



# The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes Region Vol. 25, No. 1 • Winter 2012-2013

## Living Lands and Waters: A Few of Our Favorite Things Land Trust Launches \$5 Million Conservation Campaign

In November 2012, the Land Trust announced a far-reaching capital campaign to raise \$5 million in support of conservation projects spanning the Finger Lakes. The campaign focuses particularly on protecting lakeshores, streams, wetlands, and other sensitive lands identified within strategically targeted areas. In addition, the campaign aims to increase the Land Trust's stewardship endowment and to provide for expanded educational outreach to Finger Lakes landowners and municipalities.

The Living Lands and Waters campaign got off to an enthusiastic start November 9th at a reception at the Museum of the Earth in Ithaca. About 160 Land Trust supporters gathered. Also in attendance: one Bald Eagle (the region's largest bird), one Peregrine Falcon (our fastest bird), and one Saw-whet Owl (smallest of our Owls), among sundry other creatures from the Finger Lakes.

After wandering among displays of local birds, amphibians, and reptiles, listening to a presentation on local agriculture and wine making, and watching a show of underwater videography, folks gathered to hear about an ambitious campaign that aims to preserve Finger Lakes lands and lakes for future generations to enjoy.

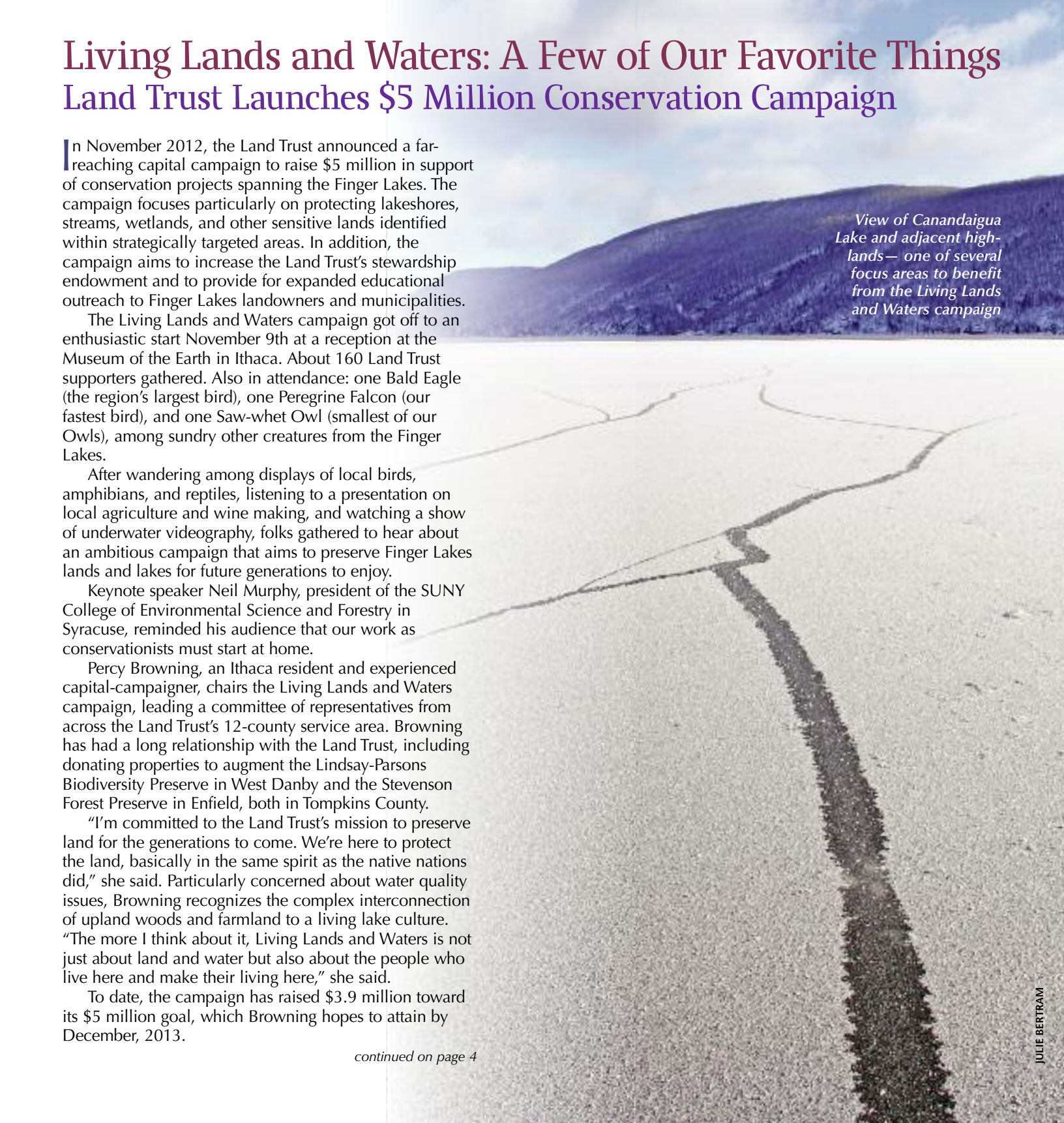
Keynote speaker Neil Murphy, president of the SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry in Syracuse, reminded his audience that our work as conservationists must start at home.

Percy Browning, an Ithaca resident and experienced capital-campaigner, chairs the Living Lands and Waters campaign, leading a committee of representatives from across the Land Trust's 12-county service area. Browning has had a long relationship with the Land Trust, including donating properties to augment the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby and the Stevenson Forest Preserve in Enfield, both in Tompkins County.

"I'm committed to the Land Trust's mission to preserve land for the generations to come. We're here to protect the land, basically in the same spirit as the native nations did," she said. Particularly concerned about water quality issues, Browning recognizes the complex interconnection of upland woods and farmland to a living lake culture. "The more I think about it, Living Lands and Waters is not just about land and water but also about the people who live here and make their living here," she said.

To date, the campaign has raised \$3.9 million toward its \$5 million goal, which Browning hopes to attain by December, 2013.

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*View of Canandaigua Lake and adjacent highlands— one of several focus areas to benefit from the Living Lands and Waters campaign*

The close of 2012 brought great news for conservation in the Finger Lakes. During the month of December alone, we completed seven protection projects that will ensure a bright future for more than 1,000 acres of pristine lakeshore, productive streamside habitat, mature forests, and scenic farmland. We could accomplish this only with the support of our committed donors, conservation minded landowners, and dedicated volunteers and staff.

Despite these accomplishments, it's essential that we accelerate our efforts in the face of increasing pressure on our rural landscapes from both sprawling residential development and the specter of widespread impacts from natural gas development.

Our Living Lands and Waters campaign, featured in this issue, will allow us both to permanently protect some of our finest remaining natural areas and to provide crucial resources needed for the long-term stewardship of these lands. The campaign will also allow us to expand our educational and outreach programs for landowners and local officials.

Please consider making a special contribution to help us ensure the future of the lands you love. Your

support at this time will allow us to proceed with planned acquisition of undeveloped shoreline on Canandaigua Lake, wooded hillsides overlooking Skaneateles Lake, and wetlands bordering Fall Creek, the largest tributary to Cayuga Lake. And these are just a few of the projects we're working on.

Please also help us spread the word about our conservation efforts by passing along this newsletter to a friend or family member. You can also help others become familiar with the Land Trust's work by encouraging them to visit our web site ([www.fllt.org](http://www.fllt.org)), where they can learn about our latest projects, upcoming events and field trips, and also find out how to receive our new monthly e-news. With your help, we can build a region-wide force for conservation that will ensure the future of our sparkling lakes and scenic landscapes.

Thanks again for your support during 2012 and best wishes for 2013!

—Andy Zepp

## New Easement Protects Canandaigua Water Supply

A unique collaboration has led to a conservation easement in Canandaigua that protects 19 acres of uplands and wetlands and plays a significant role in filtering runoff into Canandaigua Lake.

Cooperation between the Finger Lakes Land Trust, the Town of Canandaigua, the Ontario County Industrial Development Agency, and the Upper Susquehanna Watershed Coalition has allowed the Ontario County agency to purchase 19 acres on Middle Cheshire Road from Doug Albright.

Property ownership has been transferred to the Town of Canandaigua. Meanwhile, the Land Trust holds a permanent easement on the parcel, and a team from the Upper Susquehanna Watershed Coalition—proven experts at wetland restoration and mitigation throughout the southern Finger Lakes region—will work to restore another half acre to the property's already-existing 9.5 wetland acres.

Such inter-organizational cooperation comes in response to the critical location of the land. "It is a headwater area of Hope Point Stream that drains down into Canandaigua Lake about 500 feet from water intake pipes of the City of Canandaigua," said Kevin Olvany, program manager for the Canandaigua Watershed Council. "So permanent protection for this critical area and expansion of its wetlands will help to filter the water and protect it from further development. It's the epitome of source-water protection."

The entire transaction is part of a wetland "mitigation" project resulting from a runway extension project underway at the Canandaigua Airport, which is owned by the Ontario County Industrial Development Agency. To extend the runway, a small area of wetland will be filled, so the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers required that new wetlands be restored and protected elsewhere, to mitigate the loss.

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# Sugar Hill Forest Project Protects Watkins Glen Watershed

*If you draw a line on a map between Watkins Glen and Corning, you will trace the southeastern edge of ten state forests known collectively as the Six Nations Forest.*

With more than 20,000 acres of woodland, wetland, shrubland, and grassland in public ownership, the Six Nations Forest represents one of our region's largest conserved areas. The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), The Nature Conservancy, and New York Audubon all recognize the importance of the Six Nations Forest because of its size, relatively intact nature, and diversity of breeding bird habitats.

The Land Trust recently purchased 139 acres surrounded by Sugar Hill State Forest from Scott and Cassie Dickerson. Sugar Hill, part of the Six Nations Forest, is located in Schuyler County. The property, located just east of County Route 21 in Reading, is bisected by two abandoned lanes that now serve as recreational trails. It is also very close to the Finger Lakes Trail, which passes through adjacent state land. The tract includes frontage on Glen Creek, one of two tributaries that create the famous gorge at Watkins Glen State Park.

Within the Six Nations Forest, public and private ownership lands are interspersed, creating a checkerboard pattern. This pattern fragments wildlife habitat, limits access to public land, and drives up costs of managing the land. For these reasons, purchasing private inholdings from willing sellers, such as the Dickersons, is one objective listed in New York State's Open Space Plan—one to which the Land Trust has paid particular attention throughout Finger Lakes woodlands.

Originally, the DEC sought to add the Dickerson property to the adjacent state forest, but it was unable to move forward with the transaction because of a lack of available funds. Fortunately, the Land Trust was able to secure an interest-free loan from the Norcross Wildlife Foundation that enabled the organization to complete the purchase. When public funding becomes available, the land will be conveyed to the state as an addition to Sugar Hill State Forest.

The Dickersons generously agreed to sell their land for less than its estimated fair market value. Selling her land as an addition to the state forest made perfect sense to Cassie Dickerson. "My grandfather was born on that property," she said, "and by conveying it to the state, our family will always be able to visit that part of our history."

"We are thankful to Cassie and Scott Dickerson for their decision to favor conservation over profit, and to the Norcross Wildlife

Foundation for making this project a success," said Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "The property will make a wonderful addition to the state forest, and protecting this land will, in turn, protect water quality within one of New York's most popular state parks."

—Kris West, Senior Field Representative

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



*The Dickerson acquisition includes frontage on Glen Creek, one of two tributaries that create the famous gorge at Watkins Glen State Park.*

## A New Way to Stay in Touch



One of the Land Trust's New Year's resolutions is to share more beautiful photos and stories about our work around the region. *The Living Land*, our new monthly e-newsletter, includes conservation success stories, upcoming event details and highlights great places to explore. Sign up online at [www.fllt.org](http://www.fllt.org) or send an email to [info@fllt.org](mailto:info@fllt.org)

## KEY COMPONENTS OF THE LIVING LANDS AND WATERS CAMPAIGN:

### Lakeshore Protection

Three new preserves will secure over 3,000 feet of wild shoreline on Cayuga, Canandaigua, and Skaneateles lakes. As we all know, pristine lakeshore is limited and, for this reason, well worth the effort to preserve for future generations.

- VanRiper Conservation Area (Cayuga Lake, Seneca County): Adjoining the Land Trust's Whitlock Nature Preserve, the newly dedicated VanRiper Conservation Area contains 1,400 feet of undeveloped shoreline, a rugged gorge, and a mature oak-hemlock forest providing habitat for songbirds and roosting trees for Bald Eagles.
- Bare Hill (Canandaigua Lake, Yates County): Overlooking Canandaigua Lake's eastern shore, Bare Hill is well known for its scenic views and its significance to the birth of the Seneca Nation. The Land Trust is working on the acquisition of 80 acres of scenic woodland that borders New York State's Bare Hill Unique Area. The site also features nearly 400 feet of shoreline and a cove beach. When this property is secured, the Land Trust intends to provide public access to Canandaigua Lake—an increasingly rare opportunity for many.
- Cora Kampfe Dickinson Conservation Area (Skaneateles Lake, Onondaga County): This conservation area protects 1,300 feet of undeveloped shoreline on Skaneateles Lake. It features steeply sloping woodlands overlooking the lake as well as a significant portion of the Staghorn Cliffs, a 100-foot escarpment recognized for its scenic views of the lake and abundant staghorn coral fossils from the Devonian/Silurian era seas that covered our lands 360-438 million years ago.

### Stream and Wetland Protection

Five strategic acquisitions will protect more than 400 acres of critical habitat and 23,200 feet of wild stream corridors.

- Six Mile Creek— addition to Roy H. Park Preserve (Tompkins County): This 169-acre acquisition represents the first link in the Emerald Necklace "greenbelt," an ambitious effort to link 50,000 acres of public open space. The property, which borders Hammond Hill and Yellow Barn State Forests, as well as a Cornell Plantations Natural Area, encompasses 20 acres of wetlands as well as 6,000 feet of frontage on Six Mile Creek (the source of Ithaca's drinking water supply).
- Fall Creek—addition to Dorothy McIlroy Bird Sanctuary (Cayuga County): An 80-acre addition to the McIlroy Sanctuary features towering white pines, swamp woodlands, and 7,200 feet of frontage on Fall Creek, the largest tributary to Cayuga Lake. The sanctuary is located in an Audubon-designated Important Bird Area.
- Fall Creek—additions to Etna Preserve (Tompkins County): Two contiguous parcels with over 2,000 feet of streamside frontage as well as extensive, undeveloped road frontage add 14 acres of woodlands to the Land Trust's Etna Nature Preserve.



Capital Campaign Committee Chair Percy Browning leading a spirited campaign kickoff at Ithaca's Museum of the Earth

- Sugar Hill State Forest Addition (Schuyler County): A recent 139-acre acquisition is almost entirely surrounded by the state forest and will be sold to the state when funds become available. The property features mature woodlands, with 8,000 feet of frontage on a key tributary to the popular and scenic Watkins Glen State Park gorge. (See article on page 3.)

### Strategic Focus Area Projects

A seed fund will support time-sensitive projects and defray transaction costs associated with land gifts and conservation easement donations within the three identified focus areas of the Skaneateles Highlands, Emerald Necklace, and Canandaigua Highlands Heritage Area.

- Skaneateles Highlands Preserve Acquisition (Onondaga County): A recently purchased 193-acre tract features wooded hillsides, open meadows, and portions of six major gorges that drain directly into the lake. This parcel is the key link in a growing network of conservation lands that will ultimately extend around the south end of Skaneateles Lake. When complete, a new Land Trust preserve will run parallel to the lake's southeast shore for more than a mile, protecting the sloping hillsides and sweeping scenic views. A connecting corridor will link the property to lands previously protected in partnership with the Central New York Land Trust.
- Canandaigua Highlands Heritage Area (Yates County): The Land Trust recently added a 32-acre parcel to its existing Great Hill Nature Preserve overlooking Canandaigua Lake. The steep hillside property was identified as a conservation priority because it is located on the slopes of South Hill above the West River and lies close to other protected lands in the fragile watershed, including the state's nearby High Tor Wildlife Management Area. The Land Trust also received a 64-acre abandoned vineyard nearer to the West River as a gift from Constellation Brands in 2011. This property borders High Tor Wildlife Management Area and lies squarely within a designated Important Bird Area. The Land Trust is working with partners to restore grassland habitat on the property and plans to create a scenic overlook and birding trail.
- Emerald Necklace (Schuyler, Seneca, Tompkins, and Tioga Counties): A portion of the funds raised by the campaign will be used to acquire one or more strategic properties as links in the Land Trust's Emerald Necklace project. The necklace will ultimately trace a graceful arc of undeveloped open space in the forested hills and fields below Cayuga Lake—from the Finger Lakes National Forest in the west to Hammond Hill State Forest in the east. 50,000 acres in this necklace have already been preserved, and new links in the chain are to come.

### Landowner and Municipal Outreach and Education

Campaign funds will be used to support staff as they work with landowners, community members, and local officials. Efforts to educate landowners about conservation easements and other land protection options will focus on public workshops as well

as one-on-one contacts and the distribution of informational materials. Outreach to municipalities will include information on a variety of conservation options as well as joint efforts to advance conservation planning.

#### Stewardship Endowment

A substantial increase in the Land Trust's dedicated Stewardship Endowment will allow the organization to expand its support and training of stewardship volunteers, offer greater technical assistance to conservation easement landowners, increase efforts

to control non-native invasive plant species, and provide for the long-term management of the acquisitions described above. Building the Stewardship Endowment will also fund a newly hired Land Steward who works with the Director of Stewardship managing the Land Trust's growing network of conserved lands.

Land protection, stewardship, environmental education, partnership with natural allies for a strong Finger Lakes future—these are a few of our favorite things, and they are the core of what the Living Lands and Waters campaign is all about. Please join us.

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## Easement Protects Key Parcel at South End of Canandaigua Lake

Tim Hamlin grew up a mile and a half south of Canandaigua and has spent his entire life in the Canandaigua Lake area. When Hamlin was a boy, his family had a lakeside cottage on the northwest shore, and one of his fondest childhood memories is taking journeys with his father in the family boat all the way down to the inlet at the southern tip of the lake, 16 miles away. "The inlet was this far-off, mysterious, wondrous place," Hamlin said. "We would get to see turtles and, every once in a while, a blue heron."

In 2008 when a home on nine acres in South Bristol came on the market, Hamlin, who is a pastor at the United Church of Bristol, jumped at the opportunity to live within view of one of the favorite places from his youth. The property lies on the southwest slope above Canandaigua Lake, directly overlooking the inlet.

Now he is taking the extra step to protect this property permanently by donating a conservation easement to the Land Trust.

"We're grateful for Tim's commitment to the land," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "This property is incredibly scenic and, because of the site's steep slopes, keeping the land as open space will help maintain Canandaigua Lake's water quality."

Compared with many of the Land Trust's conservation easements throughout the Finger Lakes, the property is relatively small, yet has great conservation value.

Protecting the sloping terrain from the kind of degradation that all too often accompanies property development in the area is of prime importance. But the easement also maintains more of the stunning vistas along County Road 12 on the lake's west


side—views that include not only the inlet and the south end of Canandaigua Lake, but also the High Tor Wildlife Management Area, Bare Hill State Unique Area, the West River, and the Land Trust's Great Hill Preserve. As Hamlin put it, the views from the property are "a feast for the eye, an absolute feast."

The Hamlin easement, which is binding on all future owners of the land, prohibits further subdivision of the property—an important restriction, as suburbanization is spreading southward from Canandaigua. The easement also prohibits new structures that would obstruct scenic vistas, but it allows for agricultural use on a portion of the property.

Located on County Road 12 just south of Carolabarb Park (also protected by a Land Trust conservation easement), the property lies within the proposed Canandaigua Highlands Heritage Area, a swath of rural countryside that extends east from South Bristol through Naples and Italy and into Middlesex. Within this area, the Canandaigua Lake inlet, along with the West River that feeds it, is a critical protection priority for the Land Trust, given its crucial riparian habitat and importance for water quality in the lake.

For Tim Hamlin, a conservation easement allows him to protect a place that has great personal meaning: "I feel very grateful. It's almost like coming back to my spiritual home."  
—Jeff Tonole

*The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Derek Brocklebank of the Brocklebank law firm in Canandaigua for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.*



*A view of Canandaigua Lake (lower left) and the West River Valley from the Hamlin conservation easement*

# SCENES

## from our Living Lands and Waters campaign



*With the recent acquisition of the VanRiper property, the Land Trust now owns and manages 1900 feet of pristine shoreline on Cayuga Lake in the town of Romulus, Seneca County.*

*Highlands at the south end of Canandaigua Lake are among the targeted areas to benefit from the Living Lands and Waters campaign.*



*The Living Lands and Waters campaign will allow the Land Trust to strengthen its stewardship programs. Here, volunteers John Sirianni (left) and Tom Reimers mark a trail at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in the town of Danby, Tompkins County.*



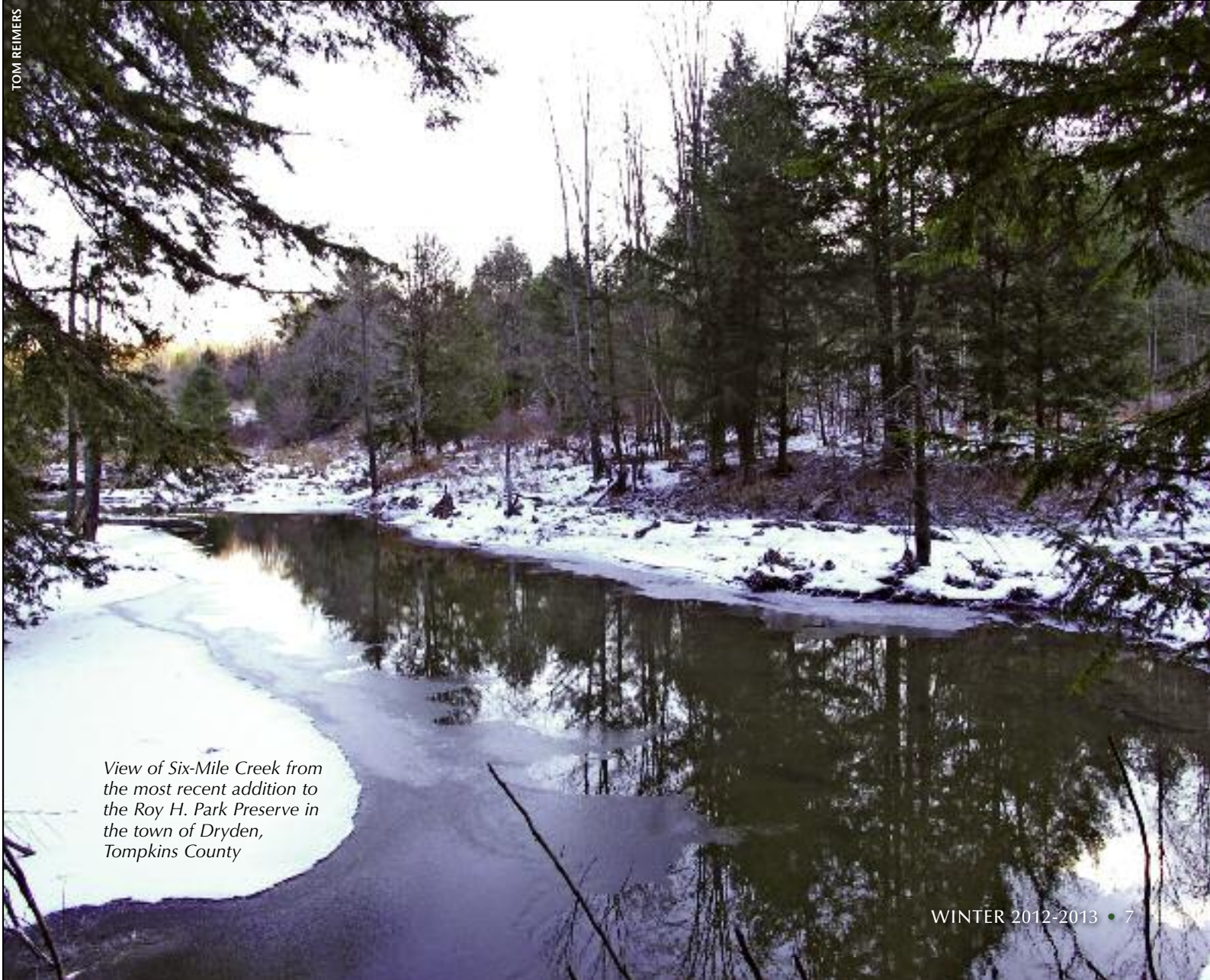
*Boardwalk under construction at the Roy H. Park Preserve in the town of Dryden, Tompkins County*

DAVID DIAZ

*The south end of Skaneateles Lake—one of several focus areas to benefit from the Living Lands and Waters campaign*



BILL HECHT



TOM REIMERS

*View of Six-Mile Creek from the most recent addition to the Roy H. Park Preserve in the town of Dryden, Tompkins County*

# Hinchcliff Family Makes Lead Gift in Skaneateles Campaign

When Land Trust member John Hinchcliff learned the organization was launching a campaign to preserve nearly 200 acres on the east side of Skaneateles Lake, he saw a great opportunity for his family to help protect the wooded hillsides they love.

The Hinchcliff family has deep roots on the lake's eastern shore, and they have come together, with lead support from John's aunt, Ann Hinchcliff, to make it possible for the Land Trust to purchase a mix of wooded slopes, farm fields, and deep gorges that stretch for more than a mile above the lake.

For Ann, her gift is both a tribute to her late husband and a reflection of her extended family's deep devotion to the lake. Dave Hinchcliff first fell in love with Skaneateles Lake and its steeply sloping woods when he was 11 years old and his parents bought a cabin on Spafford Landing for \$1800—a price that included a rowboat! He spent every summer on the lake, first bringing Ann there when they were in college.

"I met Dave in 1954. The first time I visited him and his family in Cortland right after we met, he couldn't wait to show me 'the lake,'" Ann reminisced. "It didn't take long for me to become as attached to the lake as he was!" Ann and Dave lived near New York City while Dave built his business and they raised children, but their busy schedules and the long drive (8 hours in those days) did not keep them from returning to Spafford Landing with dedicated frequency.

Despite the global reach of Dave's business, his heart stayed at the lake. He and Ann moved their family back to central New York in 1974. "Needless to say, we were all delighted to be able to spend more time at Skaneateles, enjoying it in all seasons, not just summer," Ann said.

When it became clear that the little cottage was not going to accommodate the expanding generations, the family was able to add a bit more property to the original piece. Ann's daughters and their husbands—Jennifer and Bill Warning, Kate and Mont Pooley—have followed in their parents' footsteps, spending summers at the lake and passing on to their children a love for the woods and the pristine waters. Recently, their cousin John Hinchcliff and his wife Robin donated a conservation easement to the Land Trust on the wooded portion of their adjoining property. The easement will share a boundary with the new preserve.



Ann Hinchcliff (6th from the left) and family at their beach on the eastern shore of Skaneateles Lake

"It really is impossible for me to describe what our little piece of heaven on Spafford Landing meant to Dave and means to me and our children and grandchildren," Ann said. "Having John and Robin and their girls next door there is the 'icing on the cake.'" Every summer, as the younger generations have grown up, they've been able to wander up the creeks and gullies, build forts, collect fossils, and enjoy the experience of being in the woods.

The Hinchcliffs hope other donors will join them by contributing to this special project. Though their significant lead gift will provide the funding to purchase the property, more support needs to be raised to build trails, install appropriate access, and provide for long-term stewardship.

"One of the great legacies Dave gave to his family is our deep roots in and love for this special piece of the world," John Hinchcliff said. "We are grateful to be able to help the Land Trust both to protect the [land] that is most environmentally sensitive and to open the area up to public access, so that everyone will have a chance to experience the spectacular views and the joy of just being out in the woods. The extended Hinchcliff family can think of no better way to honor Dave's memory."

—Kelly Makosch, Director of Development

## New Easement Protects Canandaigua Water Supply *continued from page 3*

The Land Trust initially tried to work with the Town of Canandaigua to preserve this land seven years ago, but a deal fell through then. Now the way to this wetland preservation project is clear.

"It just shows how sustained focus pays off," said Andrew Zepp, the Land Trust's executive director. "We worked with the Town years ago on this, and it didn't come to fruition, but another opportunity came up, and we succeeded."

The mitigation property lies within a wetland complex adjacent to a residential area, yet it has significant value for wildlife and water quality for the lake. The 17-acre wetland complex spans portions of three properties: the Albright parcel, and two other parcels owned by the Town and City of Canandaigua, respectively.

The Albright property has cattail marsh as well as some areas of shrub wetland featuring native red-osier dogwood, much beloved by migrating birds. Upland areas, formerly farmland, now include a variety of shrubs and young hardwoods, such as ash and red maple. Restoration will involve creation and enhancement of the marsh and a small swamp forest, with plantings of swamp white oak and black willow. Control of non-native invasive shrubs and trees will also be a part of the restoration effort.

Over the course of the next year, the Land Trust intends to work with the Canandaigua Watershed Council to identify and prioritize other wetland areas that are vital to the health of the lake.

—Krishna Ramanujan



# Acquisition Adds to Protected Lands on Bare Hill

*Bare Hill is well known in the Canandaigua area as the scenic ridge that looms 865 feet above Canandaigua Lake's eastern shore just north of Vine Valley. Old photos show that this area was indeed "bare" in the past, but today it is largely forested, except for a summit covered with a mix of meadows and shrub lands.*

One Seneca legend has it that the writhing of a great serpent swept the hill of its trees and bushes until it was bare. Whatever the cause, Bare Hill is notable for shallow soils that are susceptible to drought stress during most summers, leaving the steep slopes more vulnerable to erosion.

The summit is owned and managed by New York State as part of a 393-acre Unique Area administered by the Department of Environmental Conservation. Visitors can admire sweeping views of Canandaigua Lake and enjoy hiking through a variety of wildlife habitats.

For several years now, the Land Trust has been reaching out to the owners of hundreds of acres of private lands that adjoin the Unique Area as part of an effort to secure the future of this iconic landscape. As a result of one of these conversations, the Land Trust acquired a key 13.5-acre parcel on the hill just before the close of 2012. The tract lies near Bare Hill's summit at the entrance to the existing Unique Area on Van Epps Road in the town of Middlesex, Yates County. The property is entirely forested with a mix of young oak-hickory forest as well as planted conifers.

Previous owner Sonam Targee had enjoyed the land as a recreational retreat and was delighted to have the opportunity to sell with the understanding that it would be conserved in the future. The property was identified as a priority for protection due to its location near the heart of Bare Hill.

The Land Trust was able to take advantage of this opportunity through a generous donation of funds from an anonymous donor who cares deeply about the future of Canandaigua Lake and its surrounding rural landscapes.

The Land Trust intends to sell the land to New York State as an addition to the adjacent Unique Area when funds are available in the future. This is the Land Trust's second acquisition at Bare Hill. In 2007, the organization worked in partnership with the Town of Gorham and the Department of Environmental Conservation to acquire a 95-acre parcel on Bare Hill's northern flank.

*The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Sarah Pellerin of the law firm of Harter Secrest & Emery LLP in Rochester for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.*



Our sincerest appreciation  
for gifts in honor of:

Our deepest gratitude  
for thoughtful gifts in memory of:

**Diane and Jerry Albrecht**  
FROM  
*Victoria Zeppelin*

**Percy Browning**  
FROM  
*Marisue Taube*

**Patti and Jules Burgevin**  
FROM  
*Peter Burgevin and  
Margo Alexander*

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FROM  
*Allan Chambliss*

**Luke and Greta Colavito**  
FROM  
*Karen Hansen and  
Robert Schneider*

**Bob Corneau**  
FROM  
*Dr. David Arkin*

**Betsy and Dick Darlington**  
FROM  
*Jean Darlington and  
Eduardo Marchena  
Lois Darlington*

**David Diaz**  
FROM  
*Elizabeth Diaz*

**Michael Eck**  
FROM  
*Richard and June Brickwedde*

**Martha Fischer**  
FROM  
*Kenneth and Roberta Robinson  
Peter and Pam Robinson  
Susan Robinson*

**Dale W Flinn**  
FROM  
*Susan Quick*

**Lindsay France**  
FROM  
*Karen Eldredge*

**The Family of Albert and  
Mildred Genung**  
FROM  
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FROM  
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FROM  
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Joseph Wetmore*

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*Lisa and Jon Gandelot*

**James and Patricia G. Feuss**  
FROM  
*Lisa Ballard*

**Jupiter**  
FROM  
*Gordon Rowland and  
Anne Stork*

**Dorothy and James Lynaugh**  
FROM  
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**Carl Leopold**  
FROM  
*Lynn Leopold  
Elizabeth Peters  
Cyrus Umrigar*

**Henry and Marion Miller**  
FROM  
*Rachel Miller*

**D. Michael Smith**  
FROM  
*Helen Smith*

**Tom the Cat**  
FROM  
*Kathy Rayburn*

**Hemlock Trees**  
FROM  
*Mark Whitmore*

**Linda Underhill**  
FROM  
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*Jon and Janice Conrad  
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Janine Kucik  
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Mr. and Mrs. Dan H Woodard*

Our heartiest thanks to the  
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supported our work this year:

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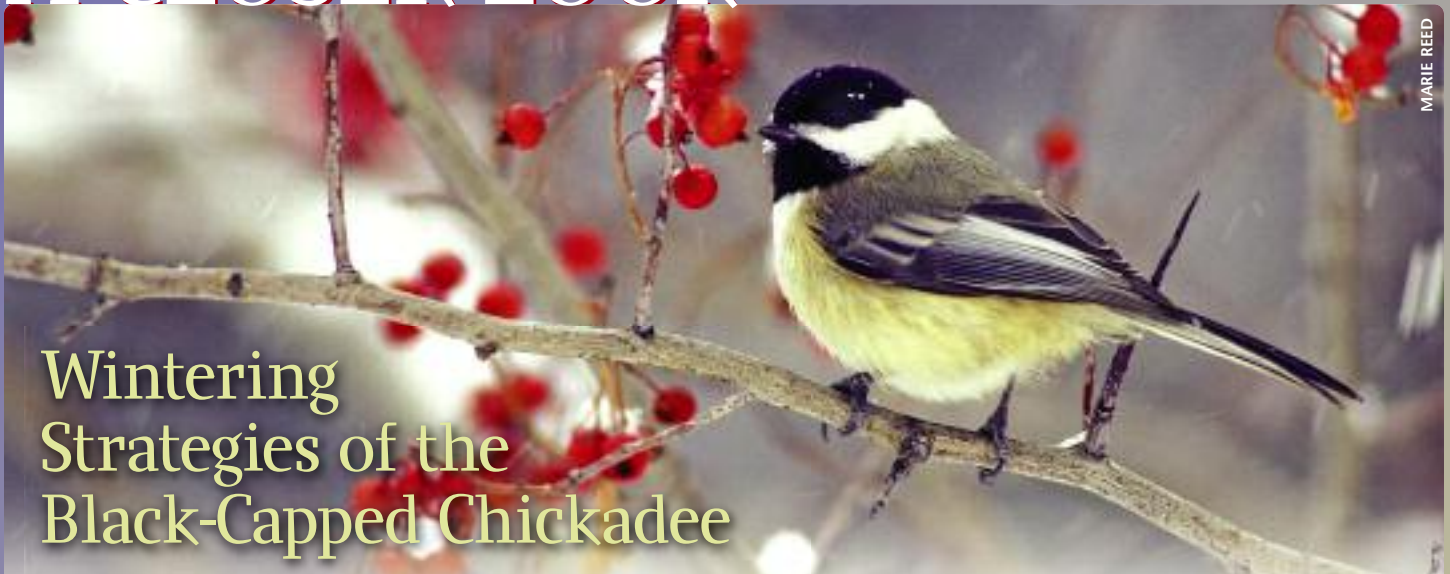
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Sheldrake Point  
Winery  
Sherwood Inn  
Standing Stone  
Vineyards



*Dr. Paul Torrisi, President of the Skaneateles Lake Association and a member of the Land Trust, addresses the audience at a holiday reception hosted by Michael and Noreen Falcone in their barn at Hobbit Hollow Farm in Skaneateles. The event was a joint venture of the Finger Lakes Land Trust and the Skaneateles Lake Association.*

DAVID DIAZ

# A CLOSER LOOK



MARIE REED

## Wintering Strategies of the Black-Capped Chickadee

On the harshest winter mornings, when the air is so cold and dry that it freezes the inside of your nostrils with every breath, the silence of the snow seems almost too loud to bear. If you listen hard, one of the first things you're likely to hear are thin, squeaking calls announcing the presence of a flock of Black-capped Chickadees (*Poecile atricapillus*). How does this bird, so tiny that it could hide in your cupped hand, survive the subzero temperatures and fierce winter winds of the Finger Lakes? The answer: just barely.

Most birds escape cold weather by migrating to the tropics, but these journeys are dangerous and energy-intensive. The chickadee instead lives here year-round, a strategy that is not without its own perils. The calculus of winter is harsh: in order to stay alive, an animal must either produce a lot more heat or lose a lot less of it. However, food is hard to find in the winter and there are only a few daylight hours available for foraging. In addition, birds have higher metabolisms than we do, and a chickadee's normal temperature is a feverish 108° F. To make things even worse, the smaller an animal's body, the greater its surface-area-to-volume-ratio, and the more quickly it loses heat to the air. These unforgiving laws of physics and biology mean that the diminutive chickadee lives right on the energetic edge in winter. An unusually cold night or a badly-timed snowstorm can mean the difference between death and life.

Luckily, the chickadee has a number of physiological and behavioral adaptations that help it survive. It arises before dawn in order to forage in the half-light and its bold, inquisitive nature seems to give it an edge when it comes to finding food. It is omnivorous and adaptable, able to take advantage of almost any source of nutrition: insects, arthropods, seeds, berries, and even fat and meat from carrion (or suet from feeders). These gregarious birds often feed with other species because more eyes can find more food as well as spot more predators. Chickadees are nothing if not industrious; they cache food items in the autumn for later use, and they squirrel away whatever they can steal from backyard feeders during the winter. It takes a lot of memory to recall the locations of all of those hidey-holes, year after year—chickadees can live for a decade or more—and their tiny brains literally fill up after one season. In

order to compensate for a limited amount of storage space, the neurons associated with last year's caches die off each autumn and new ones grow afresh.

The other part of the winter-survival equation is minimizing heat loss. On sunny days, the chickadee may turn its darker back and wings to the sun. Fat is an excellent insulator, but the chickadee depletes most of its reserves every night just to stay alive. Therefore, its greatest defense against cold is its feathers, which increase in number by twenty-five percent after the autumn molt and are remarkably dense for the bird's size. Down feathers, with their fluffy, disorganized structure, trap a layer of insulating warm air next to the skin; the outer feathers, with their interlocking barbs and oily coatings, create a shield against water and wind. By fluffing its feathers, the chickadee can increase its insulation and reduce its surface-area-to-volume ratio as long as the weather is neither too windy nor too wet. The eye and beak are poorly insulated, so a bird may close its eyes or tuck its head under its wing. Birds' feet and legs seem to be insensible to cold surfaces, partly because they are covered with thick scales and partly because blood flow to these extremities is greatly reduced in cold weather. This is possible because a bird's legs are twigs of bone and sinew, tissues with low metabolic demands; they are controlled like a pair of chopsticks by muscles that are close to the body. In a pinch, the bird may stand on one leg and tuck the other under its breast feathers, or huddle over both feet.

The chickadee stays warm all day by exercising and shivering, but when night falls, it must find shelter. Small, enclosed areas like tree cavities are best, but sometimes, any spot that blocks the wind will have to do. When the temperature drops very low and survival is precarious, the chickadee slips into a state of controlled hypothermia called *torpor* in which its body temperature falls by about twenty degrees.

Before dawn, the chickadee will emerge from torpor, warming itself to normal body temperature by shivering. With its feathers askew after a long night of squashing itself into a crevice, it will rejoin its mates for yet another day of life on the very edge.

—Jacqueline Stuhmiller

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## Winter 2012-2013 Calendar



### SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 10, 1:00 – 3:00pm

*Winter Wildlife Tracking Walk* at the Ellis Hollow Nature Preserve Strap on your snowshoes (or hiking boots) and join naturalist and tracker Linda Spielman to discover what animals have been visiting this preserve this winter. The walk will be held whether or not there is snow, so come prepared for the weather. Directions: From Ithaca, follow Ellis Hollow Road 2.5 miles past East Hill Shopping Plaza. Turn left on Genung Road, then right on Ellis Hollow Creek Road. Preserve entrance is located 0.2 miles past intersection, on left side of road.

*See our web site for maps and photos of the preserves.*

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