



# Afoot in the Field:

## A Resource for Conservation Landowners in the Finger Lakes Region

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There are millions of people in New York and around the United States who hunt and fish every year, and millions more with various interests in nature and the environment. With that in mind, I find it remarkable that there are only a small number of biologists from academia and government agencies who research wildlife (both

game and non-game species), and an even smaller number who make decisions about how certain animals should be managed.

Funding for wildlife and ecology research is always limited, and only a small amount of population, distribution and other data is available for making management decisions. It's no surprise then, that there have been increased efforts to call upon the public to help provide observations that can be used to learn more about our natural world. Landowners, hikers, birdwatchers, hunters, fishermen, and many other groups are being called on to submit data which aids in management decisions – an approach often referred to as “citizen science”.

As a hunter and fisherman, I have occasionally received invitations from the NY State Department of Environmental Conservation to participate in fish and wildlife data collection initiatives. This is in addition to the data collected from harvest reports that some hunters are required to complete. A couple of the surveys that I have participated in include a ruffed grouse drumming survey and one of the angler diary programs when I lived in the Hudson Valley. As a land-owning organization, the Finger Lakes Land Trust has also participated in such studies: a fisher distribution study; the ongoing effort to track the spread of hemlock woolly adelgid; and other non-native invasive species across the Finger Lakes region.

In this issue of Afoot in the Field, our summer intern from Cornell University, Hannah George, has assembled a list of regional citizen science initiatives for your interest. Should you choose to participate, your observations and efforts could lead to a better understanding of some of the species that share our natural world in the Finger Lakes!

Chris Olney  
Director of Stewardship

# Land-owning Citizens Research Participation Programs

compiled by Hannah George

Citizen science is becoming an increasingly valuable tool for furthering scientific research. Many scientific discoveries have been made possible by individuals who report their observations of the natural world. All it takes is a few minutes here and there to report an invasive species, to notice if trees are flowering, or to take a photo of a ladybug! And while you contribute to science, you may end up learning something new about the world around you.



*Want to get involved? Here's a list of different projects using citizen science:*



## New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Citizen Science Programs

### Wildlife Observation

If you already enjoy hiking, hunting, or bird watching on your land, there are many opportunities to share your wildlife observations with the Bureau of Wildlife which uses citizen-reported data in scientific analysis. Visit their web site at [www.dec.ny.gov/animals/1155.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/animals/1155.html) for a review of the following projects:

- **Ruffed Grouse Drumming Survey** - Spring turkey hunters can help monitor ruffed grouse populations by recording drumming behavior while afield.
- **Furbearer Sighting Surveys** - The Bureau of Wildlife wants to learn more about the occurrence and distribution of furbearers such as bobcat, otter, fisher, and weasel throughout New York.
- **Summer Wild Turkey Sighting Survey** - This annual survey conducted during August helps to gauge reproductive success by estimating the average number of wild turkey poults (young of the year) per hen statewide and among major geographic regions of the State.
- **Grouse and Woodcock Hunting Log** - Grouse and woodcock hunters keep a log of their hunting activities to help track populations of these small game birds.
- **Bowhunter Sighting Log** - Bowhunter participation provides information on long term population trends for selected wildlife species.
- **Winter Wild Turkey Flock Survey** - This survey helps monitor trends in the relative abundance of wild turkeys within major regions of the state during the critical winter period.

# New York State DEC Citizen Science Programs

*continued*



## Angler Diaries

Going fishing? Record catch information to provide the DEC with invaluable information on growth rates, stocked fish recruitment and angler success rates which help guide management efforts. Simply call your region's office to sign up. Provide your name, address and the lake(s) for which you would like to record your fishing trips.

### Region 7 - Cayuga, Owasco, Skaneateles, and Otisco Lakes

(607) 753-3095 ext. 213

[www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/27875.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/27875.html)

### Region 8 - Canadice, Canandaigua, Conesus, Hemlock, Honeoye, Keuka and Seneca Lakes: (585) 226-5343

[www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/73518.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/73518.html)

## Water Assessments by Volunteer Evaluators (WAVE)

Help collect biological data for assessment of water quality on wadeable streams in NY State. Work with a trained local coordinator or attend a training session to become a volunteer evaluator of water quality.

For more info, visit [www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/92229.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/92229.html) or contact the WAVE Coordinator, Alene Onion, by email at [wave@dec.ny.gov](mailto:wave@dec.ny.gov).

## Citizens Statewide Lake Assessment Program (CSLAP)

Volunteers collect data and water samples from lakes to monitor water quality, detect patterns, and inform lake volunteers and residents about water quality issues in their lake. Visit their web site for more info at [www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/81576.html](http://www.dec.ny.gov/chemical/81576.html).



*Photo: Tom Reimers*

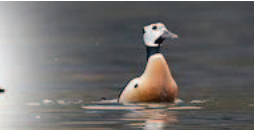
You must be a member of the New York State Federation of Lake Associations to participate in CSLAP. Visit [www.nysfola.org](http://www.nysfola.org) for more information.

## Cornell Lab of Ornithology

### **eBird - [www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org)**

Contribute to science and conservation by reporting the birds you see, while also tracking your own bird lists and exploring the data.

eBird



### **YardMap - [www.content.yardmap.org](http://www.content.yardmap.org)**

YardMap is an interactive citizen science project that allows you to help researchers better understand what kind of natural

habitat your land provides. Map the habitat on your property, learn about how these habitats support birds and wildlife, and connect with others!

*For more citizen science projects from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, check out their full list of current projects [www.birds.cornell.edu/page.aspx?pid=1664](http://www.birds.cornell.edu/page.aspx?pid=1664)*

## Cornell Natural Resources Department

### **NY eBear**

NY eBear is a citizen science program that needs your help to monitor the population size and distribution of black bears. It is being developed by Catherine Sun, a graduate student in the Department of Natural Resources at Cornell, and supported by the NYSDEC. Report sightings or photos from trail cameras, as well as any hikes where you didn't see any bears.

Collecting both information about the “detection” and “non-detection” of bears helps researchers accurately estimate the distribution of bears. Participate by visiting [www.nyebear.org](http://www.nyebear.org) or by downloading the free “NYeBear” app for both Android (Google Play) and iOS (Apple App store).



*Catherine Sun with a tranquilized radio-collared bear*

## Phenology

### **Nature's notebook - [www.usanpn.org/natures\\_notebook](http://www.usanpn.org/natures_notebook)**

Phenology is the study of seasonal changes and annual life cycle events in the natural world. The Finger Lakes Land Trust is developing a Phenology Trail at the Roy H. Park Preserve in Dryden, NY. The trail features a few plant species to observe in coordination with the New York Phenology Project and the USA National Phenology Network. If you want to make your own “phenology trail” closer to home, simply create a Nature’s Notebook account and start recording observations wherever you enjoy spending time outdoors.



### **Project Budburst - [www.budburst.org](http://www.budburst.org)**

Help collect important ecological data on the timing of leafing, flowering, and fruiting of different plants to track the responses of plants to climate change.



## Other Citizen Science Projects:

### **iMapInvasives - [www.imapinvasives.org](http://www.imapinvasives.org)**

Help protect our native ecosystems from the threat of invasive species by recording sightings.

### **Firefly Watch - [www.legacy.mos.org/fireflywatch](http://www.legacy.mos.org/fireflywatch)**

Firefly numbers have been decreasing, and scientists aren't sure why. Help collect geographical distribution data as well as record firefly activity during the summer months.

### **Journey North - [www.learner.org/jnorth](http://www.learner.org/jnorth)**

Some migratory species travel thousands of miles each year. Help track the incredible Northern migrations of a variety of migratory species.

### **Lost Ladybug Project - [www.lostladybug.org](http://www.lostladybug.org)**

Native ladybugs are on the decline while non-native ladybugs are becoming more prevalent. Take photos of ladybugs you find to help track American ladybug dynamics – and possibly discover a species thought to be long-gone!

## Creek Watch - [www.creekwatch.org](http://www.creekwatch.org)

Use an iPhone to report information on local creeks, such as water amount, flow rate, and amount of trash.

## iNaturalist - [www.inaturalist.org](http://www.inaturalist.org)

Join this online social network of people sharing biodiversity information to help each other learn about nature.

# Citizen Science – It’s Making a Difference!

- Last year, over 2,000 people in New York contributed data on fisher sightings, helping to inform the NYSDEC’s Fisher Management Plan.
- Last year, over 6,000 New Yorkers reported sightings of deer, turkey, and furbearers to the NYS DEC.
- A citizen-science project in Sweden showed that butterflies were starting to fly earlier in the year than in the past due to warmer temperatures.
- Data from Project FeederWatch showed that the emerald ash borer (EAB) invasion is affecting bird populations in the Midwest.



*Photo credits (clockwise from upper left): Fisher photo by Bill Banaszewski; Amanita muscaria (mushrooms) photo by Mark Whitmore; Meadowhawk dragonfly photo by Mark Whitmore; Canadian geese photo by Bill Hecht*

## **DID YOU KNOW THAT MOST CONSERVATION EASEMENT LANDOWNERS ARE ENTITLED TO A STATE TAX CREDIT EACH YEAR?**

The NY State Conservation Easement Tax Credit allows most owners of land restricted by a conservation easement to claim an annual state income tax credit for up to 25% of the total property taxes (county, town, and school) paid on the restricted land, up to \$5,000 per year.

Unlike a tax deduction, which is an adjustment to taxable income, a tax credit offsets a taxpayer's tax liability on a dollar-for-dollar basis - it is a direct payment toward your taxes. The credit is a refundable, so if the credit amount exceeds the amount owed in state income taxes, the landowner gets a refund for the difference.

### **Who is eligible?**

The Conservation Easement Tax Credit is available to individuals, estates and trusts, partners in a partnership, and some business corporations. Landowners who do not reside in NY State are eligible to claim the credit as long as the easement property is located in NY.

### **Please Note**

The tax law specifies that only conservation easements that were wholly or partially donated for charitable purposes qualify for the credit. Easements that were purchased at full value, or were required as a condition of sale, are not eligible. Those conservation easements that were donated to the Finger Lakes Land Trust upon purchase of a property directly from the Land Trust, as a condition of the purchase, are not considered to be eligible for the tax credit. FLLT and other Land Trusts hope to get the law changed so that these easements will be eligible for the tax credit in the future.

### **How To Claim The Credit**

When filing your NYS income tax documents, you will need to fill out Form IT-242, along with your other standard tax reporting forms. Additionally, you will need to provide the location of the property; the date the easement was recorded; the Liber and Page or Instrument Number of the recorded document; and a DEC Filing Number (the Land Trust can provide this number to you if you do not have it). Remember, the credit applies only to the land protected by a conservation easement, not homes or other structures. Ask your local assessor to calculate the percentage of your assessment that applies to the land only, then you can calculate how much of your taxes were paid on only the easement-restricted land.



Roy H. Park Preserve

Photo: Bill Hecht

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*The Finger Lakes Land Trust is a member supported, non-profit conservation organization that works cooperatively with landowners and local communities to conserve forever the lands and waters of the Finger Lakes region, ensuring scenic vistas, local foods, clean water, and wild places for everyone.*

***Afoot in the Field** is a newsletter provided by the Land Trust for landowners in the Finger Lakes who own properties that are permanently protected with a conservation easement, or who are otherwise committed to, or interested in, land conservation and wildlife habitat protection and improvement. For more information about the Finger Lakes Land Trust and its conservation programs, visit [www.fllt.org](http://www.fllt.org) or call 607-275-9487.*

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