



THE LAND STEWARD

Newsletter of the Finger Lakes Land Trust

Vol. 20, No. 1

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes Region

Winter 2007-2008

Land Trust Celebrates Its 26th Nature Preserve

In December 2007, the Land Trust completed the acquisition of two adjacent parcels bordering Six Mile Creek in the Town of Dryden, Tompkins County. The acquisitions together total 138 acres and include more than 4,200 feet of frontage on the creek. These lands will be managed as the newly established Park Nature Preserve — the Land Trust's 26th public conservation area.

The acquisition was made possible by a personal gift from the daughter of the late Roy H. Park, Sr., in honor of her father. A media executive and entrepreneur, Park made his home in Ithaca, New York. Following his death in 1993, the Park Foundation has continued his legacy, dedicated to the aid and support of education, public broadcasting and the environment.

Additional financial support for the Park Nature Preserve was provided by real-estate agent Ed Finegan and by wildlife photographer Marie Read. Landowners Frank and Blythe Baldwin also agreed to donate a significant portion of their land's value as part of the sale of their land.

The new preserve, located on the east side of Irish Settlement Road, has long been of interest to conservationists. The site encompasses diverse natural habitats including fields, woods, wetlands, and a pristine stretch of Six Mile Creek — the source of Ithaca's drinking water supply. It is renowned among local birders



MARIE READ ©

The Park Nature Preserve is host to a diversity of natural habitats including this pristine stretch of Six Mile Creek — the source of Ithaca's drinking water supply.

for its splendid array of breeding birds, including locally uncommon species such as Prairie Warbler, Red-shouldered Hawk and Louisiana Waterthrush.

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Easement Protects Shorefront and Open Vistas on Canandaigua Lake



CHUCK FEHL ©

Many readers of this newsletter probably assume that the bulk of our conservation energy is spent acquiring land or accepting donated property to turn into public preserves, such as the Plymouth Woods Preserve near Elmira or the Wesley Hill preserve above Honeoye Lake.

While the Land Trust continues to pursue these projects — the new Park Nature Preserve featured in this issue, for example — increasingly we work on conservation easements with landowners who want to protect the future of their properties while still retaining ownership and rights of use.

In December 2007, the Land Trust gratefully received the generous donation of a conservation easement on 85 acres of shorefront, woodlands and open field on the west side of Canandaigua Lake.

The donor, who wishes to be anonymous, originally bought the property with a mind toward conserving it, recognizing the development threat on the lake's west shore. This conservation easement is particularly important in protecting what undeveloped

Canandaigua Lake will benefit from the Land Trust's latest conservation easement that will secure 85 acres on its western shore.

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PERSPECTIVES

Extraordinary acts of generosity — simply put, that's what makes the Land Trust's work possible.

The two conservation projects featured in this issue of *The Land Steward* are the result of such generosity. The establishment of our new Park Nature Preserve in Dryden was supported by extraordinary financial contributions from our members. And an exceptional gift of a conservation easement on Canandaigua Lake will

permanently protect undeveloped shorefront, perhaps our scarcest land resource.

I had the good fortune to hike around both of these sites this fall. Both are truly remarkable — the Park Nature Preserve for its diverse habitats and sense of the pristine, and the Canandaigua property for its spectacular vistas of the lake and its shore protection.

All of us at the Land Trust greatly appreciate these wonderful gifts, as we do every gift that supports our mission.

From the generosity of our donors, to the tireless efforts of our volunteers and the strong commitment of our landowners, we are fortunate to have your support.

From everyone here at the Land Trust, thanks very much for your sponsorship and help — our best wishes to you for 2008!

—Andy Zepp

Land Trust Celebrates Its 26th Nature Preserve *continued from cover*

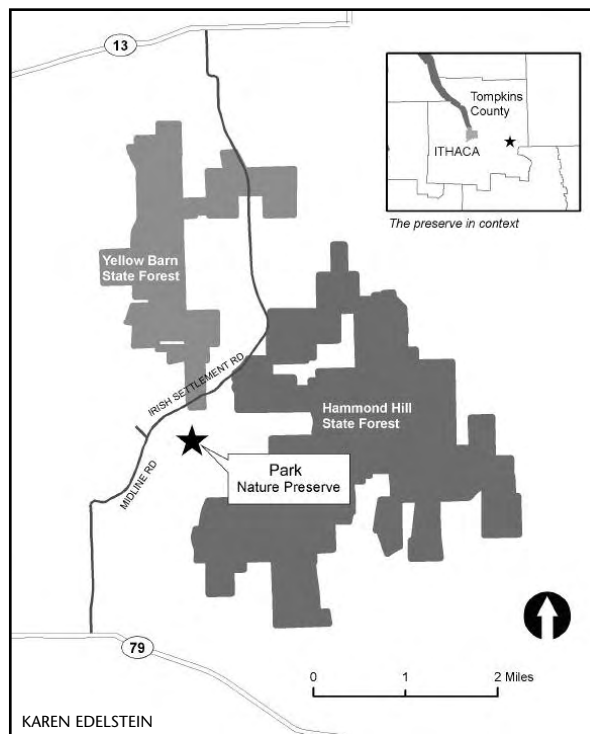
The new acquisitions are the latest additions to the Emerald Necklace, the Land Trust's initiative to create a continuous band of 50,000 acres of protected lands around Ithaca. The area is adjacent to existing open space lands, including Hammond Hill and Yellow Barn State Forests in Dryden, and the Cornell Plantations Natural Area Preserve known as the "Old 600," which extends south to Slaterville Springs. Thus far, the Land Trust has permanently protected more than 1,500 acres within the Emerald Necklace.

"It's a rare occasion to have the chance to permanently protect a natural area of this quality," says Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "The Land Trust is honored to have the opportunity to recognize Roy Park in this way and also to continue the tradition of stewardship exemplified by landowners like Frank and Blythe Baldwin. In the future, we hope to work with other landowners in this area to protect additional acreage."

The 80-acre parcel constituting the northern half of the Park Nature Preserve was purchased from Don Christian and Denise DeCesare in April 2007. This portion of the new preserve comprises mixed hardwood forest, wet hemlock woods with sphagnum and at least four species of lycopods, numerous vernal pools and an expansive beaver pond with cattail edges.

The second acquisition, from Frank and Blythe Baldwin, was completed on December 14, 2007. The Baldwins had long allowed the public to enjoy their land and donated a conservation easement limiting development to a portion of the property, in 1991. The Land Trust decided to acquire the property to ensure continued public access and to extinguish the remaining development rights.

Explaining her family's willingness to give up their land for a



public preserve, Blythe Baldwin said, "Some people through an accident of birth or other circumstances have come to possess lands, and some don't. But land such as this should be for everyone who will use it properly."

"People have always been visiting our property," she continued. "Since we entered into the easement agreement, we've appreciated that the Land Trust has been keeping an eye on the land and helping us with advice about how to deal with interlopers who misuse the site. Now that the land is a preserve, we hope that it will attract more nature lovers and others who will enjoy it responsibly. We are certainly pleased that it will be protected from development and extractive uses."

Visitors to the Park Nature Preserve will enter via the Baldwin tract on Irish Settlement Road, between Midline and Goodband Roads. An existing network of trails,

long maintained by the Baldwins' neighbor Jan Rogowicz, will take hikers along a small wooded stream past the Prairie Warblers' home, a stand of spruces and white pines. The trails continue along the forest edge, entering the shady hemlock woods and eventually leading to a large lean-to shelter built by the Baldwins above the creek, near a stunning waterfall.

The Land Trust is working on a comprehensive management plan, which will include expanded parking, for this new preserve. The Land Trust intends to formally open the Park Nature Preserve to the public some time during 2008.

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Kim Rothman and the law firm of Miller Mayer, LLP along with Attorney Peter Miller and the law firm of Adams, Theisen, May, Miller & Yehl for providing pro bono legal services in the acquisition of this property.

—Mark Chao

State Grants Fuel Finger Lakes Farmland Protection

In December, Governor Eliot Spitzer announced the commitment of 38 grants totaling nearly \$35 million to support the acquisition of conservation easements on prime farmland around the state. One of these grants will allow the Land Trust and Yates County to work together to purchase an easement on Henderson Farms, a 457-acre cash crop, hay and vegetable farm with 100% prime agricultural soils.

Henderson Farms is located just south of Penn Yan and adjoins Hallpine Farms, another operation whose protection has already been funded by the state's farmland protection program. Completion of an easement on Hallpine Farms is expected during 2008. Together, these two farms will serve as an agricultural "gateway" to the southern entrance to Penn Yan.

Additional farmland protection projects were funded in Cayuga, Cortland, Livingston, Onondaga, Ontario, Seneca and Tompkins Counties. In Ontario County, the Land Trust supported a successful application for funding by the Town of Canandaigua which will ensure the future of the Hicks Farm, in operation



KATIE BORCELLA

The Howser Farm in Tompkins County was permanently protected with support from New York State's farmland protection program.

since the late 1700's on the west side of Canandaigua Lake.

The Land Trust's first experience with the state's farmland protection program was when it partnered with Tompkins County to secure the Howser Farm in Lansing. This year, the County secured two additional grants, one of which will protect Bensvue Farm, a 942-acre dairy farm that adjoins the Land Trust's Salmon Creek Nature Preserve. A second grant will secure a 419-acre portion of Jerry Dell Farm in the Town of Dryden.

The Land Trust recognizes the importance of Finger Lakes agricultural lands, for their economic, cultural, scenic and ecological values. For this reason we are working together with a variety of partners, including the American Farmland Trust and the New York Agricultural Land Trust, to develop a comprehensive approach to the protection of this valuable resource.

Additional information on the state's farmland protection program may be found at: <http://www.agmkt.state.ny.us>

Easement Protects Shorefront and Open Vistas on Canandaigua Lake *continued from cover*

shorefront land still exists on the lake's west side.

"The donation of this conservation easement safeguards significant natural resources on a property that otherwise would very likely become the target of development," said Betsy Landre, Senior Field Representative at the Land Trust. "Thankfully, a beautiful natural area will now remain that way."

Those natural resources include rich upland woods and ravines coursing steeply down to the lake, as well as unspoiled views of the lake and across to the eastern shore. A high, open field provides a beautiful view of the lake from above.

The property's forest and field provide significant habitat for diverse native plants and animals, serving as a corridor for wildlife movement and a natural greenway. The woodland, in particular, contains a variety of tree and shrub species, with trees of different ages producing a multistory canopy ideal for many different songbirds. Standing dead trees and downed logs also contribute to the structural diversity of the forest.

These forested slopes would be highly susceptible to erosion and accelerated storm water runoff if the trees or other vegetation were removed. Given this, development of the property would almost certainly have a detrimental effect on the water quality of Canandaigua Lake.

"The lake provides drinking water to 60,000 area residents," Betsy Landre noted. "The easement on this property helps to protect that very important public resource."

As terms of the easement, the donor has given up development, or building, rights on at least two shorefront lots totalling nearly 400 ft., which means that this piece of

undeveloped lake shore will remain so in perpetuity.

Conservation easements are voluntary legal agreements between a landowner and a land trust in which the owner places restrictions on the use of his or her property, protecting the natural value of the land. The agreements are flexible and tailored to meet the landowner's needs. Donation of a conservation easement protects the land permanently from development while keeping it in private ownership. The land trust holds the easement, but the landowner retains ownership of the property and all rights and privileges for its use, except for uses restricted under the easement.

Such an easement may be either donated or purchased, and both federal and state tax incentives are available to those who are able to make a qualified easement donation. As part of the donation process, the landowner works with the land trust to identify specific permitted uses of the property — typically limited agriculture, forestry and recreational use. An easement limits or prohibits certain activities, such as industrial, commercial and residential development.

These easements are designed to conserve forever the important natural resources of each property. Covering portions of the property or the entire parcel, an easement is legally binding on all future owners and is monitored annually and enforced by the land trust, or easement "holder."

Under the terms of this latest Canandaigua Lake conservation easement, the owner is allowed to utilize the upland field for agriculture. Appropriate timber harvesting on the forested

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VOLUNTEER PROFILE

Al Cardinale: Solace in the Woods

Al Cardinale, current steward of the Bishop Preserve in the Town of Fayette, Seneca County, doesn't remember a time when he didn't want to be in the woods. "I grew up that way," Al remembers. "In my younger life, I spent a lot of time in the Adirondacks. Even though the commercial areas for children excited me, I always begged my dad to take me to the woods. I found a solace there. I still do. And wish that those who don't would discover it."

So it was natural for Al to feel an interest in the wooded property of his next-door neighbor, Bruce Bishop; he began to roam it regularly. Eventually, after Bruce noticed Al's love for those woods, they became close. "I spent a lot of time there. I really felt in touch with that particular property, knowing how hard he worked to turn that abandoned farmland into those lovely woods. Bruce was very protective of it until he saw that we were on the same page."

In 1993, Bruce was terminally ill and, to insure the protection of his meticulously cared for woods after his death, he donated the property to the Land Trust. Al spent an increasing number of hours there. As in his childhood, there was nothing he preferred doing during the day. "I work at home and whenever it gets too stressful, I go there with the dog. It fills that gap."

Al isn't sure how he got the job of steward or even how he met Betsy Darlington, the Land Trust's Director of Preserve Stewardship. "I just started helping out, and I guess Betsy just



BETSY DARLINGTON

Al Cardinale, volunteer steward of the Land Trust's Bishop Nature Preserve.

asked me to be steward," he said simply.

Al wants to maintain the woods the way Bruce had made it. "Bruce did most of the work; he planted over 30,000 trees and shrubs, and maintained the trails beautifully, but nature was pushing back. I ruined three tractors running over some of those stumps. I finally figured out how to get them out with a pick axe so I don't ruin the tractors anymore."

Betsy describes Al as deeply committed to the beauty and restoration of this preserve: "He loves that preserve and just throws his heart into it. It's away from the center of things so he doesn't have a pool of volunteers to help him out. His son helped him before going off to college, but now he does it on his own. Once, after a huge tree fell across the path, Al converted it into a bench for visitors to enjoy those woods as he does."

The Finger Lakes Land Trust is delighted with and grateful to Al Cardinale for his steady and loving labor to this preserve, allowing others to join him in finding solace there.

—Margot Brinn



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Easement Protects Shorefront and Open Vistas on Canandaigua Lake

continued from page 3

sections of the property is permitted, provided the harvest proceeds according to a management plan drawn up by a qualified forester and approved by the Land Trust. The aim of such a plan would be to protect wildlife habitat and the diversity of tree species, maintaining the natural character of the property. The owner may also build one more house in a designated site, in addition to the residence already in existence. These terms are fairly typical of the conservation easements the Land Trust currently holds throughout the Finger Lakes region.

"We're grateful for this wonderful gift," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "This easement gift is truly extraordinary in terms of its conservation values relative to Canandaigua Lake."

The Canandaigua Lake area, and the Finger Lakes region as a whole, is renowned for its spectacular views of forested hillsides, agricultural lands and beautiful lakes. The thoughtful, private action of a landowner today will be appreciated for generations to come.

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Kim Rothman and the law firm of Miller Mayer, LLP for providing pro bono legal services in support of this conservation easement.

—Eben McLane

News from the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve

During the fall of 2007, the Land Trust worked with valuable partners to solve several significant problems at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby, Tompkins County.

The old manmade earthen dam, impounding the waters of Coleman Lake, was deteriorating, prompting our efforts to look for a solution that would enable us to retain Coleman Lake and also adjust water levels for better habitat management.

The US Fish & Wildlife Service's (USFWS) Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program came to our rescue, designing and supervising a major reshaping of the dam. The result is a dam that is lower and broader, blending in better with the terrain.

Significantly, the new dam's gentler slope makes it less attractive for burrowing muskrats that could threaten the dam's structural integrity.

The crew replaced the old concrete control structure with a modern one that will make periodic draw-downs of the lake easier — and will also prevent sinkholes from developing in the dam. The lake will have a wider wetland edge, which should be attractive for a greater variety of critters. The USFWS recommends lowering the lake level every few summers in order to rejuvenate both the wetlands along the edges and the lake itself. The Land Trust intends to do just that.

Also last fall, the USFWS did a major brush-hogging of the 26-acre field that they mowed for us in 2004. Our goal is to retain some old field habitat on the preserve. This is important for many invertebrate species (yup, "bugs"!), some of which are declining as our region's old fields revert to brush and then forest. The field also provides habitat for resident bobolinks that enjoy grassy or weedy meadows. Without such mowing, the field was destined to become a rather uniform and uninteresting brushland of mostly invasive, nonnative shrubs — honeysuckle, multiflora rose and autumn olive.



BETSY DARLINGTON

In an effort to retain some old field habitat, the USFWS helped the Land Trust last fall by brush-hogging this 26-acre field.



BETSY DARLINGTON

The new Coleman Lake dam, with its gentler slope, will be lower and broader and provide the lake with a wider wetland edge, attracting a greater variety of fauna from around the area.

If not restrained, the field will revert to brush and eventually forest. But for now, it's a field and will stay that way as long as we keep up periodic mowing. The preserve has a great deal of brushland, so that habitat type will still be well represented. These other brushlands, for the most part, have a good supply of native shrubs, though still interspersed with invasives.

Making the decision to slow down natural succession — from field to forest — is not easy, and there are good arguments on both sides. But in this situation, the decision was made easier by the rampant spread of nonnative species and the desire to promote diversity at the biodiversity preserve.

Our third challenge was near the railroad tracks along Cayuga Inlet, deep in the preserve. Beavers had built a high dam along the creek, impounding a large, six-foot deep pool. If they continued to raise the height of the dam, the water level next to the tracks could get too high and threaten the railroad with a derailment.

With some sense of urgency, we contacted the DEC and the railroad and, of course, a lot of volunteers. The DEC's fish and wildlife expert, Bruce Manuel, provided us with plans for a pipe at the top of the dam, to control the water at a level that would protect both the beaver pond and the railroad bed. He scoped the situation out with us in advance and provided invaluable skilled help with the actual installation.

Equipment provided by the railroad and volunteers included a rail-mounted truck, a rowboat (supplied by our student intern Dustin James), a 20-foot long 12-inch culvert, fence posts and other materials to anchor the water level control pipe in the pond. Much ingenuity and volunteer power went into this project, especially by Roger Hopkins and Dave Schurman, who were instrumental in figuring out the myriad details.

Then on a cold, rainy day in mid-November, everyone gathered and, with Roger and Dave leading the team, we installed what we hope will be a permanent solution for as long as the beavers remain active in that area. By the time you read this, the hands of those who did the actual installation will probably have thawed out!

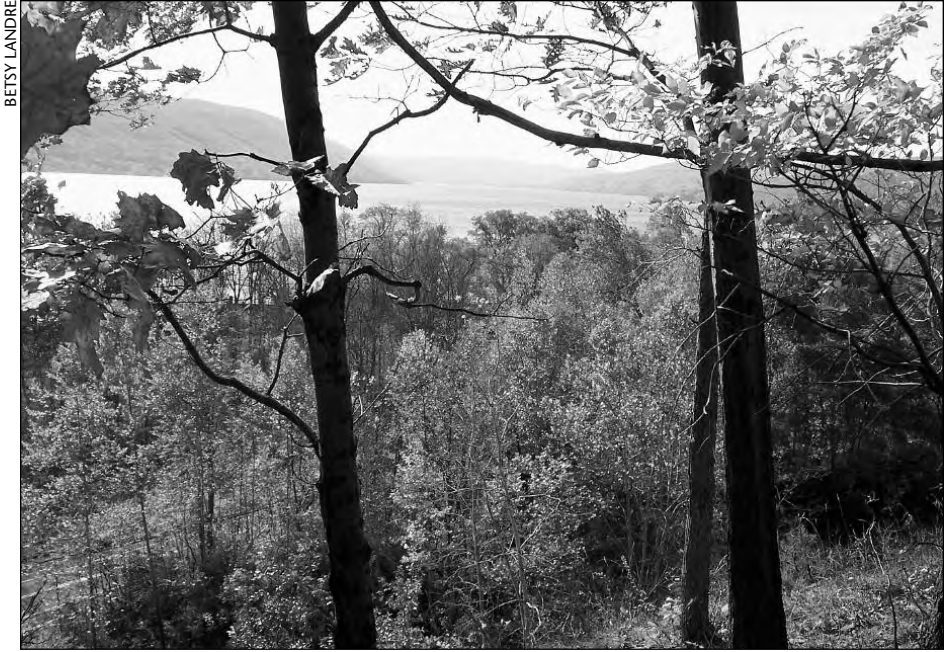
—Betsy Darlington, Director of Preserve Stewardship



BETSY DARLINGTON

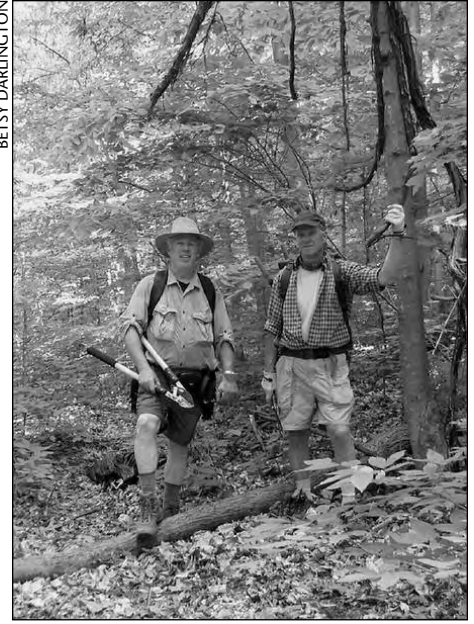
Volunteers (left to right): Bruce Johnson, Roger Hopkins, Dave Schurman, Bruce Manuel, Gary Mallow and Sandy hard at work installing the new beaver pond leveler.

Scenes' from Our Protected Lands...



BETSY LANDRE

The natural resources and vistas that characterize the southern end of the Canandaigua Lake watershed, visible in this photo from the Morse Conservation Club property, are protected by a conservation easement held by the Finger Lakes Land Trust.



BETSY DARLINGTON

Volunteers Roger Hopkins (left) and Dave Schurman maintaining trails at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in Tompkins County.

“There must be places vast enough in size that they will always be refuges not only for nature but also for those of us who long to know what lies beyond the next far hill.”

— Michael DeMunn, Forester



BETSY DARLINGTON

In December 2007, the Land Trust completed the acquisition of two adjacent parcels bordering Six Mile Creek in the Town of Dryden, Tompkins County – becoming the Land Trust’s 26th nature preserve (see article on page 1 for details).

BETSY DARLINGTON



Manlius High School students planting native seeds at the Bishop Nature Preserve near Geneva.

MARIE READ©



The new Park Nature Preserve is the latest addition to the Emerald Necklace, the Land Trust's initiative to create a continuous band of protected land around Ithaca (see article on page 1).

BETSY DARLINGTON



Volunteer steward and board member Nick Gavrielides (left) with Ithaca College student intern Dustin James, marking a boundary at the Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary in Cayuga County.

BETSY LANDRE



Finger Lakes Community College professor Bruce Gilman (left) leads a plant walk at the Wesley Hill Nature Preserve in Ontario County during the 2007 Talks and Treks series.

THANK YOU!

The Land Trust's work is made possible through the efforts of over 1700 members and supporters. Your commitment to this region and the natural world has enabled us to conserve more than 9,500 acres of rolling hills, pristine forests, deep ravines, and productive farmland in the Finger Lakes region.

*Thank you to all of our members and supporters and, in particular, those who gave leadership gifts of \$100 or more in 2007.***

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The Aldo Leopold Society was created in 2006 to recognize those individuals and families who make an unrestricted annual contribution of \$1,000 or more in support of the Finger Lakes Land Trust. Contributions to the Leopold Society allow the Land Trust to take advantage of conservation opportunities as they arise and to build a strong foundation for future stewardship of our lands.

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A CLOSER LOOK

Short-eared Owls Grace Our Open Lands in Winter

Widespread, familiar, and yet seldom seen, owls fire our curiosity while mostly concealing their lives from us humans.

When we do detect their presence, it's often as a distant hoot or trill emanating unseen from the dark outside. But every winter in our region, one species, the Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*), exits the shadows and delights lucky observers with breathtaking aerial shows by the plain light of day — or at least the half-light of dusk.

Though they aren't common in our area even at peak times, one can maximize the likelihood of seeing Short-eared Owls by searching suitable habitats — marshes, grasslands, inactive quarries and agricultural fields — at dawn and dusk. Try looking in places favored by Northern Harriers. Often one can watch harriers vanishing in the gloaming over a field, and Short-eared Owls suddenly appearing in their place, foraging singly or in groups of a dozen or more.

Generally most active by twilight and at night, Short-eared Owls can also be awake and busy even in the middle of the day, more so than any other owl species in eastern North America. Weather, hunger and abundance of prey all are possible triggers for daytime activity.

The payoff for a well-planned and lucky owl search is rich indeed, not only for the thrill of finding something distinctive and uncommon, but also for the sheer beauty of the birds. Light and long-winged, Short-eared Owls fly with unique slow grace, maneuverability, and buoyancy, often evoking comparisons with bats and moths. Their plumage is mostly brown and coarsely patterned, with striking buff-orange wing patches. Their facial discs are also brown, with white in the center of the face and black around the eyes. As with many other owl species, females are darker and larger than males.

Short-eared Owls are named for small feather tufts atop their forecrowns, which vaguely resemble the ears of cats. These feathers aren't actually ears. They serve no sensory function, but instead, as with other "eared" owls, the tufts break up the bird's silhouette to enhance concealment. Short-eared Owls can raise and lower the tufts at will. When disturbed, Short-eared Owls sometimes erect their feather tufts and elongate their faces, imperceptibly morphing into the likeness of a broken branch rather than a broad, sleek raptor.

The actual ears of Short-eared Owls are on the sides of the head. One ear opening is higher on the head than the other. This asymmetry, common among many owl species, enables the bird

to pinpoint the origin of a sound in both vertical and horizontal planes. Coursing low over open ground, Short-eared Owls find prey primarily by hearing, though they also hunt by sight. Although Short-eared Owls sometimes consume small birds, they specialize in small rodents, especially meadow voles. Research suggests that the owls generally consume one or two voles per day.

The visibility of the species in winter, as well as the abundance of the farmland habitat where they're often found, may suggest that Short-eared Owls have adapted well to human alteration of the landscape. But closer examination reveals a more complicated picture.

New York is at the southern limit of the breeding range of the species in eastern North America. Records from the early 1900s indicate that Short-eared Owls used to breed in at least 16 counties across the state. Sharp declines in breeding activity and overall numbers became apparent by the 1970s. Now the species is nearly absent from New York except when wintering or passing through in migration. The Short-eared Owl is listed as Endangered in New York. Numerous other states and Canadian provinces have documented similar declines, with analogous designations of conservation status.

Fragmentation and loss of grassland and marsh habitats are likely the major causes of Short-eared Owl breeding decline in our region. Not only does rural overdevelopment eliminate sites for nesting and foraging, it typically increases the risk of predation of the nests of Short-eared Owls and other ground-nesting species.

Though the trends are surely alarming, solutions aren't obvious. Many of the rural landscapes most suitable for Short-eared Owls and other grassland species in New York were once forest, before being cleared for agriculture. Now, preserving these open lands often requires regular mowing to

prevent reversion to scrub and forest. In setting conservation priorities, we need to consider history and weigh our values. How have lands changed over time? What is the relative importance of maintaining grasslands versus allowing natural succession?

Thus, as thrilling and moving as it might be for us to watch them, the connection between people and Short-eared Owls runs much deeper than just birding. We are linked through the lands we share. Human decisions on using, managing and preserving land will define how the connection between our two species evolves in the future.

—Mark Chao



Generally most active by twilight and at night, Short-eared Owls can also be awake and busy even in the middle of the day.

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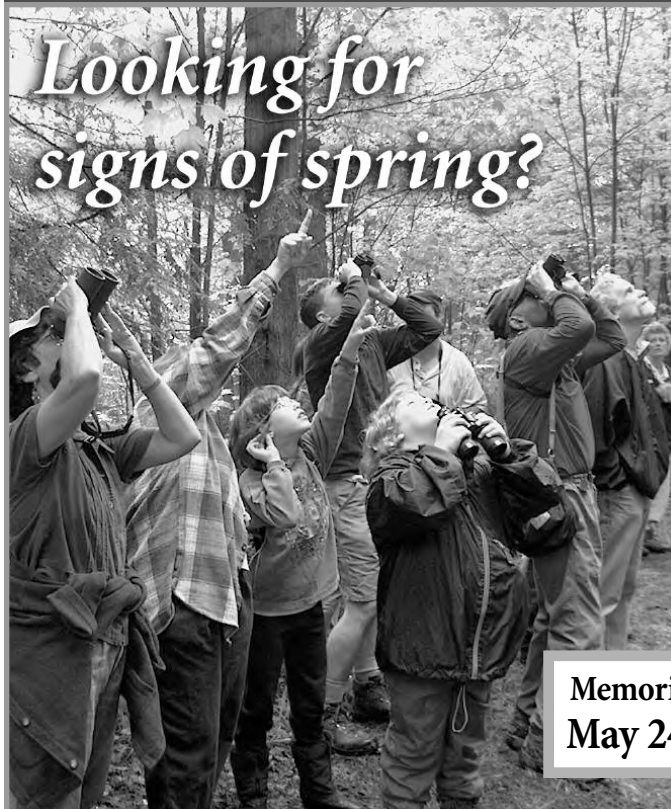
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THE SPRING BIRD QUEST IS BACK!

Looking for
signs of spring?



Join your friends and neighbors on Memorial Day Weekend—May 24 thru 26, 2008 for the 2nd Annual Spring Bird Quest. Visit Land Trust properties and discover the dazzling diversity of bird species in the Finger Lakes region while raising money for the Land Trust.

Birders of all skill levels are welcome. Mark your calendars now and look for details in the next issue of *The Land Steward* or call 607-275-9487 for more information.

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