



# THE LAND STEWARD

Newsletter of the Finger Lakes Land Trust

Vol. 15, No. 2

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes Region

Spring 2003

## More Than 500 Acres Added to Protected Land

*It took months of leg work and countless hours of volunteer time, but the end result turned into three conservation easements that will permanently protect special places in three different counties in the Finger Lakes region—including the largest conservation easement donated to the Land Trust to date.*

Easements in Steuben, Livingston, and Tioga counties will conserve both farm and forest land. The Krebs' easement protects more than 430 acres of upland, meadows and timberland in the Hemlock-Canadice area. Above the shores of Keuka Lake, Vera Van Atta's easement donation is our first in the Keuka Lake basin, and the first to come with a bed-and-breakfast. After donating 161 acres in the Tioga Hills to the Land Trust last year, Robert and Mary King decided to donate a conservation easement on their adjacent 48 acre tract. With the acceptance of these three easements, the Land Trust now holds 41 permanent conservation restrictions across the region. *(Look inside for more on the three easements)*

The conservation easements for these sites are "gifts of love" to the future generations of the Finger Lakes Region from the people whose love of scenic beauty, untamed nature, productive farmlands and unparalleled views propelled them to make these sacrifices. Every private landowner who sets aside some of his land for "those who follow" deserves our deep gratitude. If you would like additional information about conservation easements please contact Betsy Darlington in the Land Trust's Ithaca office.



*John and Carol Krebs donated the largest conservation easement to date.*

## Nature's Gift Fundraising Effort Exceeds Goal for Western Lakes

By exceeding a \$200,000 fundraising campaign goal in just eight months, (and in the midst of an economic downturn), the Land Trust's Western Lakes Chapter has again demonstrated its grass-roots strength and the appeal of the Land Trust's mission.

"Nature's Gift: A Special Gifts Campaign for the Western Finger Lakes" was launched last June to raise funds

needed for long-term management of the Wesley Hill and Nundawao (Great Hill) Preserves, the initiation of new land protection projects and ongoing chapter operations.

Led by talented and enthusiastic volunteers, the campaign defied the stock market's downward spiral, ending the year with a magnificent, anonymous donation of \$100,000 to put the campaign

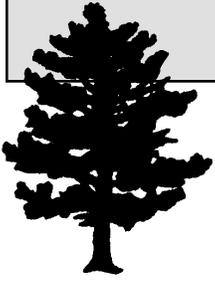
over the top. At press time, the campaign had received gifts and pledges from 107 donors, totaling nearly \$270,000. During the coming months, the campaign will be concluded.

The campaign has brought other dividends as well. New volunteers have been recruited, and new friends have been introduced to the Land Trust.

*continued on page 2*

**ANNUAL CELEBRATION: Join us April 27 for our Annual Celebration at the Steamboat Landing on Canandaigua Lake.**

It's a great opportunity to meet Andy Zepp, our new executive director, as well as honor this year's recipients of the Volunteer of the Year and Conservationist Of The Year awards. Please see insert for details, reservation form and election ballot for Land Trust board members.



# PERSPECTIVES

Eleven glacial lakes and 6,000 square miles of forests, farms, wetlands, hills, and gorges; the Finger Lakes region is a place like no other. Thirteen years ago, I worked with dedicated volunteers to create the Finger Lakes Land Trust. We shared, and still share, a common vision and acted to ensure that this special region retains those intact landscapes that serve to create its very identity.

Since its formation, the Land Trust has worked cooperatively with landowners to conserve almost 7,000 acres through the use of conservation easements and the establishment of nature preserves. Thanks to these efforts, today you can stroll through the wooded palisades above the Chemung River, marvel at the serenity of a quiet morning at Lick Brook Falls, or contemplate the beauty of Canandaigua Lake from the Trust's Nundawao/Great Hill Preserve. You can also appreciate thousands of acres of private lands that will not be developed thanks to conservation restrictions held and monitored by the Trust.

Now in its thirteenth year, the Land Trust has much to be proud of. Yet, we've also just gotten started. In some parts of our region, the actions we take during the next few years will determine whether our last undeveloped lakeshores, ridgelines, farm, and forest tracts remain. We must act now to build upon our success and grow to a new level of activity, expanding our reach across the region and actively working with more landowners to

*The Land Trust has worked cooperatively with landowners to conserve almost 7,000 acres through the use of conservation easements and the establishment of nature preserves.*

conserve their lands. We must also forge new partnerships with like-minded organizations, both public and private, to leverage our efforts.

Articles in this issue of *The Land Steward* highlight the steps we're already taking in this direction, from acquiring new conservation easements across the region to the spectacular success of the *Nature's Gift* fundraising campaign. Both of these efforts relied upon those dedicated volunteers who still serve as the backbone of the Land Trust.

I'm delighted and honored by the opportunity to work with such excellent volunteers and staff, and also to have the opportunity to work with others to help shape the future of a region I call home. During the coming months, I'll spend much of my time talking to land trust volunteers, members, conservation partners, and landowners to learn about the challenges and opportunities facing land conservation throughout the Finger Lakes.

Please let me know what you think. I hope that you'll join me at the Land Trust's Annual Celebration in April. You can also reach me by phone at our Ithaca office or by e-mail at [andrewzepp@fllt.org](mailto:andrewzepp@fllt.org). I look forward to hearing from you.

—Andrew E. Zepp, Executive Director

## Nature's Gift Fundraising Effort Exceeds Goal for Western Lakes

*continued from page 1*

Special credit must go to Barbara Hamlin and Meg Ewing, who led fundraising efforts. Chapter Chair Jim Kersting, Sara Kersting, Jim and Ellie Fralick, Linda Firth (now back in Colorado, to the chapter's dismay), Cathy Gardner and others who helped with solicitations, events, mailings, or obtaining donations of goods and services to help keep costs down. Paul Kellogg and others helped early on with suggestions for our prospect list. Advisory

Board member Howard Hartnett and then Development Committee Chair Joel Rabinowitz came up to Canandaigua to lead an "ask" training session. And recently, Virginia Homsy and Anne Fayko have joined the Nature Gift's team.

It's been a great effort, proving that "*Together we can protect Nature's Gift for generations to come.*"

—Liz Brown

### Membership On Line

*You can donate, join or renew your membership on line through our web page at [www.fllt.org](http://www.fllt.org)*

*It's fast, easy and secure.  
Thank you for your support*

### UNITED WAY

Offers the opportunity for you to designate some or all of your gift to this organization.

For more information on how to designate your gift, please contact your United Way.

# VOLUNTEER PROFILE: BARB HAMLIN

## Puffins Stuffed with Rhubarb. A National Dish?

“I love the Finger Lakes,” says Barbara Hamlin. “I want the area to thrive but not lose what makes it most valuable—clean water, forested hills, natural vistas.” Barbara is an accomplished fundraiser who, with other Western Lakes Chapter volunteers—especially Jim Fralick, Meg Ewing, and Jim Kersting—guided and energized the resoundingly successful “Nature’s Gift” campaign. They began with a goal of \$200,000, but had received nearly \$270,000 in gifts and pledges by press time.

Barbara grew up among the Western Lakes and, from 1976 to 1987, served her hometown, Canandaigua, as an alderman on the City Council.

Over the past 17 years, she’s done fundraising for arts organizations—public broadcasting stations, Bristol Valley Productions, and the Metropolitan Opera Association—as well as environmental groups such as the National Audubon Society.

“I learned about environmental issues when I went to Audubon,” she says. “Just as I learned about opera, the theatre, and public television when I worked in those fields. Of course, I don’t know *how to do* any of those things. Can’t sing, produce a TV documentary, or re-establish puffins in former habitats!”

Working for Audubon provided the opportunity to travel to different parts of the country. “I visited Steve Kress’s puffin project off the coast of Maine, the Platte River for the Sandhill Crane migration, Sonoma County in California to see the effects of grape monoculture on bird habitat, and McAllen, Texas, to see

the effects of lack of water in the Rio Grande River basin.”

“Did you know,” she asks, “that although puffins had virtually disappeared from the Maine coast, they are plentiful in Iceland? In fact, the Icelandic national dish is puffin stuffed with rhubarb. I can’t verify that; someone at Audubon told me. Steve Kress, if you read this newsletter and disagree, please call the Land Trust office!”

Barbara has brought humor, expertise, and more to her associates in the Western Lakes Chapter. “Working with Barbara has been an exciting ride,” says Meg Ewing. “She’s smart, funny, a quick study, and engaging. She brings an incredible range of both experience and experiences to her work, yet is completely down-to-earth.

“Best of all, she has completely embraced the work of the Land Trust. She has guided us into cultivating major corporate support, and she is helping us develop a corporate benefits package which can be used region-wide.”

“I love to raise money for worthy causes, but I must say, it’s more fun as a volunteer!” says Barbara, who has established her own fundraising consulting company in Canandaigua—Philanthropic Advising—with clients in Rochester, Washington DC, and Seattle. “I look forward to seeing the Finger Lakes Land Trust grow and mature under Andy Zepp’s leadership. And I just hope I don’t have to get a ‘real job,’ so I can continue to volunteer!”

—Caissa Wilmer



Photo by: Meg Ewing

*“I love to raise money for worthy causes, but I must say, it’s more fun as a volunteer!” says Barbara.*

## Conservation Easement Protects a Piece of Heaven

In December of last year, Robert and Mary King generously donated a conservation easement to the Land Trust to protect their 48-acre retreat in Richford. Located just east of the stunning 161-acre Robert and Mary Carver King Preserve, donated to the Land Trust by the Kings a year ago, the property includes a vacation cabin that looks down the beautiful valley south of Richford, in Tioga County. The Kings are now looking for a conservation-minded owner for this special place.

The easement limits development to the weekend cabin. The land is mostly forested, but has small meadows on the south-facing slope around the cabin. Water comes from a year-round well with a hand pump. This and the adjoining preserve have a rich array of birds and other wildlife—and good trails for accessing different areas.

A tributary of the East Branch of Owego Creek runs west to east through the southern part of the property, through a hemlock- and yellow birch-sided ravine. Even during rainy weather, the stream runs clear, thanks to the forest all about. (Andersen Hill State Forest is just one property removed to the

west of the King Preserve).

If you’re interested in this property, please contact the Land Trust for more information.

—Betsy Darlington



*A view from the Kings' cabin*

# Welcome, 10,000 Delights

Our newest conservation easement includes—count ‘em—10,000 delights. Of course, all our conservation easements are delightful, but this one is pretty special. For starters, it’s our first conservation easement in the Keuka Lake basin, and this particular “10,000 Delights” is a bed-and-breakfast owned and operated by Vera Van Atta. 10,000 Delights is just south of Branchport in Steuben County and consists of about 48 acres running from near Keuka Lake to the top of the slope,

with deep hemlock gorges on either side. Between the gorges there is a red pine plantation along with mixed stands of young trees and old farm fields. The vista alone of Keuka Lake from the porch of the B-and-B is worth the visit. Trails and dirt roads crisscross the property, and the outbuildings—a tipi, a tree house with a

view of the lake, and a teahouse straddling a 60-foot waterfall—contribute to the park-like feel. Turkey, deer, and fox all call 10,000 Delights home. The day I



*View of Keuka Lake and Bluff Point from the Van Atta property.*

was there I was treated to the sight of some very small wildlife—hundreds of little toads less than an inch long.

10,000 Delights was an inn earlier in the twentieth century, but had shut down by the 1960s. Bruce and Vera Van Atta bought it in 1979, when, on a winter drive to check on their cottage in Penn

Yan, they saw the 1850s Greek Revival mansion up the slope and found an old “for sale” sign in the ditch. The place had been for sale for so long that it was difficult to find a record of it in file cabinets at the real estate office. The paperwork was finally located under “unimproved farm land.”

After the closing, while walking the lines of their new property, Bruce turned to Vera and said, “We bought a park!”

Vera’s vision was to develop a bed-and-breakfast inn where people could leave their stress behind. Although Bruce did not live to see the project completed, 10 years later, Vera opened the inn.

According to Vera, there is a Buddhist tradition that maintains that the world is made up of 10,000 things. “My world is made up of 10,000 delights,” she said. “What better name for an inn? I am lucky enough to live in a paradise and I want to preserve this magical place as it is.”

Thanks, Vera—we’re all delighted that you did.

—Gail Blake

*We think of a philanthropist as someone who donates big sums of money, yet the word literally means “love of humankind.” All of us are capable of being philanthropists.*

—Edward Lindsay

## Our Sincere Thanks

*Our Sincere Thanks for Gifts In Honor Of*

**Mr. and Mrs.  
Jerome Ahrns**  
*From*  
**Stephen Ahrns**

**Jim Fralick**  
*From*  
**Michael &  
Mary Anne  
Finigan**

**Sue Strunk**  
*From*  
**Judith Oplinger**

**Nancy Sills &  
Frank Moss**  
*From*  
**Sheila Stone**



*Vera Van Atta and Debbie Koop, Keuka Chapter contact person, in the tree house high in a stately oak tree.*

# Farm and Forest Forever

*“Whatever good there is in the world I inherit from the courage and work of those who went before me. I, in turn, have the responsibility to make things better for those who will inherit the world from me.”* —Arthur Dobrin

The donors of the largest conservation easement in the history of the Land Trust may well be living by these words. This stunning 434-acre property, high in the hills southeast of Hemlock and Canadice Lakes and donated by John and Carol Krebs, includes 313 acres of forestland, 116 acres of farmland, and 5 acres of ponds and wetlands. It drains both east, into the Honeoye Lake watershed, and south, to the Cohocton River Basin. Topping out at 2240 feet, this place earned notice in Arch Merrill’s *Down the Lore Lanes* as a place of “scenic heights” and “rugged grandeur.” Old foundations



*A small pond north of Dutch Hollow Road on the Krebs property*

and rock walls attest to the farming of previous centuries, but now it’s deer, grouse, woodcock, turkey, fox, coyote, and the occasional bear that call it home. This conservation easement is unique not only in its acreage, but in its nature. A blend of agriculture and forestry, it permits farming to continue in the six fields

currently open on the land while also allowing the owners to manage the forestlands for the timber, as they have done for thirty-eight years. John Krebs will work closely with the Land Trust to ensure that forest practices are ecologically sound and on a sustained yield basis. Maintaining the forest will not be a problem for John, who has taken forestry courses in Massachusetts and New York and been a Master Forest Owner volunteer since 1991. John is also active in the New York State Forest Owners Association (NYFOA), having served on the board of the local chapter, then as a NYFOA director. His forest management practices earned him the 1994 New York State Outstanding Tree Farm Award.

John, who retired from Kodak in 1993, traces his love for the outdoors to his father, who introduced him early on to the beauty of the Hemlock-Canadice area. By 1965, he had begun acquiring land in these high hills. Now, with neighboring lands taken out of agriculture and forestry and subdivided, and more development likely in the area, John and Carol decided that something had to be done to prevent this from ever happening to their land.

Thank you, John and Carol Krebs, for your generous gift to the earth.

—Sara Kersting

## In Memoriam

*Our deepest thanks for generous contributions in memory of:*

**Stephen J. Bradley**

*From*

**Don and Marian Hartill**

...

**Ann Jankey**

*From her daughter,*

**Sarah Medlin**

...

**Pat Roth**

*From*

**Kathy Roth**

...

**Virginia Allen Sibley**

*From*

**Mae Kadleck**

...

**Dr. Laura Lee &**

**Ora Smith**

*From*

**James and Janis Smith**

...

**Sally Spofford**

*From*

**Peter and Pidge**

**(Rhoda) Curtiss**

**Janet (Mrs. Robert)**

**Witzeman**

...

**William B. Van Orman**

*From*

**Elizabeth Johns**

## Who We Are...

**The Finger Lakes Land Trust** is a membership-supported, nonprofit land conservation organization founded in 1989. The Land Trust works to protect the cherished natural places of the 12-county Finger Lakes Region. We conserve the beautiful, wild, and working landscapes of this area by establishing nature preserves and holding conservation easements, educating for responsible stewardship, and collaborating with organizations, communities, and individuals.

By protecting the region's 6,000 square miles of forests, farms, and open spaces, the Finger Lakes Land Trust provides many benefits to the communities we work with: clean air and water, plant and animal diversity, scenic views, and opportunities to learn about and enjoy the natural world.

## How We Protect the Land...

The Finger Lakes Land Trust helps landowners to take direct and positive action through private, voluntary land conservation. Our members have made it possible for the Land Trust to protect a mosaic of natural habitats and landscapes among the long, lovely lakes, rolling hills, rich farmland, rugged gorges, vibrant wetlands, and mature forest that we call home.

Here are just a few of our recent projects that were made possible with our members' support:

- **Steeger Hill Nature Preserve**, an 800-acre preserve of forested hill-sides and rare species habitat along the Chemung River (Chemung County)
- **McIlroy Bird Sanctuary**, a 128-acre preserve that protects critical bird and plant habitat in the Cayuga Lake Watershed (Cayuga County)
- **Nundawao**, the 226-acre Great Hill Nature Preserve, a massive hillside on the east side of Canandaigua Lake (Yates County)

For information about other Nature Preserves please go to [www.fllt.org](http://www.fllt.org)

# LAND TRUST LANDSCAPES:

© Harry Littell



*Etna Preserve*

never made a picture, but I'd be hard pressed to call them bad days.

This project was funded in part by a Tompkins County Decentralization Grant. Special thanks to the Land Trust staff, especially Kat Lieberknecht, Betsy Darlington, and Gay Nicholson, and to Robin Schwartz, Program Director at the Community Arts Partnership, for their support of this project.

—Harry Littell

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*You can see all of the images captured by Harry Littell on display at the Tompkins County Library. Exhibition dates: April 5-June 27 during regular library hours. Opening reception: Saturday April 12, 3-5pm. Land Trust members and friends are welcome.*

© Harry Littell



*Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook*

# Preserves of the Finger Lakes



© Harry Littell

*Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary*



© Harry Littell

*Sweedler Preserve at Lick Brook*

## How You Can Help...

In order to protect more land we need your participation through membership, annual appeal donations, and contributions of time and energy.

Become a member if you haven't joined yet and team up with hundreds of your friends and neighbors as we work together to protect the Finger Lakes.

As a member of the Finger Lakes Land Trust, you'll have the satisfaction of knowing that your membership support will result in protection of cherished places throughout the Finger Lakes Region. In addition, members also receive:

- A complimentary subscription to our newsletter, *The Land Steward*, published four times a year. *The Land Steward* is a fantastic source for up-to-date information about our latest land protection projects, stimulating discussions of conservation issues, announcements of hikes and events, and information for landowners in the Finger Lakes Region.
- Invitations to our events, such as hikes, concerts, lake cruises, book readings, and our Annual Celebration.
- Membership benefits and discounts at many local businesses that also support the mission of the Finger Lakes Land Trust.

**Volunteer with us!** Over 200 volunteers help us each year with everything from trail work to office work.

Together we can leave a natural legacy and shape what our Finger Lakes landscapes will look like tomorrow and for generations to come

*"Land Trusts give people the power to shape the future of their neighborhoods, and to ensure for future generations the existence of the wild and scenic places, the farms and forests, the rolling hills and quiet places that make our lives meaningful."*

# Special THANKS for special gifts

*Our deep gratitude to the following friends and supporters of Nature's Gift campaign. We couldn't have done it without you!*

## Conservators -

**\$30,000+**

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## Stewards -

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Alan and Sandy Stone  
Irene Szabo

## A "time out" for Meg

Meg Ewing, a busy wife, mother to three young sons, and a caring daughter-in-law, has called for a "time out" so she can dedicate more energy to her family. As a hockey mom and a member of an all-woman ice hockey league, Meg knows the value of time off the ice. We are looking forward to her return to this spectacular landscape in the Finger Lakes to continue her work to protect it for future generations.

Meg has starred in many roles on behalf of the Land Trust: founding member of the Western Lakes Chapter, Board Member, Conservationist of the Year, Volunteer of the Year, parent to the Bishop, Wesley Hill, and Great Hill Preserves—and this "hat trick"—the first three conservation easements in the Chapter. She will continue her role as Co-Chair for Nature's Gift Campaign.

Please help us celebrate Meg's legacy by joining us at the Annual Meeting on April 27 at the Steamboat Landing restaurant in Canandaigua.



—Jim Kersting

James and Ellen Terwilliger  
Hiram and Cornelia Tindall  
Marie C. & Joseph C. Wilson  
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*\*Matching Gift, Courtesy  
of David Fay*

## Protectors \$500 - \$999

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*"Philanthropy is like snow—it forms with  
silent spontaneity when conditions are right."*

—John K. Layle Jr.

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Paul Wentworth  
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***Our thanks to the following businesses and individuals for gifts of goods and services to Nature's Gift Campaign:***

Arbor Hill Grapery  
Libby Campbell  
Linda Firth  
Cathy and Marty Gardner  
John Guyette  
Gray and Jadon Hoffman  
and the crew of the  
Captain Gray  
Brad Kellogg  
Howard & Mary Lester

The Lodge at Bristol Harbour  
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Tom and Pam Post  
George and Joan Reineke  
Duncan Remington  
The Richard Reuter family  
Matt Saxon  
Smith's Interstate Printing  
The Southside Grille  
Tom and Patty Steele  
Connie Truesdale  
Rikki Van Camp  
Doug and Barbara Vittum  
Wegmans Food Markets, Inc.

***We are pleased to acknowledge the following supporters of this year's Annual Appeal***

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Heather Bernhardt and  
John Walp  
Betsy and Dick Darlington  
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Ted and Joan Hullar  
Carl and Lynn Leopold

Jan and Susan Suwinski  
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William Van Orman  
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June Morrell, Southern Tier  
Custom Fabricators, Inc.  
Lauren Stefanelli  
Jim and Marsha Wooster  
Andrew Zepp

*We also wish to thank those donors who could not be listed due to space limits.*

*We sincerely regret any errors contained in this listing. Please call us at 607-275-9487 to report any changes required. Thank You.*

## "Thanks to Jola"

We would like to take this opportunity to thank Jola Simon for playing a key role at the Land Trust during a time of multiple transitions. During the last eight months, Jola has led the Land Trust's development efforts while also overseeing production of the newsletter. She substantially upgraded the Land Trust's membership database, supervised the annual appeal, and put fundraising systems in place that will serve the Land Trust well into the future. Thanks to Jola, the organization was able to advance its development efforts in the absence of an executive director. Jola also brought a tremendous amount of energy and enthusiasm that will surely be missed.

Thank you Jola! We wish you well in all your future endeavors!

## A very special thanks

To those of you who responded so generously to this year's Annual Appeal. If you're still thinking of making a gift to the Land Trust, remember that a donation today is an investment in the future of the Finger Lakes Region for generations to come

### *Did you know?*

You can help support the work of the Land Trust by enrolling in our convenient monthly giving program!

Contact our office at  
607-275-9487 for details.

# REFLECTIONS ON CONSERVATION

## What does nature mean to me?

*Professor Thomas Eisner posed this question to the 100-plus students who took his class, The Naturalist's Way, at Cornell University in Ithaca during the fall of 2002. What follows is a medley crafted from the writings of nearly two dozen students. As with much academic writing, the essays' style and tone were often stilted. Yet in each essay the love, the concern, the passion for nature,*

*for beauty, for life--these were the things that came through. Granted, it's rather stream-of-consciousness. Still, it provides an intimate glimpse into the collective heart — along with a couple of dollops of good advice.*

*We hope you enjoy it.*

—Thomas Eisner, Jackie Grant, Mary Woodsen

Nature is a continuous flow of wonders. It provides an opportunity to learn – about ourselves, about other creatures, about what it means to be alive. Nature is the phenomena of the uncontrollable. It is harsh and random and beautiful--yet even when everything seems empty, there is always something there.

Nature. It's the swallows that find their way home year after year, the stubborn grass that springs up from within the cracks of old floor beams and flourishes in a seemingly impossible place, the water that dribbles in and provides this grass with moisture. No, nature is not always wilderness, pristine and beautiful, yet it is equally as wild and unyielding. When I am in

the suburbs, nature is the dandelion... I always want to bend over to these little plants and say, you are welcome. Indeed, my life exists as a delicate state between working for and against nature.

Strangely, I have never really bothered to sit down and think about why immersing myself in the natural world is such a crucial part of my life. I believe that I love nature, but have been unable to find it, probably because I am looking for it. Sometimes the saddest answer is simply, 'I don't know.' What does nature mean to me? I have not the first clue.

Perhaps nature is what I, myself,

wish to be: adaptive, practical, creative, strong, fascinating, refreshingly raw, and somehow ultimately genuine. And consider: nature has never judged my looks, asked how much money I make, or told me to do my homework. I can rest all night not knowing what the fate of humanity will be, but toss and turn if I start to question the fate of nature.

I know that the world that I live in is very delicate. Someday the phenomena I now take for granted may only be something that my grandchildren can read about in a book. Nature is no longer simply something to enjoy and explore, but something to protect, and it is impossible to appreciate nature without also being its advocate. For in the end nature is our home.



Photo by: Bob Corneau

*Nature in full glory at Steege Hill.*

## A CLOSER LOOK

### “Just singin’ in the rain...”

*It was the end of maple syrup season a few years ago. Nighttime temperatures hadn’t dropped below freezing for a couple of nights and we had emptied the buckets for the last time. As darkness fell, the first spring thunderstorm hit. What great punctuation to the season!*

Later, driving north on Rt. 34 near the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve, I began to see really big raindrops bouncing on the dark road. Or maybe they were small leaves blowing... Or—frogs?! I stopped and got out. Sure enough, I was in the middle of a sea of frogs a mile or more wide. Many lay squished in the road, but far more were hopping, still hopping east, downhill, toward the ponds on the valley floor.

What to do? After at least an hour watching them, I decided that I couldn’t spend the night by the side of the road. With regrets, I drove slowly on, trying as best I could to miss the frogs.

The field guide told me that these little grayish-brown frogs with a dark X on their backs were spring peepers, *Pseudacris crucifer*. While we’ve all heard their sleigh bell chorus in the spring, most folks have never seen them—one, because they’re tiny (19-35 mm) and two, because they’re nocturnal. Yet peepers range over all eastern North America. They live in wooded or brushy areas near permanent or vernal ponds, where they eat bugs and other small invertebrates. Snakes, larger frogs, and even large insects eat them in turn. To protect themselves, peepers get darker or lighter to better match their surroundings.

When temperatures drop in the autumn, peepers burrow into leaf litter to hibernate. (In frogs, this is called estivation.) They are one of the few frog species that can tolerate freezing by building up a high concentration of glucose in their blood and tissues to prevent damage. When temperatures rise again in the spring, peepers head back to their natal pond to mate. The males, which are smaller than the females, get to the pond first and start calling. One male may call up to 25 times per minute; females are apparently attracted to males with faster calls. Mating season typically lasts from March to May, eggs hatch in three to five days, and tadpoles metamorphose in about 90 days. A spring peeper can live about three years.

Herpetologist Jackie Grant tells me that mass migrations like the one I saw aren’t common—they only occur when just the right combination of temperature and rain (temperature being the

*“Habitat fragmentation, especially through road construction, has a big effect on any amphibian that migrates from hibernation sites to breeding ponds to foraging areas,” says Jackie*



© Susan Bull Riley

*Pseudacris crucifer — the spring peeper*

more important cue) induce all the members of a species to head off at once. “Usually it’s more of a concerted trickle over one to two weeks,” says Jackie.

As far as we know, spring peeper populations are not yet declining the way many amphibians are, but my experience on the road that spring night illustrates a major challenge to the survival of peepers. “Habitat fragmentation, especially through road construction, has a big effect on any amphibian that migrates from hibernation sites to breeding ponds to foraging areas,” says Jackie. “It’s simply because of the number of times they must cross a road. Peepers don’t seem to have the fungal infestations that have been killing other frogs; it’s us and our cars doing it.”

Join Jackie at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve on May 10 for an evening of listening to spring peepers and other frogs (*see calendar*).

—Gail Blake

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## SPRING—EARLY SUMMER 2003 CALENDAR:

**JOIN US FOR OUR ANNUAL CELEBRATION, Sunday, April 27 at Noon, at Steamboat Landing in Canandaigua. See insert for details and reservation form!**

**Sun., April 6, 2 PM:** CHAMBER MUSIC CONCERT with the Ariadne String Quartet. \$35 per person. Call (607) 275-9487 for reservations.

**Sat., April 12, 3-5 PM:** GRAND OPENING, at Tompkins County Public Library: Harry Littell's Photo Exhibit, "Land Trust Landscapes: Preserves of the Finger Lakes Land Trust," continuing during regular hours from **Apr. 5-June 27**. Library is in Ithaca, corner of Cayuga and Green Streets.

**Sat., May 10, 7:30 PM:** FROG SONGS at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby. Led by herpetologist Jackie Grant. **Bring flashlight or headlamp!** From Ithaca, go south on route 13. Take left exit on route 34/96 and go about 7 miles to the preserve parking lot, opposite house #2500 and just beyond the W. Danby Fire Station.

**Sun., May 11, 1:45 PM:** MOTHERS' DAY PLANT WALK at the King Preserve in Richford, in collaboration with the Finger Lakes Native Plant Society. Led by Anna Stalter and Tom Reimers. Take route 79 east from Ithaca. In Richford, turn right on route 38. Go *just* past the 55 MPH sign and turn right on Andersen Hill Rd. After road makes a right-angle bend, continue about 0.3 mi. to the entrance, on the right. Park along side of road. OR carpool from Cooperative Extension in Ithaca at 1 PM corner of Willow Ave. and Lincoln St. in Ithaca.

**Sun., June 8, 8:00 AM:** SEEING CERULEANS at the Salmon Creek Bird Sanctuary in Lansing, ornithologist Ken Rosenberg, leader. Meet at the intersection of Brooks Hill Rd. and Salmon Creek Rd., in Lansing (north of Ludlowville).

WALKS GO RAIN, SUN OR SNOW. PLEASE BRING SNACKS AND WATER, AND WEAR SUITABLE SHOES. CALL THE LAND TRUST AT (607) 275-9487 FOR DETAILS.