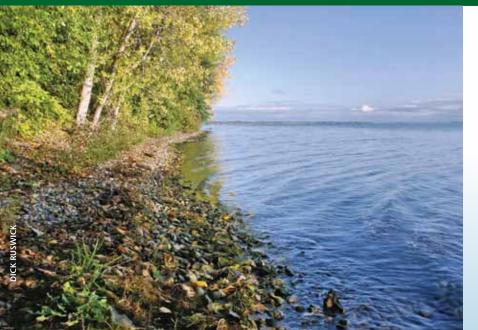
## New Conservation Easement Protects Ithaca Horse Farm

The origins of Sheffield Farm date back to 1969, when Jan and Susan Suwinski purchased a 62-acre property on Ithaca's West Hill to pursue their passion for horses. Jan is an avid polo player, and was a member of the 1963 Cornell polo team that won a national championship, while Susan is a competitive trail rider who now also enjoys carriage driving. continued on page 3

The Suwinski horse farm extends from state route 79 in the center of photo, to the red barns on the left to the fields on the far right.



## Land Trust Expands VanRiper Conservation Area on Cayuga Lake

Bordering Cayuga Lake in the town of Romulus, the VanRiper Conservation Area and Whitlock Nature Preserve together provide public access to a rare and beautiful mix of shoreline and forest ecosystems. The Land Trust just purchased 15 acres to expand this natural area.

On the slope above Cayuga Lake, on the west side of state Route 89, this property has features that are typical of the Finger Lakes: a deep gorge, flanked by diverse forest. This new addition continued on page 2

# It's been another year of erratic weather, and the impacts of climate change are becoming increasingly clear across the globe.

oncerns in our region range from last year's drought to wild winter temperature swings that are damaging our fruit crops. Increasingly, intense rain storms are also damaging roads, homes and bridges while feeding algae growth in our lakes.

The Land Trust recognizes the myriad challenges associated with climate change, and we're already factoring these issues into our work. As we survey the 12 counties that comprise our region, we're assessing how best to accommodate renewable energy facilities, such as solar farms, in ways that don't have harmful impacts on sensitive wildlife habitats and prime farmland.

We're also working on the protection of landscape corridors that will allow plants and animals to migrate over time in response to changing conditions. By creating such networks of conserved land, we can increase the resilience of our natural habitats, while maintaining higher levels of diversity.

In the face of more intense rainstorms and associated flooding, we're increasing our focus on the protection of sensitive stream corridors and floodplains. During the past few years, communities such as Penn Yan and Owego have suffered from significant floods. To minimize the impact of future floods, we're working with partners to keep development out of floodplains and, wherever possible, to restore wetlands that can hold water and act as buffers during flood events.

As we work on these issues, we're painfully aware of how much we still don't know. So we'll be pursuing our work, informed by the best knowledge available, but we also recognize that we'll have to adapt our strategies as future conditions change and as our understanding and knowledge evolve.

Cuchen J.

Andrew Zepp, Executive Director, Finger Lakes Land Trust

#### Land Trust Expands VanRiper Conservation Area on Cayuga Lake continued from cover

extends protection along the gorge from the current VanRiper Conservation Area. An unnamed stream flows seasonally through the gorge, adding to the property's biodiversity and habitat value. The forest surrounding the gorge is like much of the rest of VanRiper's second growth forest, with a mix of tree and shrub species, including mature hemlock, beech, maple and oak.

In an area so close to the lake, with few undeveloped tracts of land remaining, it is exciting to protect this property, particularly because it adds to an existing preserve. The new project expands the contiguous network of conserved lands and provides additional opportunities for public access and recreation.

"It's a beautiful piece of property, one that has value for wildlife and people," said Zack Odell, director of land protection at the Land Trust. "Protection of this land will also help ensure Cayuga Lake's water quality."

Funding for the purchase came from the Land Trust's recent Shoreline to Summit capital campaign. Like all 32 of the Land Trust's preserves, activities at the VanRiper and Whitlock Preserves are governed by a management plan that details the preserve's conservation value and lays out conservation goals and priorities. Land Trust management plans are updated periodically by a committee of staff and volunteers to ensure long-term stewardship and protection of the values that make these preserves and conservation areas special in the first place.

Consistent with the Land Trust's public use policy at both VanRiper and Whitlock, the new addition will be accessible to the public for recreational uses including hiking and bird watching. With the lake so close, there is ample opportunity to see a variety of shore and water birds, including Spotted Sandpipers, Buffleheads, Common Loons, or even the occasional Bald Eagle or Osprey.

Looking at the visitors' log at the VanRiper trailhead, you will find a mix of locals and out-of-town guests. The property is in the heart of Finger Lakes wine country, just half a mile from Toro Run Winery—one of the many stops on the Cayuga Lake Wine Trail. State Route 89 is also part of the Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway, recognized by New York State for its scenic, recreational, and natural heritage qualities.

The addition of the new property to the existing VanRiper Conservation Area helps ensure that these features will continue to be protected. The forest habitat that is so important to this recent acquisition helps control erosion and sedimentation, helping to protect the water quality of Cayuga Lake, the wildlife habitat, and the beauty of the area that inspires locals and tourists to get outdoors and explore.

—Alli Sribarra

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney David Loftus of Skaneateles for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.



# New Conservation Easement Protects Ithaca Horse Farm continued from cover

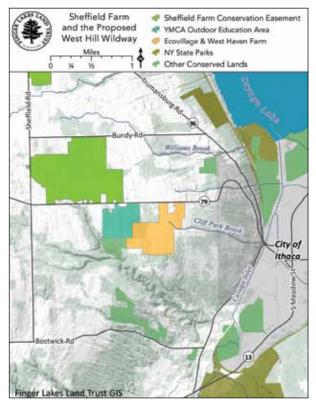
Over the next 40 years, the Suwinskis expanded their farm by gradually purchasing neighboring properties whenever they became available for sale. Sheffield Farm now covers more than 470 acres and is one of the largest remaining privately owned parcels in Ithaca.

Recently, the couple donated a conservation easement on Sheffield Farm to the Land Trust. "We've been involved with horses our whole lives," Jan said. "This farm has been a labor of love for us, and with the increasing loss of open land in Ithaca, we wanted to be sure our farm retained its natural state."

The Suwinskis are lifelong conservationists and long-time supporters of the Land Trust. Jan has been on the Land Trust board for six years and currently serves as Treasurer. Susan is on the Board of Trustees of the Central & Western New York chapter of the Nature Conservancy. "Given our familiarity with land conservation and our involvement with the Land

Trust, we knew at some point we would pursue a conservation easement for our farm," Jan said.

With the exception of a 40-acre parcel located a half-mile away (currently in use as a hay field), Sheffield Farm is one contiguous property nestled between State Route 79, Sheffield Road, and Bundy Road. The property consists of fields and forest, with varied levels of woodland



growth reflecting the transition from farmland back to woods. There are also several sizable ponds on the property.

The farm has some unique equestrian-oriented features. In addition to the stables and pastureland for the horses, there is a polo field in the southeast corner of the property that gets ample use by the Central New York Polo Club during the summer months. The Suwinskis also developed and maintain a network of trails around the property

for both horse riding and carriage driving. They are members of the Cherry Valley Carriage Association and host an annual Fun Day and Pleasure Drive on the farm.

"We feel lucky to have an organization like the Land Trust in our area," said Jan. "It's gratifying to work with a dedicated group of people as they go about fulfilling their mission of land protection, and for us to be a part of that while protecting our farm is wonderful."

The Land Trust intends to build upon this generous donation from the Suwinskis by working with the Town of Ithaca and other partners to create the West Hill Wildway—a greenbelt that will ultimately extend from Sheffield Farm to Robert H. Treman State Park. The greenbelt will ultimately link these areas to town conservation land, a YMCA outdoor education center, and undeveloped portions of EcoVillage Ithaca, an intentional community. —Jeff Tonole

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Carolyn Fame and Attorney Donald Snyder of the law firm Harter Secrest & Emery, LLP in Rochester for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project. The Land Trust also acknowledges Attorney Don Crittenden of the law firm Harris Beach, PLLC in Ithaca for contributing a portion of his services in support of this project.

#### West Hill Wildway Effort Kicks Off With Easement Donation

The protection of Sheffield Farm not only ensures the future of one of the largest privately owned properties remaining in Ithaca—it also launches a new effort to create a greenbelt along the west side of the town of Ithaca.

This effort, known as the "West Hill Wildway," will eventually connect a four mile stretch of farm and forest land extending from Robert H. Treman State Park in the south to Bundy Road in the north. In addition to the Sheffield Farm easement, the wildway already features a Land Trust easement on a portion of the EcoVillage community, the YMCA's outdoor environmental education center, and conservation lands owned by the Town of Ithaca and by Cornell Botanic Gardens.

Additional parcels within the wildway are privately owned and the Land Trust is reaching out to these owners

to explore options for conserving key portions of their properties. While the initial focus will be on conserving land, the Land Trust is also assessing the feasibility of creating a hiking trail that would traverse the wildway and connect to downtown Ithaca.

"This is truly a rare opportunity to create a network of conservation lands that could extend outward from the center of one of our cities," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp.

### 29 Acres and a Piece of Skaneateles Lake History Conserved Forever

My vision is that

this land will always

remain this way. My

children can come

here and fly kites,

pick berries like I did,

and enjoy nature.

The Land Trust recently protected 29 acres on the eastern hillside of Skaneateles Lake, in the town of Spafford, with a conservation easement. The property has been in Art Woldt's family since 1920 when it was purchased by his grandfather, a Czechoslovakian immigrant, who farmed the land into his 80s.

When Art first came upstate from Staten Island to visit his grandparents' farm in the early 1930s, he was barely three years old. The farmhouse where they lived had no plumbing,

no electricity, and only a dirt road leading to the house. From the first day of school break to the last, Art spent every summer at the farm swimming, picking berries, building lean-tos, and helping his grandfather with various chores. He loved the quiet and peaceful open space, so different from the bustling streets of New York City.

The family was self-sufficient, relying on food grown or raised on the farm, and Art fondly remembers his grandmother's apple pies, made from the Northern Spy variety grown in their

orchard. In addition to apples, the farm produced wheat, corn, potatoes, and cabbage, and included a herd of dairy cows, as well as pigs and chickens.

This idyllic pastoral upbringing gave Art a close connection with the land that endures to this day. The decision to protect his land began with a desire to protect his family legacy and preserve it for his children and grandchildren. "My vision is that this land will always remain this way," he said. "My children can come up here and fly kites, pick berries like I did, and enjoy nature—which pleases me."

Conservation of the property, which includes 1,640 feet of creek frontage, will help protect water quality within the Skaneateles Lake watershed and maintain the rural beauty of the area. The property sits in close proximity to the Land

4 THE LAND STEWARD

Trust's High Vista and Hinchcliff Family preserves. Across the lake, the Woldt property is visible from the Land Trust's Bahar Nature Preserve and Carpenter Falls. These conservation areas are key components of the Land Trust's Skaneateles Highlands Protection Project, which aims to create a greenbelt around the south end of the lake.

The land has been passed down through the family, and now, at the age of 89, Art resides on the property in a house

built by his parents, where he enjoys observing the various wildlife that pass through his property, including fox and coyote. Coincidentally, the donation of the conservation easement was completed on Art's 89th birthday.

As a retired employee of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation, where he worked for 24 years, Art saw his department go from a small network of agencies managing hunting, fishing and camping in the 1960s to absorbing programs of the Department

of Health such as the management of air and water pollution and solid waste.

"It's all connected," Art said. "You're not going to have good fishing if you don't have clean water. It made sense to bring this all together."

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Tim Lynn



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The Land Trust is seeking the donation of a car or truck with low mileage to assist our stewardship staff—fuel-efficient, compact car with all-wheel drive perferred. As per IRS guidelines, contributions are tax deductible to the extent allowed by law. Please contact Director of Development and Communications, Kelly Makosch at (607) 275-9487.

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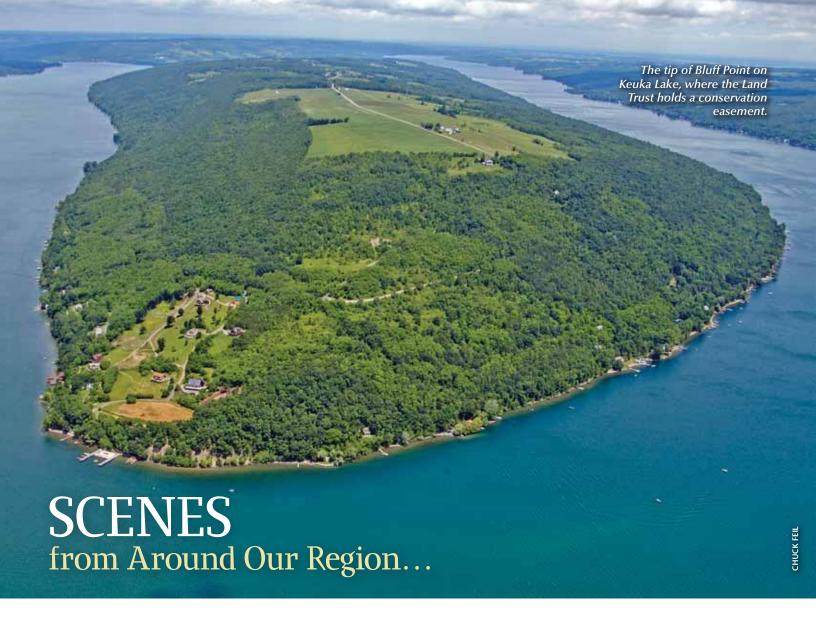
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A fisher, spotted at the Roy H. Park Preserve in Tompkins County. Fishers have repopulated many portions of our region after a long absence. They've also recently been sighted at our Logan Hill Nature Preserve in Tioga County, Hinchcliff Family Preserve in Onondaga County, and the Wesley Hill Nature Preserve in Ontario County.



Your free online guide to the best hikes, bikes, paddles, and outdoor adventures in the Finger Lakes region. Coming very soon from the Finger Lakes Land Trust.

Get outdoors...Go Finger Lakes!



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We are very grateful for gifts of all sizes and promise to use them wisely to protect more land and water. In particular, we wish to acknowledge everyone who generously gave \$100 or more in 2016.\* Please accept our heartiest thanks!

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# A CLOSER LOOK

## Beyond the Iconic Image: The Hidden Life of Wood Ducks

ost anyone who has perused a field guide knows the Wood Duck—perhaps the most visually distinctive and striking bird in North America. Indeed, even nonbirders may recognize the species just from having seen its iconic image in popular art, as on a hotel wall or a coffee mug.

But despite the outward flamboyance and familiarity of the species, most people haven't ever really watched Wood Ducks up close, nor gotten to know them. They are never tame like urban Mallards and Canada Geese. They are seldom abundant and conspicuous, like goldeneves, scaup, and mergansers on open water in migration. Instead, Wood Ducks are discreet and easily overlooked, but full of secrets

and hidden angles, like the woods and sheltering wetlands where they live.

Adult male Wood Ducks are unmistakable, with bright red eyes and bill contrasting with a white-striped green face, white throat and deeply russet breast. Adult female Wood Ducks have muted brown-gray plumage, with a white patch around each eye. Juveniles resemble adult females. Even in silhouette, Wood Ducks strike a profile unique among North American waterfowl, given their small size, short bills and

crests that taper tidily to a point at the back of the head.

Despite their bold appearance, Wood Ducks are usually much more difficult to see than other waterfowl. Wood Ducks most often reveal their presence when females take flight, voicing a husky hweek-hweek! Males sound quite different, perching on high branches and issuing a rising zzzzzzzeeeb! like a very long fine-toothed zipper being closed with a flourish.

Wood Ducks are migratory, appearing throughout central and western New York around the beginning of March and departing by mid-November. They breed in various wooded habitats, preferring mature trees near wetlands with a mix of open water and cover from vegetation, including downed timber.

In the early 20th century, Wood Ducks were thought to be seriously endangered because of unrestricted hunting and habitat loss. Then the federal Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 banned the hunting of ducks for sale. In subsequent decades, most states established bag limits and seasonal restrictions on recreational hunting. These measures have led to a strong recovery. Increased beaver populations may also help explain the rise in Wood Duck populations, as flooded woods constitute ideal habitat. Wood Duck numbers are now stable or rising throughout their range,

even though the species remains a very popular target of hunters—indeed, the most-hunted duck species in the Atlantic Flyway.

Wood Ducks have a broad diet, including seeds, aquatic grasses, fruit, and both terrestrial and aquatic invertebrates. If food is scarce in wetlands, Wood Ducks sometimes forage for acorns in woodlands, or for grain or soybeans in harvested fields.

Wood Ducks nest in cavities. They prefer natural holes, especially those formed where large branches have broken off from tree trunks, from near ground level up to 60 feet. They also take readily to human-made boxes placed on

> poles or tree trunks at the edges of wetlands.

> The female tends the such cases, one can find

nest and young without assistance from her mate. She lines the nest with down that she plucks from her own breast and belly. Wood Ducks are unusually prolific egg-layers, with clutch sizes usually ranging between 9 and 12 eggs. Moreover, female Wood Ducks often lay eggs in each other's nests. Hooded Mergansers also often parasitize Wood Duck nests in this way. In

between 17 and 29 eggs in one Wood Duck nest.

About 24 hours after the young hatch, the mother inspects the area around the nest. If she finds it safe, she positions herself directly under the nest hole and vocalizes softly. The tiny yellow ducklings step to the lip of the hole and plummet to the ground or water, flapping their stubby wings and relying on their fuzzy plumage and wide feet to create enough friction to brake their descent. They usually land on their feet, unfazed by the impact, even from a height of five or six stories. Sometimes, if an intervening twig upsets the duckling's fall, it can land awkwardly, but even then, it remains stunned only momentarily. Then the mother leads her troop of day-old ducklings to open water. When suitable nest cavities right next to water are unavailable, this journey may involve a walk of up to 1.5 miles, fraught with risk of predation by snakes, raccoons, mink, owls, and hawks.

And so, far more than just a pretty picture, the Wood Duck is the embodiment of the wonders of ecology and evolution, the fragility of life amid natural and humancreated perils, and the enduring value of sound conservation policy. Take the time this spring to go out to our woods and wetlands, listen and look, and maybe Wood Ducks might share some of their secrets with you. — Mark Chao



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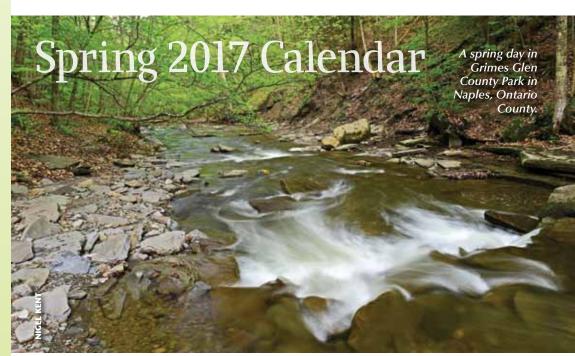
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Please see inserts for our schedule of 2017 Spring and Summer Talks & Treks. Detailed directions and maps of our preserves can be found on our web site at www.fllt.org.

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