



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region

Vol. 30, No. 1 • Winter 2017-18

Land Gift Creates Funding for Nature Education and Conservation

Thanks to an anonymous donor, the Land Trust has protected 200 wildlife-rich acres in northern Steuben County, while also generating funds for the organization's education and outreach efforts.

The land is located in the rolling hills of Prattsburgh. It was donated to the Land Trust in 2015 with the understanding that the property would be sold subject to a conservation easement that prohibits subdivision and limits development to a single home site. The donor further requested that some of the funds generated by the sale of the land be used to support a new effort to connect inner-city Rochester youth with nature.

The property was recently sold to a couple who intend to use it as a seasonal retreat. Once a potato farm, the site features extensive conifer plantings as well as areas that have returned to a natural state—with hardwood forest, brush lands, and wet meadows that border 8,500 feet of creek frontage. Six acres of streamside wetlands add to the site's value for fish and wildlife.

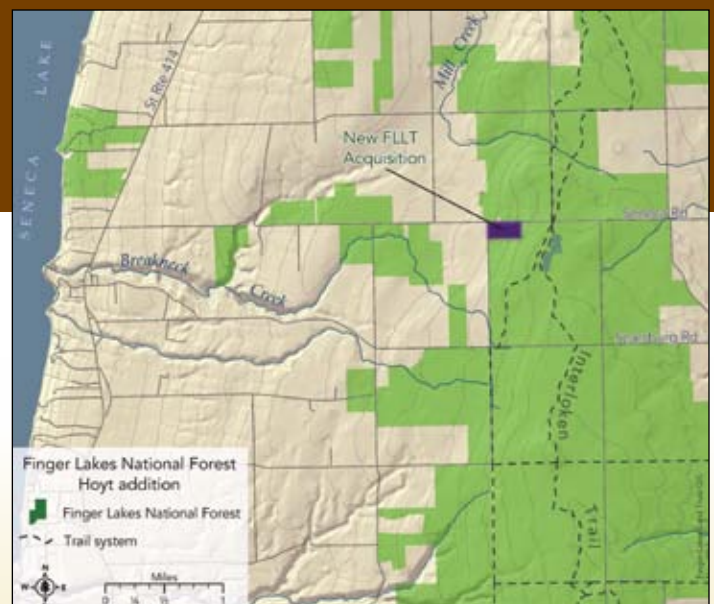
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Land Trust Acquires Parcel in Heart of Finger Lakes National Forest

The Land Trust continued its efforts to ensure the integrity of New York's only national forest with the recent acquisition of 24 wooded acres that are surrounded by existing public land. The acquisition was made possible by the organization's "Forever Fund," a dedicated account that was created by the Land Trust to make time sensitive acquisitions such as this one. The fund will be replenished when this property is sold to the U.S. Forest Service at some point in the future.

Though relatively modest in size, this latest acquisition was identified as a priority for protection because of its location within the national forest and its frontage on two public roads. Subdivision and development of the land would not only

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Thanksgiving is a favorite day to get outdoors and burn off some turkey by going for a hike at a favorite local natural area. In Ithaca, Lick Brook Gorge is a favorite for many, and its popularity was clearly evident this year as we counted 34 cars parked at our Sweedler Preserve!

ON one hand, it is great to see so many people out enjoying nature and getting some exercise at a Land Trust preserve. The screen of a computer tablet or smart phone simply can't match the experience of a hike through an inspiring natural area.

With increasing use, however, also comes greater challenges in terms of trail

maintenance and site management, particularly at a place that has steep slopes like Lick Brook Gorge.

In the case of Lick Brook, erosion issues on a particularly steep stretch of the Finger Lakes Trail must be addressed, and the Land Trust is committed to raising the funds needed to complete a trail rehabilitation project here in 2018. We're well on our way in terms of fundraising, and we're confident that this project will move forward this coming summer. Volunteer efforts will be supplemented by staff and at least one contractor.

Over the long run, the Land Trust must be able to fulfill its obligation to provide exemplary stewardship for its growing network of preserves and conservation areas. While volunteers are vital to this effort, funds will also be needed to address ongoing preserve management.



Brian Maley

For this reason, the Land Trust has two dedicated funds: our Stewardship Fund and our Darlington Stewardship Fund. Both are professionally managed to provide a long-term income stream to address our land management needs.

As our accomplishments grow, so do our stewardship commitments, and so should our stewardship

funds. We were delighted to receive an extraordinary million-dollar contribution for stewardship in 2017. More typically, though, growth of these funds has happened through more modest bequests.

Anyone can create a meaningful legacy by providing for a bequest to the Land Trust's Stewardship Fund. These planned gifts are vital to ensuring that our wonderful natural areas are well taken care of far into the future. Please contact our Ithaca office if you'd like to learn more.

Andrew Zepp,
Executive Director, Finger Lakes Land Trust

Land Trust Acquires Parcel in Heart of Finger Lakes National Forest *continued from cover*

eliminate intact hardwood forest but would also degrade the ecological and recreational value of adjacent public lands.

Spanning more than 16,000 acres, the Finger Lakes National Forest is located between Cayuga Lake and Seneca Lake. The forest is well known for its miles of multi-use trails and dirt roads. It also features frontage on Seneca Lake and a drive-in campground. The national forest's patchwork of fields and woodlands provide habitat for a diversity of wildlife and is recognized as one of New York State's Important Bird Areas.

This latest acquisition is the sixth land protection project the Land Trust has completed within the forest. Three of these have involved the acquisition of "inholdings"—privately owned parcels surrounded by public land, while the other three have involved the donation of perpetual conservation easements.

Both approaches are important techniques for advancing

The Land Trust is committed to working with landowners, the Forest Service, and other partners, to ensure the future of this expansive stretch of countryside.

conservation in this area. In some cases, acquisition eliminates the threat of development while allowing for more efficient management of public lands. In others, a conservation easement can provide a suitable buffer for the forest while allowing for compatible uses such as sustainable forestry and agriculture.

Privately owned land adjacent to the national forest has traditionally been used for agriculture, forestry, and as hunting retreats. With more people discovering this part of the Finger Lakes, however, pressure on this land is increasing. The Land Trust is committed to working with landowners, the Forest Service, and other partners, to ensure the future of this expansive stretch of countryside.

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

60 Acres of Farmland Overlooking Skaneateles Lake Conserved Forever

The Land Trust is excited to add 60 acres of scenic farmland to our growing network of conserved lands in the Skaneateles Lake watershed. This conservation easement property, owned by Gil and Melinda Weatherly, preserves open space and agricultural land, and addresses the threat of subdivisions along the scenic corridors on the eastern hillside of Skaneateles Lake.

Originally purchased by Melinda Weatherly's grandfather, and later farmed by her parents, the property was divided into two parcels when Melinda's parents passed. Melinda inherited one parcel, while her brother inherited the other. Since that time, well over 10 years ago, Gil and Melinda have been struggling with what to do with their parcel. They wanted to keep the property's open space and agricultural values intact, but were unsure how to balance that with future financial stability. Ideally, they would also move from their current home in Connecticut to the original farmhouse on the northeast corner of the property upon retirement. "We came upon the concept of donating development rights, and the more we talked about it, the more it made sense, especially for Melinda," Gil said. Having grown up with the property, the last thing Melinda wanted was to see the property subdivided for housing development—a very real threat in an area with beautiful views of Skaneateles Lake.

The Skaneateles Lake watershed provides drinking water for 220,000 area residents, including people living in Syracuse. This fact alone is enough to spur conservation efforts in the region, and it has. In 1992, the City of Syracuse hired its first watershed control coordinator and, in 1994, the Skaneateles Lake Watershed Agricultural Program (SLWAP) was born. The goal of this program was to avoid an expensive filtration system for the city by encouraging voluntary water quality protection measures among farmers and landowners in the watershed. As part of the early planning for SLWAP, high priority properties and hydrologically sensitive areas were identified for protection. Conservation easements served as one way that landowners could protect areas critical to managing water quality in the watershed.

Conservation easements are "another tool in the conservation toolbox," says Mark Burger, Executive

Director of the Onondaga County Soil and Water Conservation District (OCSWCD). OCSWCD administers SLWAP in partnership with the City of Syracuse, and provides other technical

their property will allow for continued agricultural use of the land by the adjacent farmer.

Gil and Melinda Weatherly will be able to move to the original farmhouse,



and educational assistance to farmers to address environmental concerns on their farms. Several years ago, the SLWAP program stopped accepting conservation easements due to lack of funding for new easement purchases. The Land Trust is now working with partners to secure funding to restore this program in some form.

Together, easements such as the ones purchased by the City of Syracuse and the one donated by the Weatherlys, contribute to protecting water quality, conserving open space, and keeping land in agriculture. In the case of the Weatherlys, a conservation easement provided enough flexibility for them to meet all of their goals. The easement on

enjoying the views with the knowledge that future generations will be able to do the same. "It gives us great pleasure, to know it's not going to change," said Gil Weatherly.

—Alli Sribarra

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorneys Laura Smith and Don Snyder of the law firm Harter Secrest & Emery, LLP in Rochester, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.



Land Gift Creates Funding for Nature Education and Conservation

continued from cover

The conservation easement includes special protections for the portion of the property bordering the creek, which provides habitat for native brook trout. Traditional agricultural and forestry uses will continue to be allowed on the property.

Some of the costs associated with the conservation easement were covered by a Chesapeake Bay Watershed grant from the NYSDEC Division of Water. The Land Trust recently received this award to support voluntary land and water conservation efforts throughout the watershed of the Upper Susquehanna River, an area encompassing approximately 45 percent of the organization's service area.

Funds generated from the sale of the property will now be used to support the Land Trust's educational and outreach programs. A portion of the funds will be used to expand popular existing efforts such as its Story Walk program, which connects children with nature by reading in the woods. The Land Trust is also reaching out to partner organizations in the Rochester area to identify the best opportunities to invest in efforts to connect underserved inner-city youth with nature.

Look for updates on these efforts in future issues of *The Land Steward*.



The Land Trust's Story Walk guides children and their caregivers on free, self-guided walking and reading adventures through the Ellis Hollow Nature Preserve.



New Rail Trail Will Enhance Access to Land Trust Preserve

Located in Tompkins County, the Etna Nature Preserve stretches along Fall Creek, and features floodplain forest, a beaver pond, and upland woods with a modest loop trail. Soon, it will also have access to a multi-use rail trail under development by the Town of Dryden.

The Land Trust recently entered into an agreement with the Town to allow the development of the trail on a portion of the abandoned rail grade that makes up one boundary of the preserve. This is part of a much larger effort to create a continuous ten-mile multi-use trail that will connect the Town's existing Jim Schug Trail to Ithaca's East Hill Recreation Way.

According to Bob Beck, chair of Dryden's Rail-Trail Taskforce, 37 of the 48 agreements needed for the completion of the trail have either been secured or pledged. Together, these cover approximately eight of the ten miles needed for the trail.

"Dryden's progress toward the completion of this trail has been truly impressive," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "We look forward to the day when families can bike or walk to the Etna Preserve and do not have to use their car to get there."

Additional information on the Jim Schug Trail may be found at gofingerlakes.org/schug while information on the Etna Nature Preserve may be found at fllt.org/etna.

1,000 Feet of Chemung River Streambank Conserved Forever



Thanks to an anonymous donor, 1,000 feet of Chemung River streambank, along with six acres of associated floodplain forest, are now permanently protected.

The parcel borders State Route 352 in the town of Big Flats and is located in close proximity to the Land Trust's Kehoe Nature Preserve and The Nature Conservancy's Frenchman's Bluff Preserve.

The Land Trust moved quickly to purchase the property when it was advertised for sale. Featuring lush woodlands adjacent to the river, the property is rich in birdlife, and a recent visit yielded sightings of eagles, herons, and merganser ducks.

The property will be protected permanently through a conservation easement to be held by the Land Trust, while ownership will be conveyed to the Town of Big Flats for management as a public conservation area. The easement will ensure the integrity of forests bordering the river and also allow public access for kayaking and canoeing.

"More and more people are enjoying the opportunity to experience the Chemung. We're delighted to have the opportunity to work together with the Town of Big Flats to conserve this site while also providing for appropriate public access."

This latest acquisition joins more than 2,000 acres already protected by the Land Trust in the Chemung River watershed, including the newly-acquired Kehoe Preserve, the 195-acre Houghton Land Preserve in Corning, the Steege Hill and Plymouth Woods Nature Preserves in Big Flats, and the Parker Nature Preserve in Bath.

"This is a significant addition to what is a growing greenbelt along the Chemung River," said Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "More and more people are enjoying the opportunity to experience the Chemung. We're delighted to have the opportunity to work together with the Town of Big Flats to conserve this site while also providing for appropriate public access."

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney John Alexander of the law firm Sayles & Evans in Elmira, NY for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

New Leash Policy in Effect at Several Land Trust Preserves

Due to increasing use and a series of troublesome interactions between hikers and dogs, the Land Trust is enforcing a dog leash policy at several of our popular nature preserves. The policy is meant to provide a safe and non-threatening environment for all to enjoy.

While dog owners must maintain control of their dogs at all preserves, dogs must be kept on a leash at the following conservation areas: Ellis Hollow Preserve and Roy H. Park Preserve in Dryden, Tompkins County; Sweedler and Thayer Preserves in Ithaca, Tompkins County; Hinchcliff Family Preserve in Spafford, Onondaga County; and the Houghton Land Preserve in Corning, Steuben County. It is worth noting that the Town of Dryden enforces its own dog control law. Section 4, Paragraph A of the Town of Dryden Dog Control Law states: "It shall be unlawful for any owner of a dog in the Town to permit or allow such dog to run at large, unless the dog is leashed."

One of the challenges of the new policy is that the Land Trust is trying to change patterns of use that were in place for years. Over time, it became clear that the Land Trust could no longer rely on an "honor system" for dog control. Recent examples include: a visitor to the Roy H. Park Preserve being bitten by an off-leash dog; a couple at the Ellis Hollow Preserve was threatened and intimidated by a dog owner after mentioning the leash policy; and, a family carrying a baby cancelled their hike after feeling unsafe when met by a man with three unleashed dogs.

Our preserves are open to everyone for quiet, unobtrusive nature observation and low-impact recreational activities such as walking, hiking, snowshoeing, and cross-country skiing. Please leash your dog and stay on marked trails, where they exist, to minimize disturbance of native plants and wildlife, and to avoid hazards. Observing these simple rules will ensure that we will be able to continue offering a safe place for everyone to enjoy nature.

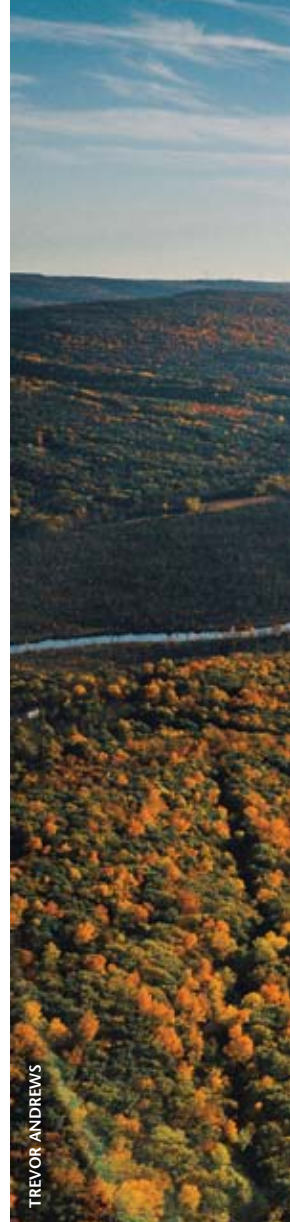


SCENES

from Around Our Region...



The Land Trust dedicated its Houghton Land Preserve in Corning, Steuben County in the fall of 2017. The preserve is a gift from longtime Corning leaders Jamie and Maisie Houghton. From L-R: Land Trust President Holly Gregg, Nina Houghton, Maisie Houghton, Nature Preserve Manager Jason Gorman, Land Trust member Marianne Young, and James D. Houghton.



The Land Trust's Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby, Tompkins County.





The West River and south end of Canandaigua Lake, where the Land Trust has protected over a dozen parcels and also owns and manages the Great Hill and West River Nature Preserves.



LONG CREEK PHOTOGRAPHY



ELITT

The Land Trust formally opened its 43-acre Kehoe Nature Preserve on the Chemung River in Big Flats, Chemung County in fall 2017. The property was a gift from Phyllis Kehoe, a resident of Pine City, pictured on the left with her family.

PRESERVE PROFILE: Houghton Land Preserve

ON an unusually warm day in October, the Land Trust held a ribbon-cutting ceremony to introduce its 34th preserve—the Houghton Land Preserve in the Town of Corning, Steuben County. As part of the event, Land Trust Director of Stewardship Chris Olney led a guided hike through the property, and *The Land Steward* tagged along to explore the Land Trust's newest preserve.

The preserve is located on a hilltop southwest of Corning. The parking lot is accessed from Spencer Hill Road, which connects downtown Corning and Corning Community College. The 194-acre preserve features approximately two miles of well-marked trails that traverse the varied terrain.

From the parking lot, the trail climbs north and winds through a mixed hardwood forest featuring primarily oak and hickory trees, with some maple, birch, and pine in the mix as well. We also came across an unexpected stand of sassafras trees. Along this part of the trail, porcupines have been spotted in the branches of trees.

Soon the trail straightens out, following an underground telephone cable that is still in use. After about a half-mile, the trail reaches a pole that marks an access point to the underground cable, and also serves as a central junction where the preserve's various trails meet. We turn right, and as we head east, Chris mentions that a trail camera set up in this area recently spotted a black bear.

Shortly after our turn eastward, the trail opens up into a sizable meadow that offers stunning views of the hills to the south and east. The first of several benches built and installed by the local Boy Scout troop provides a pleasant place to take in the scenery and perhaps have a picnic. The meadow also supports abundant birdlife, including bobolinks and field sparrows.



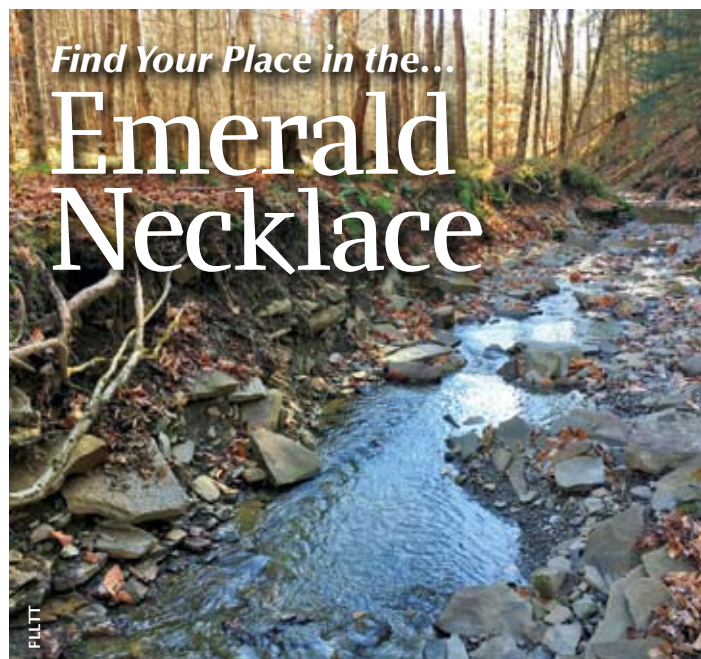
The trail skirts the north end of the meadow and reaches a fork just after re-entering the forest. To the right, a spur of the main trail runs through a narrow portion of the preserve that stretches to the east. The Land Trust is working with

adjacent property owners to extend this part of the trail all the way to downtown Corning, making it easier to access the preserve by foot from the city.

We take the left fork, which takes us to two trails that loop back to the central junction. On this section of the trail, we find a patch of blueberry bushes and a few stray pitch pine trees.

The shorter loop heads back along the hilltop to the central trail junction. We take the longer loop that runs along the back side of the ridge, where a big stand of gray birch covers the north side of the hill as it drops sharply down to Powderhouse Road, the preserve's northern boundary.

The trail circles back around to the central junction, and as we retrace our steps back down to the parking lot, the autumn sun angles in through the trees. The group expresses their gratitude to Chris for the tour, and to the Houghtons for their generous donation of this wonderful preserve. Visit fltt.org/houghton for more information. —Jeff Tonole



The Land Trust is selling a beautiful 90-acre parcel of land adjacent to an existing nature preserve and subject to a conservation easement—for \$149,500.

The property is located in the town of Newfield, Tompkins County, and includes a creek and forested land with recreational trails perfect for hiking and cross-country skiing. Also included is a barn with electricity and a drilled well.

The Land Trust pursued protection of the land in order to secure valuable wildlife habitat and expand its existing 200-acre Charles Spencer Nature Preserve. Approximately 70 acres of the original parcel were added to the preserve, while the remaining 90 acres will be sold subject to an easement limiting development to a single home. The selective harvest of timber is also allowed as well as agricultural use of approximately five acres of meadow.

For further details, please contact realtor Ed Finegan at (607) 279-0234.



30th

Anniversary Photo Contest

THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST is opening its 30th Anniversary photo contest, accepting submissions through December 1, 2018. In addition to great prizes, the winning photos will be featured in a printed book and on the FLLT's social media as it promotes conservation and recreation across the Finger Lakes. Categories will include: Nature and People, Wildlife, Landscape, Young Photographer, and Mobile. All submissions must be taken on FLLT protected lands (fllt.org/map).

Visit fllt.org/contest for details!

Land Trust Receives “Forest Champion” Award

ON November 3rd, the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, with support from the U.S. Forest Service, awarded the Finger Lakes Land Trust a Chesapeake Forest Champion Award for our work in engaging the public to inspire people to act on behalf of forests. Forests provide clean water and air, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities and a host of other benefits to people. In our region, forests in portions of the Emerald Necklace and the Southern Tier are important sources of clean water flowing to the Chesapeake Bay.

The Land Trust was nominated for the award by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation for our work in 2015 to provide public access and protect natural resources at Logan Hill Nature Preserve and Connecticut Hill

Wildlife Management Area. Through the use of conservation easements in 2015, the Land Trust also protected the landscape next Mark Twain's summer home which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Since 2015, the Land Trust has provided public access at two new nature preserves in the Southern Tier, most recently with the dedication of the Houghton Land Preserve near Corning. We have also partnered with the Finger Lakes Trail Conference to protect nearly 200 acres and more than a mile of Finger Lakes Trail corridor in Danby. Since our inception, the Land Trust has conserved 5,115 acres in the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

The Land Trust is working to protect lands along the Chemung River, which is located within the Chesapeake Bay watershed.

Our deepest gratitude for thoughtful gifts in memory of...

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FROM
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memory

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To learn more, please call Kelly Makosch at the Land Trust office at (607) 275-9487.

NIGEL KENT

Seeing Stars

The remarkable sensory adaptations of the star-nosed mole

HERE'S A RIDDLE:

I touch with 22 fingers...

I can see in total darkness...

I can catch and eat my prey faster than you can blink...

I can smell inside a bubble...

And though you might never have met me, I'm your neighbor, and you've probably stood right outside my walls.

Who am I?

A fantastic chimerical beast of legend? Good notion, but no. Maybe some human lesson veiled in tricky metaphors, as if by the Sphinx? Also plausible, but wrong again.

The answer, amazingly, is an actual animal, seemingly too strange to be true, but alive and real. Meet the star-nosed mole.

The riddle's answer lies in the mole's remarkable snout. The star consists of 22 fleshy pink appendages, or "rays," which radiate from the point of the mole's narrow nose, in arcs of 11 around each nostril. Each ray is covered with tiny bumps called Eimer's organs, which contain specialized nerve endings for detecting shapes and textures. Each star, with about 25,000 Eimer's organs, has six times more sensory neurons than an entire human hand.

Neurobiologist Kenneth Catania of Vanderbilt University has noted astonishing analogies between the mole's touch perception and the eyesight of surface-dwelling animals, including humans. The mole browses its dark network of tunnels, pressing the star rapidly here and there against the walls to generate a broad scan, just as we build a mental image of our surroundings by shifting our eyes from spot to spot. When any ray touches a possible food item, the mole then applies subsequent touches with the two most sensitive rays, at the bottom center of the star. Like the fovea of the retina, these central rays are relatively small but have disproportionate nerve density and processing area in the brain, thus allowing the mole literally to focus on objects of interest, but with touch instead of sight.

Immediately after these ultra-sensitive rays zoom in and confirm something edible, they part to make way for the mole's tweezer-like front teeth to snap up the prey. The mole carries out this whole process, from identification to ingestion, with speed unmatched by any other known mammal—as fast as 120 milliseconds, or more than twice as fast as a blink of your eyes. Such speed, Catania

suggests, has allowed the mole to adopt an expanded diet, including very tiny prey that wouldn't provide sufficient caloric reward to be worth the time of slower foragers.

Aside from its singular snout, the star-nosed mole also differs outwardly from other mole species by its unusually long tail. In winter and spring, the tail thickens with fat deposits, which may serve as energy storage or a means of heat retention. Otherwise, the star-nosed mole looks much like other moles, with very thick, dark fur and short, strong forelimbs with long claws for digging. Star-nosed moles have tiny eyes, which probably serve only to distinguish light from dark.



Star-nosed moles live throughout eastern North America, from central Canada to the Atlantic, south to the coast of the Carolinas and Georgia. Star-nosed moles are common in the Finger Lakes region, but are rarely seen because they spend almost all of their time under the surface, out of view.

More than other mole species, they favor areas with wet soils, such as moist woods, edges of ponds and waterways, marshes, and poorly drained meadows. These soft, saturated soils were likely a defining factor in allowing the star to evolve with such complexity and exquisite sensitivity, as mole species that live in drier soils have tougher snouts with fewer Eimer's organs. Star-nosed moles can dig approximately 8 feet per hour, with tunnels extending from the surface to depths of up to 2 feet. Active year-round, they also create tunnels through snow.

The tunnels of star-nosed moles often open directly underwater. Unlike other moles, they are strong swimmers, propelling themselves with powerful alternating forepaw swipes. Remarkably, the star-nosed mole is the first mammal, along with the water shrew, with the known ability to smell underwater. It does so by blowing bubbles through its nostrils onto submerged objects or scent trails, then quickly inhaling the bubbles back in, several times a second. The mole can stay underwater for about ten seconds before having to catch a breath at the surface.

So, no, the star-nosed mole is not a mythical creature, nor an allegory, nor a crazy flight of imagination. Indeed, thanks to the discoveries of science, it's even becoming less and less of a riddle. Rather, it's a marvelous reality of our world—utterly unique and practically right next door.

—Mark Chao

Finger Lakes Land Trust

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PERMIT NO. 1

Winter 2017-18 Calendar

TREE IDENTIFICATION WALK, SATURDAY, MARCH 10, 2018, 2:00pm, Houghton Land Preserve, Corning, NY. Join Ryan Davis, Chesapeake Forests Program Coordinator for the Alliance for the Chesapeake Bay, for a tree identification walk at the Land Trust's new Houghton Land Preserve in Corning. We can't use leaves to identify trees for nearly half of the year, but winter is a lovely time to be in the woods. Learn how to identify trees in the winter, when there are no leaves and few other clues. This trip is limited to 20 people; please email info@fllt.org or call (607) 275-9487 to register. **DIRECTIONS:** From Rte 352/Denison Parkway in downtown Corning, turn south onto Chemung Street. Take Chemung Street to Spencer Hill Road and drive about 2 miles to the preserve entrance on your right.

Please see our calendar of upcoming events at fllt.org/events. Except in the case of extreme weather, walks go rain, sun or snow. Please check our Facebook page or web site for updates.

CHRIS RAY