help humans change their world into a more sustainable one—a world more harmonious with nature's systems. To quote Janine Benyus, "Nature runs on sunlight, uses only the energy it needs, fits form to function, recycles everything, rewards cooperation, banks on diversity, demands local expertise, curbs excesses from within, and taps the power of limits." It gives looking around your backyard a whole new meaning.

**Deborah J. Knight** is an environmental specialist with DEC's Pollution Prevention Unit in Albany.



# On Patrol

*Real stories from Conservation Officers  
and Forest Rangers in the field*

Contributed by ECO Lt. Tom Caifa  
and Forest Ranger Lt. John Solan

## The Canadian Cullers—Franklin County

During a routine check of anglers on the Salmon River in the town of Constable, ECO Jorge Sibbert discovered two men who had 19 rainbow trout in a live trap near the stream bank. Since the daily possession limit for trout is five per person, the ECO questioned the subjects—both from Quebec—who explained that they always kept all the fish they caught and then let the smaller ones go before leaving. A practice called culling, it's illegal to do this because it usually results in a high mortality rate for the fish that are let go. ECO Sibbert released the trout and then escorted the two men to town court where they were each fined \$100.

## Crappie Fishing Doesn't Pay—Monroe County

Hearing about the possible upcoming illegal sale of a large amount of black crappie at a local fish market in Rochester, ECOs Matthew Dorrett and Shaun Dussault contacted ECO Bruce Hummel who went to the market and posed as a customer. Hummel watched as three men brought in several containers of black crappie. The fish were weighed, and after the men agreed on a price, the store owner handed over a large amount of money. Since the commercial sale of many species of native freshwater fish—including black crappie—is illegal in New York, Hummel called for assistance and when ECOs Dorrett, Dussault and Frank Lauricella arrived, they arrested the suspects and seized the evidence—476 pounds of black crappie. Further investigation revealed that the same individuals made at least one previous sale of 100 pounds of crappie to the fish market. The fish market owner and the three men were charged with felony-level illegal commercialization of protected fish, and later paid more than \$15,000 in fines.

## Ranger Aid—Cattaraugus County

One evening, DEC Rangers Martin Flanagan and Wayne Krulish were patrolling the Zoar Valley Multiple Use Area and overheard radio transmissions indicating a local police officer had been shot. Since the incident occurred just 1.5 miles away, they quickly responded to see if they could be of assistance. The rangers were the second back-up unit to arrive on the scene. Ranger Flanagan provided medical treatment to the injured Gowanda police officer while Ranger Krulish monitored the scene for safety. As additional police units arrived from numerous state, county and local police agencies, both rangers continued to assist in trying to apprehend the shooter. Unfortunately, the shooter had already fled the scene, but thankfully the police officer made a full recovery.

### Ask the ECO

**Q:** How do I contact an Environmental Conservation Officer if I witness a violation or have information about illegal activity involving fish and wildlife?

**A:** The quickest way to report an environmental violation is to dial **1-800-TIPP-DEC**—a toll-free number connecting you to a statewide dispatch center that operates 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. A dispatcher will take your information and then contact an ECO to respond. You can call this number to report all kinds of environmental crimes or illegal activity you may have witnessed, and all callers can remain anonymous. To reach a specific ECO, there is a complete list of ECO phone numbers, arranged by county, in DEC's Freshwater Fishing Guide, DEC's Hunting and Trapping Guide, and on our website at [www.dec.ny.gov/about/50303.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/about/50303.html).

**HELP STOP POACHERS AND POLLUTERS IN THEIR TRACKS  
CALL  
1-800-TIPP-DEC**

Baby snapping turtles



James Clayton

Rattlesnake



Richard Thomas

Box turtle



James Clayton

## Operation Shellshock

In one of the most extensive undercover operations DEC has ever undertaken, the Bureau of Environmental Crimes Investigation, working with a number of other state, federal and international offices, uncovered an international black market for poaching, smuggling and illegally selling protected native New York species of reptiles and amphibians. Dubbed "Operation Shellshock," the investigation began in 2007 and documented that thousands of New York turtles were being laundered through "middlemen" in other states, and then shipped overseas for meat and other uses. More than 2,400 individual turtles, snakes and salamanders were involved in the documented crimes, represented by such species as timber rattlesnakes, wood turtles, snapping turtles, Eastern hognose snakes and box turtles. Investigators spent hundreds of

hours afield, online and at shows with reptile poachers and illegal collectors, building cases from the ground up. The operation covered a large geographic area, involving officials from various states, the U.S. government, the New York State Attorney General's Office, Environment Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources. The investigation led to charges against 18 individuals for 14 felonies, 11 misdemeanors and dozens of violations.

Reptiles and amphibians are important environmental indicators of the health of the planet. As such, illegal trafficking of these species can have long-term, detrimental effects on the ecosystem. We hope that the success of this sting operation sends a strong message that buying and selling New York's native species will not be tolerated.

## New Dragonfly Found

A new species of dragonfly was identified during the New York Dragonfly and Damselfly Survey conducted last summer. Annette Oliveira, a survey volunteer, saw the four-spotted pennant (*Brachymesia gravida*) in Greenport, Long Island in late July and early August. A coastal dragonfly species known to occur from New Mexico to New Jersey, it had not previously been seen in New York. The four-spotted pennant is easily recognized by the single dark patch in the middle of each wing, along with a white bar at each wing tip. The new find further emphasizes the importance of survey efforts in documenting the state's biodiversity.



Jeffrey S. Phippen, Duke University

## New Osprey Nest

Wickham Marsh Wildlife Management Area is home to a new osprey nesting structure. After months of planning, collaboration between DEC Region 5 wildlife staff, New York State Electric and Gas (NYSEG) and the High Peaks Audubon Society, NYSEG erected the nesting structure on top of a 35-foot utility pole. The structure sits at the edge of the marsh in a field, and lies directly across from a

universally accessible wildlife viewing platform where visitors can look across the marsh and peer directly into the osprey nest. DEC paid for the nesting structure, the High Peaks Audubon Society arranged for the utility pole to be donated by Lake Placid Municipal Lighting, and NYSEG provided their services for free (see *Make Way for Osprey* on page 2).

## Refrain from Feeding Waterfowl

DEC is cautioning people not to feed waterfowl. Last fall, a dozen Canada geese were found dead or sick—the result of the fungus, aspergillosis. The fungus is transmitted to waterfowl through moldy grain, like breads and livestock feed. Though it is not contagious and not a health risk to humans, it has been the cause of large-scale waterfowl mortality. As such, DEC is telling the public not to feed geese, ducks, and other waterfowl to help prevent this disease and other negative impacts on waterfowl populations. Many people don't realize that artificial feeding is actually harmful to waterfowl. It causes overcrowding, unnatural

behavior, delayed migration, and it facilitates the spread of diseases, like aspergillosis, that can result in death. To prevent these problems, farmers should keep grain piles covered and everyone should always dispose of any moldy grain or bread. Please report any sick or dead waterfowl to your nearest DEC wildlife office. You can find out more information about feeding waterfowl at DEC's website ([www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7001.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/7001.html)).

## Turkey Sighting Survey

DEC is looking for some volunteers to help with a Summer Wild Turkey Sighting Survey. Every August, DEC conducts this statewide survey to monitor the number of wild turkey poults (young-of-the-year) produced by hens. Volunteers and DEC staff record the age and sex composition of all flocks of wild turkeys observed during normal travel. DEC uses the information to gauge the reproductive success in a given year and predict fall harvest potential. Nest success, hen survival and poult survival depend on a number of



John R. O'Connor

## BRIEFLY

variables, including weather, predation and habitat conditions. To volunteer for this important survey, visit [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/48732.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/48732.html). In late July, the survey form will be posted on the webpage for volunteers to download and print.

### Don't Move Firewood

To protect New York's forests, the state enacted a new regulation in March 2008 that regulates the movement of firewood. The regulation bans importing firewood into New York unless it has been heat treated (kiln-dried) to eliminate pests, and prohibits the movement of untreated firewood within the state more than 50 miles from its source. The new measures are in response to the fact that firewood may house some deadly, non-native insects such as the emerald ash borer, Asian longhorned beetle, and Sirex woodwasp. These invasive pests, which may be hidden on or under the bark or buried deep within firewood logs, can be extremely detrimental to New York's forests. If you do transport firewood less than 50 miles, you must carry proof of its source, like a receipt, or else you may be subject to a fine. For more information on the new firewood regulations, please visit [www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov) and look for "firewood" in the Subject Index.

### Business Web Resource

DEC recently launched a new web resource called "Help for Businesses." Found on the DEC website homepage ([www.dec.ny.gov](http://www.dec.ny.gov)), the new gateway acts as a central point for information and assistance on environmental reviews and permitting, money- and energy-saving practices, and cutting-edge technology. It also contains links to state-of-the-art business assistance programs run by other agencies.

### New Fishing Access

Anglers in the Malone area will have a new place to fish. Last year, the Franklin County Federation of Sportsmen received a \$14,000 grant from the Habitat Stamp Program to construct a wheelchair-accessible fishing platform on the Salmon River. Located within the City of Malone, the platform overlooks a trout fishing hole and supports the city's efforts to enhance river-based recreation. The grand opening is scheduled to occur in early June.

### Ask the Biologist

**Q:** When I see a turtle crossing the road, I usually stop and move it to safety, being sure to move it in the same direction it was traveling. Is this proper? I read that turtles "mark" their trail with a scent marker on their tail and that picking the turtle up can prevent it from leaving a scent to follow.

**A:** Thank you for stopping to rescue turtles you find on the road. Roadkill can be a significant problem for some reptile and amphibian populations, with the highest road mortality for turtles occurring between the last week of May and the first week of July, when female turtles move from their winter habitat to nesting areas. Since many of the females

are killed before they have a chance to lay eggs, the impact to the population is significantly greater than the death of a single turtle.

While turtles and other reptiles do use a scent trail, it is not their only method of navigating throughout their habitat. While picking a turtle up and moving it off the road should not disorient it too much, it's best to move it as little as possible; a few hundred feet at most, in the direction it was moving. But remember—be careful and don't put yourself in danger.

One final note—moving a turtle must be done carefully. Some species, such as snapping turtles and spiny softshells, may strike at the rescuer, and the bite can be painful. Also, never pick up a large snapper by its tail. This puts all its weight on its backbone, which can cause dislocation of the vertebrae (or a broken back) from which the turtle may not recover. Some people use a shovel to scoop up large turtles or a broom handle that the turtle can bite and hang onto while being dragged to safety.

—Alvin Breisch, DEC Amphibian and Reptile Specialist.



Susan L. Shafer



### Flashy Fowl

I am enclosing a picture of one of five birds my daughter's co-worker had at her bird feeder from spring to September last year. They lost their pin feathers, but stayed the same size. We couldn't find them in our bird books. Can you help?

Doris Bush

Clifton Springs, Ontario County

*We had several experts look at the photo you sent, and we all agree that it is of a young Baltimore oriole. Orioles and blackbirds are closely related, and have the kind of long, pointed beak shown in your photo. However, it is a rather unusual color, for which we cannot offer a good explanation.*

—Scott Stoner, DEC Research Scientist

### Raven Tumor

Last August, I spotted this northern raven feeding on berries in the Moose River Wild Forest. As you can see, it has some kind of growth on its right cheek. Judging by the raven's behavior, I'd say it was acting normally. I was wondering if any of your biologists might have a comment about the growth.



William "Bunch" Lewis

Scotia, Schenectady County

*Thanks for the photo. It appears that the growth may be a granulomatous lesion related to a trauma and a corresponding bacterial infection. However, it is more likely a pox virus that I see commonly in crows, but less often in ravens.*

—Ward Stone, DEC Wildlife Pathologist

### Super Serpent

I was on my land in Lima when I saw this snake. I was amazed at the size of it! I have never seen anything like it around here. What kind of snake is it?

Brian J. Decker

Bloomfield, Ontario County



*The snake you photographed is a northern water snake (Nerodia sipedon). They are often seen basking at the edges of ponds, lakes and streams, especially in the spring when the water is cool and the air is warm. It is hard to tell from your photograph how big the snake is, but northern water snakes can reach lengths of slightly more than four feet. Their large size can be intimidating, and their defensive behavior when cornered leads some people to assume they are venomous, but these snakes are not. More often than not, when approached, they will try to escape into the water.*

—Alvin Breisch, DEC Amphibian and Reptile Specialist

### Mighty Moth

Ronald Stannard sent us this photograph of a rather large day-flying moth. We asked what it could be and this is the response we received.

*This moth is most likely the very common white-lined sphinx (also known as a hawk moth).*

*Most sphinx moths are beneficial flower pollinators, and this one looks to be doing its job of pollinating deep-throated native and garden flowers. However, be careful not to confuse this moth with the other powerful day-flying moth, the hummingbird moth, which is often seen and photographed in gardens.*

—Frank Knight, DEC Environmental Educator





## ✉ LETTERS

### Making a Point

I thought your readers might enjoy this picture. On April 13, we were startled to find this guy on our back porch. As we drove to church the following day, we saw the "porky" in our neighbor's meadow, and later, our neighbor called to say her dog came home with his nose full of quills!

Nick Marasco  
Andover, Allegany County

Editor's note: *Thanks for sharing your photo. It's interesting to note that while porcupines can come in a variety of colors, including chestnut, brown and dark grey, this one is especially blonde.*



### Write to us

Conservationist Letters, NYSDEC, 625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-4502  
or e-mail us at: [magazine@gw.dec.state.ny.us](mailto:magazine@gw.dec.state.ny.us)

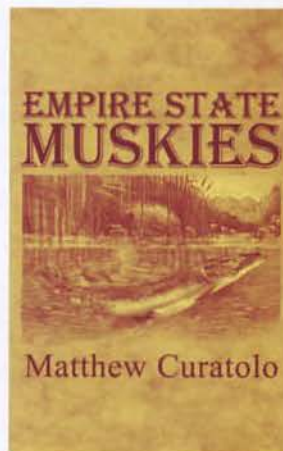
## 📖 REVIEW by Mike Seymour

### Empire State Muskies

By Matt Curatolo  
97 pages; soft cover \$14.95  
Publish America of Baltimore  
[www.publishamerica.com](http://www.publishamerica.com); (301) 695-1707

The elusive muskellunge ranks as king of New York's freshwater fish, and anglers who pursue muskellunge often experience the playful condition known as "muskie fever." When Matt Curatolo of Ogdensburg contracted a case of muskie fever, the condition resulted in a passionate pursuit of muskellunge, and the book *Empire State Muskies*.

In a nutshell, the book discusses the ecology of New York's muskellunge, time-proven fishing strategies, catch-and-release information, and muskellunge-holding waters across the state. It's a good read for novice muskellunge anglers (as evidenced by chapter four, *Muskie Fishing 101: A Beginner's Guide*), as well as those with a general interest in learning about muskellunge in New York. Muskellunge anglers of all levels will find where-to and how-to information in the book's second half, which focuses on 25 state waters. Special attention is given to top muskellunge destinations like the St. Lawrence River,



Niagara River, Chautauqua Lake, and Buffalo Harbor.

Curatolo dedicates two chapters to the topic of how quality muskellunge fishing continues to thrive in New York because of careful angler handling and releasing of caught fish. The author acknowledges the importance of Save the River's Muskie Release Program in protecting muskellunge populations. Since inception, the program has led to the release of nearly 1,000 St. Lawrence River muskellunge.

So if you want to learn about muskie fishing, or if you are already a muskie angler and just want to learn more, give *Empire State Muskies* a read.

**Mike Seymour** is a U.S. Coast Guard licensed charter captain and a NYS licensed guide. He is also a member of New York State Outdoor Writers Association, Outdoor Writers Association of America, and Association of Great Lakes Outdoor Writers.

# Back Trails

Perspectives on People and Nature

## Mornings With Jacques

by Daniel Pinkwater

Unless you're a shepherd or maybe an Inuit musher, it's a safe assumption that if you live with a dog it is because you derive pleasure from doing so. We enjoy living with dogs for a variety of reasons. Unconditional love gets cited a lot, companionship, a surrogate child, a fellow participant in certain sports. What I like about dogs is their capacity to communicate, and be communicated with—a trans-species conversation.

Jacques was a pound puppy we did not need. He was your typical shelter shepherd, yellowish tan, medium-sized, on the skinny side, hyperactive, noisy, and completely untrained. But there was something about him, the look in his eye—once I saw him, I knew he was going to wind up living with us, and there was nothing rational about this. It was not even a decision—it was a recognition of fact. When I took him out on the leash for a pre-adoption get-acquainted walk, his feet hardly touched the ground. He was crazy-wild with joy at being out of his cage.

He was going to need plenty of training—and that was all right with me. I know how to train dogs. He came home on July 14th, Bastille Day, hence his name. Friends who saw him that day refused to believe he was the same dog when they visited again at the end of the summer. He had filled out, developed an impressive athletic physique, become calm, quit bouncing off the ceiling. Where he had seemed to be made of pipe cleaners, and in a state of continual frenzy, he was now handsome, quiet and

self-contained. One could see his lineage, German shepherd and Akita—he bore himself with dignity.

Key to Jacques' rehabilitation and training was a daily morning walk of an hour or so. On these walks I taught him many things—I also learned. And I taught him to fear squirrels.

*“Shh, look out. It's a squirrel. Don't let him see us.”*

At first he was inclined to chase them. Instead of getting into an argument with him, I counted on his canine tendency to read my emotions, and fell back on the first chapter, which was all I had read, of a book about method acting. I would tighten up on the leash, take baby tip-toe steps, and whisper to Jacques, “Shh, look out. It's a squirrel. Don't let him see us.”

Jacques shot me a look, “What? Are they dangerous?”

“Are you kidding? Squirrels are lethal.” I all but held my breath as we sneaked past some squirrel who was ready to flee, but not before enjoying the spectacle of a man and dog cringing as they walked by.

It wasn't long before Jacques was on the constant lookout for squirrels. He would crowd against my leg, and whimper, “Boss! It's a squirrel. Don't let him see us!” Together we would sneak our sneakiest sneaky walk, and get out of the squirrel's range without being horribly mauled.

I can't say for sure that Jacques actually became afraid of squirrels. Certainly he did not hesitate to chase them up trees in

the yard at home. It may be he thought I was afraid of them and humored me. Or maybe he considered the whole thing a crazy charade, and played along because he found it funny.

Over the years, we took that same walk along the bluffs above the Hudson, at the Vanderbilt Mansion National Historic Site, approximately 4,000 times. We saw all manner of things one could expect to encounter on such rambles—from deer, to pileated woodpeckers, to the occasional bald eagle. We enjoyed all kinds of weather, the changing seasons, and one another's company.

And never once were we torn to bits by an enraged squirrel.

First-time *Conservationist* contributor and children's book author extraordinaire **Daniel Pinkwater** lives with his wife Jill on a farm in the Hudson Valley. He promises to contribute another essay when, in his words, “...the complaints stop.”



Kathy McLaughlin

*New York State Conservationist*, June 2009

# Four hundred years ago...

Photo by Jim David, courtesy of The Trust for Public Land

*Henry Hudson and Samuel de Champlain explored the water bodies that now bear their names. Two hundred years ago, Robert Fulton journeyed up the Hudson River in the first successful steamboat. All three voyages helped shape our great state, making it unlike any other.*

In commemoration of these historic events, communities across New York are making 2009 a Quadricentennial celebratory year. Numerous events and celebrations are planned that will highlight New York's unique, rich history, emphasizing the connection between community and the environment in environmentally and economically sustainable ways.

## **Some Scheduled Quad Events Are:**

- ♦ *Aug. 1, 2009: Quadricentennial Cruise on the Hudson at the Cold Spring Boat Club in Cold Spring, NY*
- ♦ *Aug. 22, 2009: Voyage of the Half Moon at the Storm King Art Center in Mountainville, NY*
- ♦ *July 11, 2009 - Oct. 10, 2009: Hudson/Athens Lighthouse Tours in Hudson, NY*



**[www.ExploreNY400.com](http://www.ExploreNY400.com)**

For more information visit [www.ExploreNY400.com](http://www.ExploreNY400.com). Also, watch for the August issue of *Conservationist*, in which we will delve into the area's rich history, and bring additional attention to celebratory events.



See page 2

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