



The Land Steward

NEWSLETTER OF THE FINGER LAKES LAND TRUST

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes region

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Farmland Forever: 600 Acres Conserved in Canandaigua



In 2020, the American Farmland Trust released a report analyzing the impacts of development pressure on America's farmland. The report reveals that in New York State, 78% of farmland conversion results in low-density residential development which fragments farms piece-by-piece, and limits the long-term viability of nearby farms.

TO protect our region's viable agricultural lands, the Land Trust works with the New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets (NYSDAM) to secure funding through their Farmland Protection Implementation Grant program (FPIG). In partnership with NYSDAM and the Town of Canandaigua, the Land Trust recently protected 606 acres at Kim-Mar Farms in the towns of Canandaigua and Hopewell, Ontario County, with a conservation easement.

Kim-Mar Farms is located just off State Route 332, north of the city of Canandaigua. In recent years, residential development pressure has become intense in this area of Ontario County, given its proximity to the Rochester metropolitan area. The farm is owned and operated by Kim and Mark Stryker, first-generation farmers who produce corn, wheat, soybeans, hay, straw, and beef cattle—all of which are sold to local markets.

Kim and Mark bought their first 84

acres in 1991 and continue to purchase neighboring parcels to grow their operations. Almost 500 acres of their property's soils are classified as prime or soils of statewide significance. They are committed to best management practices and work with the Ontario County Soil & Water Conservation District to control erosion and stormwater runoff. These practices are important ecologically, as the farm drains into Beaver Creek and Padelford

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For more than 30 years, the Land Trust has been working “to conserve forever the lands and waters of the Finger Lakes region, ensuring scenic vistas, local foods, clean water, and wild places for everyone.” As you can see in this issue of *The Land Steward*, our work continues.



RICK LIGHTBODY

What is not highlighted is the collective effort of the Land Trust staff and board to ensure that our work truly benefits everyone in our region.

Our preserves are free and open to the public, but not everyone who wants to visit has the opportunity to do so, or will feel a sense of safety while there. How can we best ensure that our network of preserves is truly open for everyone?

There are stressed communities within our region that suffer from poverty and other major challenges. How can we best help these communities connect with nature?

Our work takes place on the traditional homeland

of the Haudenosaunee (Hodinöhsö:ni’) who lived on these lands and waters long before their first contact with Western settlers. How can we partner more closely with the Haudenosaunee to achieve shared goals?

We are wrestling with these and many related questions right now. We have embarked on a journey of discovery – a journey that promises to strengthen the Land Trust and allow us to better meet the diverse needs of our region.

Andrew Zepp, Executive Director



Farmland Forever: 600 Acres Conserved in Canandaigua

continued from cover

Brook, tributaries of the Canandaigua Outlet.

The Stryker easement provides for a forested buffer and “Resource Protection Area” to protect Padelford Brook. The Town of Canandaigua created the “Padelford Brook Greenway,” an area designated for conservation in the town’s Padelford Brook Greenway Plan. The Greenway contains a significant portion of prime farmland as well as wetland and riparian areas worthy of protection.

“We would like to thank all of those involved in this project for their foresight and commitment to preserving our great natural resources, farmland,

and water quality,” the Stryker family stated. “With the help of NYSDAM, Ontario County, the leadership of the towns of Canandaigua and Hopewell, and the Finger Lakes Land Trust, this project has come to fruition.”

“The commitment of the Stryker family to protecting their farm is outstanding,” said Elizabeth Newbold, Project Manager for the Land Trust. “They first started the process with the town nearly 10 years ago, showing their long-term dedication to preserving their land. This project protects not only a beautiful farm, but also an important water resource and development buffer for the town, and the history and legacy

of the family’s stewardship of that land.”

This is the fifth project done in partnership with the NYSDAM, the Town of Canandaigua, and the Land Trust. Recent projects include the protection of Catalpa Farm and Brock Acres, both large-scale crop farms located two miles away,

By protecting farms with conservation easements, the Land Trust can ensure long-term agricultural viability. The organization has protected over 4,000 acres of farmland, helping to sustain the Finger Lakes agricultural community for generations to come.

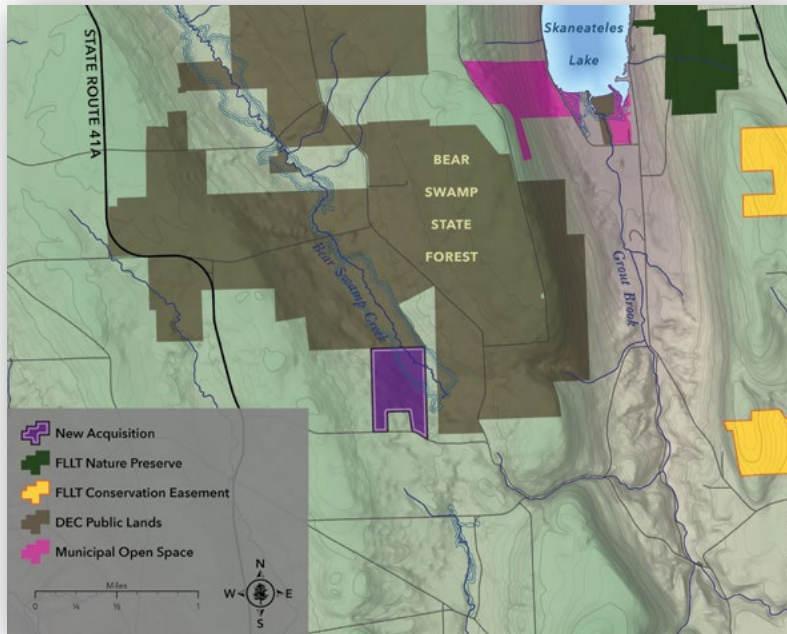
Land Acquisition A Win for Skaneateles Lake

The Land Trust recently acquired 102 acres nestled among the rolling hills of southern Cayuga County in Sempronius. The property is bordered to the north by Bear Swamp State Forest and contains 2,275 feet of frontage on Bear Swamp Creek, a critical tributary to Skaneateles Lake. The property also contains 26 acres of wetlands, many springs and streams, mature forest, and a well-maintained trail system.

The Land Trust purchased the property from Brenda (Bean) Contento, who spent her childhood farming, hunting, and foraging on the land with her family. “We picked every kind of berry imaginable to eat or freeze for pies,” Brenda said. “Neighbors stopped by sometimes to play cards and have a slice of my mom’s famous pie.”

The family also spent time exploring the forests and wetlands on the property, and Brenda remembers waking up early in the mornings, packing a snack, and leaving a note for her parents as she went out alone to the swamp. She seems to have memories of every corner of the property and describes herself as being “both sad and thrilled” to have sold the land and to know that it will continue to be protected.

Conserving the property will help protect Skaneateles Lake—the source of drinking water for the city of Syracuse. Ongoing efforts by the Land Trust focus on securing hillsides in this area, known as the Skaneateles Highlands, especially



those adjacent to Bear Swamp State Forest.

The organization intends to transfer the property to the state in the future as an addition to Bear Swamp State Forest. The forest is part of an Audubon-designated Important Bird Area, hosts a popular network of recreational trails, and features extensive wetlands and rare flora.

“Bear Swamp is one of the most pristine wetlands remaining in our region,” said Finger Lakes Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. “Acquisition of this land

is a win for wildlife, water quality, and outdoor recreation.”

This is the Land Trust’s seventh conservation project on Bear Swamp Creek, where it has protected 4.5 miles of streambank. Other protected lands in the area include Carpenter Falls State Unique Area, the Land Trust’s Bahar Nature Preserve, and three privately owned properties that have entered into conservation easement agreements with the Land Trust.



Six Mile Creek Watershed Projects Help Protect Ithaca's Drinking Water Supply

In March, the Land Trust accepted the generous donation of a 170-acre conservation easement from longtime members and supporters Charles and Jane Walcott. Avid conservationists, the Walcotts wanted to protect the land they love, located in Dryden, Tompkins County, in perpetuity.

The property is wholly located in the Six Mile Creek watershed, the municipal water supply for the city of Ithaca. Situated off of Besemer Hill Road, high above the Six Mile Creek valley, the largely wooded property includes part of Cooks Corner Gully, a Tompkins County Unique Area, and several intermittent streams that drain to the creek. While portions of the property are maintained as brushlands

and meadows to provide habitat for a variety of birds and other wildlife, nearly 85% of the property will remain forested forever.

The role forests play in protecting water quality cannot be overstated, especially on this property which is entirely underlain by erodible soils. Complex associations between roots and fungi hold soil in place and cycle nutrients and water back into the living system. Above ground, leaf litter, branches, and fallen logs (what ecologists like to call “coarse woody debris”) absorb and slow the flow of water across the land, allowing it to soak into the ground. This moderates the impact of both heavy rains and prolonged dry spells. Trees cast shade over streams, cooling the water which

results in higher oxygen concentrations and a corresponding increase in the abundance and diversity of aquatic life.

Protecting the Walcott property with a conservation easement will also prevent their land from being subdivided and developed into smaller housing lots. More importantly, it maintains more than 140 acres of forest which will continue to live, grow, thrive, and ultimately, protect the drinking water that flows to nearly every tap in the city of Ithaca.

The project was supported by a generous grant from the City of Ithaca's Six Mile Creek Watershed Protection Fund. “This donation is a welcome and important addition to other efforts of the Finger Lakes Land Trust to protect the Six Mile Creek watershed,” said Ithaca City Mayor Svante Myrick. “My sincere thanks to the Walcotts and the FLLT for their visionary generosity and work in keeping the source of the city of Ithaca's drinking water safe and clean.”

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges attorney Christopher K. Werner of Bolan Code for providing pro bono services in support of this project.

“This project is the Land Trust’s 20th conservation easement within the Six Mile Creek watershed and the state’s funding will build upon other conservation investments made by the Land Trust, the City of Ithaca, and Tompkins County.”

In January, the Land Trust protected 13 acres in Dryden, Tompkins County, with a conservation easement using grant funds from the New York State Water Quality Improvement Project (WQIP) program, administered by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). This project is part of the Land Trust’s broader Six Mile Creek Conservation Partnership Project.

The property is owned by Ithaca resident Lenore Boris who was initially uncertain if her property’s size would be of interest to the Land Trust. However, size is only one factor the organization considers when assessing projects. Sometimes, a property’s location relative to other protected lands plays a large role in elevating seemingly small projects. When the state announced land conservation projects as eligible under the WQIP program, Lenore’s property was a perfect match.

Though modest in size, from a conservation perspective the Boris property is mighty! This narrow strip of land, with frontage on Slaterville Road, also has more than 1,000 feet of frontage on both banks of Six Mile Creek, a wide gravel bar, and part of a floodplain forest. Short, but steep wooded slopes prevent soil from washing into the creek. The property is also immediately adjacent to and upstream of two other private properties protected with Land Trust conservation easements.

The conservation easement will limit development of the property while protecting the creek corridor, floodplain

forest, and sensitive slopes above the creek. Additionally, the Land Trust will continue to partner with Lenore and the Tompkins County Soil and Water Conservation District to rehabilitate and restore vegetation on the creek’s south bank to further safeguard water quality.

As part of New York State’s Environmental Protection Fund, the WQIP supports projects to improve water quality, reduce the potential for harmful algal blooms (HABs), and protect drinking water across the state. DEC has announced more than \$37 million in grants that are helping partners support 37 WQIP land acquisition projects to date.

“We are grateful for the state’s commitment to this project through the WQIP Program,” says Finger Lakes Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. “This project is the Land Trust’s 20th conservation easement within the Six Mile Creek watershed and the state’s funding will build upon other conservation investments made by the Land Trust, the City of Ithaca, and Tompkins County.”

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges attorney Peter Miller for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.



Land Acquisition Adds to Conservation Lands at Connecticut Hill

Spanning over 11,000 acres across Schuyler and Tompkins counties lies Connecticut Hill Wildlife Management Area, one of the largest contiguous high elevation forests in the region. A rugged landscape that is home to black bear and notable bird species such as the Northern Goshawk, Connecticut Hill is also the largest wildlife management area in New York State.

In January, the Land Trust purchased 66 acres directly adjacent to Connecticut Hill in Newfield, Tompkins County, from Walter Cogswell of Schenectady, NY. After fleeing Germany during World War I, Walt's grandfather settled in Newfield and bought the land with a business partner in 1921. He raised Walt's mother and her three siblings on the property in a plank house during the Great Depression. "She often told of hanging pictures of steaks on the kitchen walls so they could imagine that the potatoes and sauerkraut they ate for most meals was, in fact, meat," Walt shared.

Walt grew up on the property, too. "I spent many days of my childhood exploring the property, helping split firewood, jumping from the haymow, picking beetles off the potato plants, and drawing pails of water from the dug well for use in the house and garden," Walt writes. Although he intended to build a home on the land after he purchased it from his mother in 1983, his life took him to the Hudson Valley, where he and his family still live. Since the property was in his family for 100 years, Walt wanted to make sure the land was

conserved. "It's been my fervent hope that the land would remain undeveloped, so I was extremely pleased to happen upon the opportunity to have the Finger Lakes Land Trust take possession of it," he said.

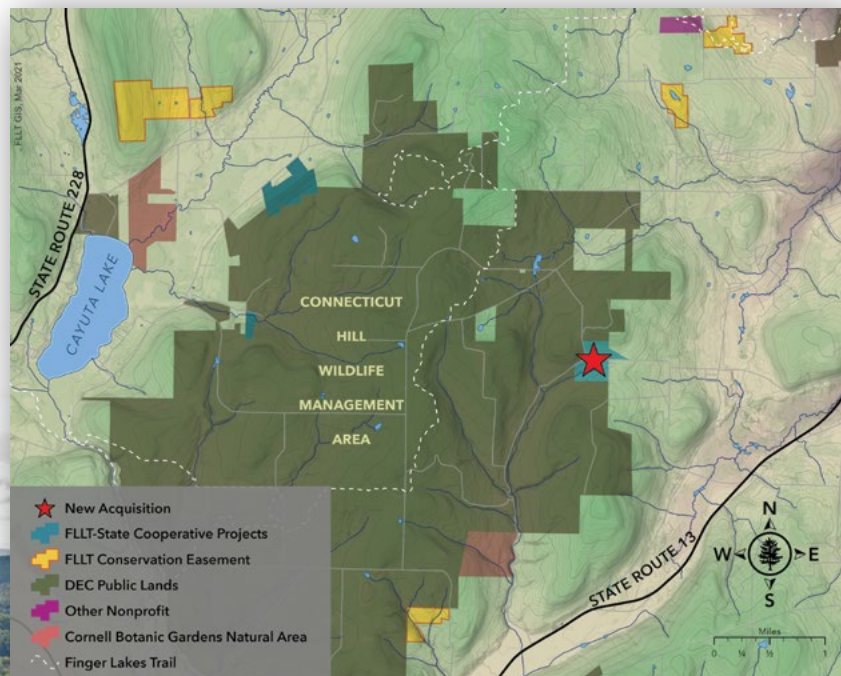
The property features a mix of fields, forests, wetlands, and more than 4,000 feet of road frontage. The Land Trust intends to transfer the land to the state as an addition to Connecticut Hill when funds become available.

Connecticut Hill is a key component of the Emerald Necklace, an emerging greenbelt that will ultimately link 50,000 acres of existing conservation land in an arc around Ithaca, from the Finger Lakes National Forest in the west to the Hammond Hill State Forest in the east. The Emerald Necklace is recognized as a priority project within New

York State's Open Space Plan and is a conservation priority for the Land Trust.

With its road frontage and easily accessible recreational opportunities, this property would have been an attractive prospect for residential development. Thanks to Walt, and his connection to this land, it is now conserved forever.

—Alli Sribarra



Join Us for the June 2021 Bioblitz!

Mark your calendars for our 1st official Bioblitz, this June 11th to June 13th! This event is free and open to all. Participants will visit Land Trust preserves, discover and document living things, then submit their observations via the online platform iNaturalist.

1 Learn how to Bioblitz on Tuesday, May 25th at 7:30 p.m.

Download the iNaturalist app to your mobile device and register as a user, or just register at inaturalist.org. Then, join us online for a presentation by member and volunteer Mark Chao who will teach you how to use iNaturalist to become a citizen scientist. Register in advance at fllt.org/events.

(Optional) From your iNaturalist mobile app or desktop browser, search "Projects" for "Finger Lakes Land Trust June 2021 Bioblitz" and join the project. This will enable you to find the project easily in your own list of joined projects, and also enable organizers to contact you conveniently. Even if you do not join the project, all observations from eligible sites during the time period will be included in the bioblitz tally.

2 Participate in the Bioblitz, June 11th-13th

Visit FLLT nature preserves from **June 11 through June 13, 2021**. Visit fllt.org/map for a list of eligible sites, and choose a time and location that fits your schedule. Please stay on marked trails at all times and follow social distancing protocols. Take photographs or sound recordings of the flora and fauna you find, then upload your media to iNaturalist, noting the location and date. Click "What did you see?" and select from among the options that iNaturalist suggests or enter your own identification.



3 Discover what we found on Tuesday, June 29th at 7:30 p.m.

Regroup online with Mark Chao and other expert naturalists to review observations and receive help with identification. Register at fllt.org/events.

Bioblitz is free to participate but donations are welcomed. General donations may be made, or please let the Land Trust know if you would like to make a pledge of any amount per species by contacting us at info@fllt.org or (607) 275-9487. We will keep a tally of the total species count and announce results at the June 29 Recap Event. Gifts can be made online at fllt.org/give. Please click the box that says "This gift is in honor or memory of someone" and type in: June 2021 Bioblitz.

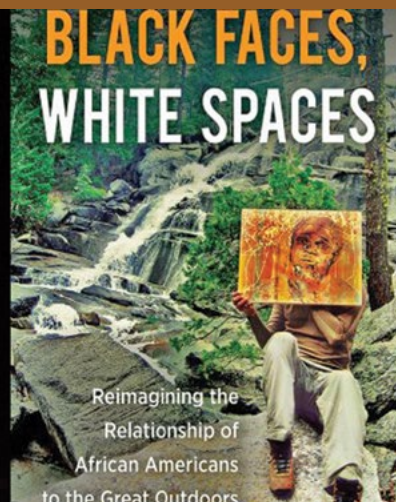
More details about June 2021 Bioblitz can be found at fllt.org/bioblitz2021.

Program Highlights

ON February 25, the Land Trust co-sponsored an online lecture by Dr. Carolyn Finney titled "2020 Vision: a Black Walden Pond and Other Musings," in partnership with Cornell Botanic Gardens, Ithaca Children's Garden, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and The Learning Farm. With over 1,000 people in attendance, Dr. Finney, author of "Black Faces, White Spaces," shared her work on the intersectionality of race, power, and the environment. Drawing from her book and life experiences, Dr. Finney explained the historical nuances that have led us to this point of racial



reckoning and how we can move forward together to ensure equitable green spaces for all.



To watch a recording of the lecture, please visit the Land Trust's web site at fllt.org/news.

Remembering Percy Browning

All of us at the Finger Lakes Land Trust wish to pay tribute to Percy Browning, longtime Finger Lakes Land Trust board member, and dear friend.

Percy was a tremendous woman—a singer and actress, advocate for the arts, dog-lover, world traveler, and an extraordinarily generous supporter of the causes she believed in. She cared about water and land conservation very deeply.

In addition to her role chairing the Finger Lakes Land Trust's first regional capital campaign and her terms on the board, Percy donated two important parcels of land. These gifts of land expanded both the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve and the Stevenson Forest Preserve. She loved to look at the region, and all that the Land Trust was working to preserve, on a map!

We adored Percy and will so miss her mischievous smile, savvy advice, and strong leadership.



RICK LIGHTBODY

Anonymous Donation Supports Stewardship Efforts

With each new nature preserve or conservation easement, the Land Trust takes on additional responsibilities in perpetuity.

Thanks to the recent donation of \$500,000 by an anonymous donor, the organization is making progress toward ensuring sufficient stewardship funds for the ongoing care of the lands we protect.

This latest gift will be added to the Darlington Stewardship Fund, established in 2017 in honor of Land Trust founder and longtime volunteer Betsy Darlington of Ithaca. Each year, the organization draws a modest amount from this fund to cover its stewardship operations while managing the fund so that its principal is protected against inflation and sustained over time. For additional information about the Darlington Fund, please contact Senior Director Kelly Makosch at (607) 275-9487 or kellymakosch@fllt.org.

SCOTT LEVINE

Our Forever Work Our Forever Home

Your gift will help us protect the lands and waters of the Finger Lakes region, the special places we call home.

Planned gifts come in many forms and can help you live your values. Learn more at fllt.org/planned-giving or call (607) 275-9487.

CHRIS RAY

thank you

While 2020 most certainly presented its challenges, members like you made it possible for the FLLT to continue its critical work of protecting the beauty and integrity of the Finger Lakes. Thanks to you, we surpassed the major milestone of over 25,000 acres conserved forever, and we look forward to working together to accomplish even more in 2021.

We are very grateful for gifts of all sizes and use them wisely to protect land and water across the region. In particular, we wish to acknowledge everyone who generously gave \$100 or more in 2020. * Please accept our heartfelt thanks!

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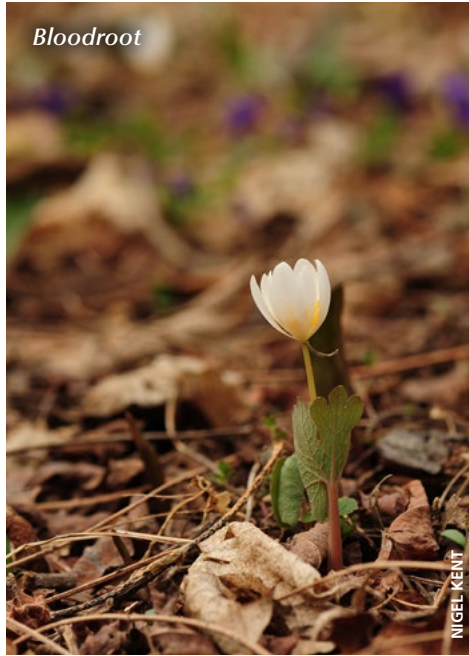
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Rev, Hover, Pump, Zoom: The High-Performance Hybrid Powertrain of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird

Down past the second meadow at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve, an old snag rises above a dense expanse of successional shrubs. For years now, lucky passersby on sunny spring days have regularly seen a male Ruby-throated Hummingbird here, perching like a little red-badged sentinel at the tip of a branch, zinging away to resume his rounds, then faithfully returning to his post.

Scenes like this will play out in many other preserved lands and feeder gardens throughout our region in coming weeks. Given their familiarity, endearingly diminutive proportions, and distinctive habits, it's no wonder that Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are among our most iconic and beloved birds. And beyond the features that we can readily see, recent advances in science and technology-aided imaging shed further light on just how amazing their adaptations are.

Hummingbirds are unique among birds in their ability to hover without a headwind, and even to fly backwards and upside down. They achieve these aeronautical feats via distinctive wing mechanics, documented in the past two decades using laser stroboscopy. Unlike other birds, which open their wings on the downstroke and fold them on the upstroke, hummingbirds keep their wings open on both strokes. They twist their wings on flexible shoulder joints in a figure-eight pattern, creating vortices that in turn generate lift.

All this happens far too fast for the unaided human eye to see – about 50-60 wingbeats per second. What's more, hummingbirds' hearts thrum at up to 20 beats per second, and even at rest they breathe 250 times per minute. When hummingbirds fly, their oxygen consumption relative to muscle mass is approximately 10 times higher than for top human athletes.

Therefore fueling up is another vitally important, highly evolved aspect of hummingbird life history. Ruby-throated Hummingbirds feed primarily on flower nectar, modestly supplemented by tiny insects and spiders. They have bifurcated tongues with feathery tips and two grooves down the middle. It was long believed that capillary action drew nectar into these grooves passively, but scientists have recently demonstrated via high-speed videography and flow modeling that the tongues actually expand when they touch nectar in a flower, creating forces that actively pump the nectar through the grooves into the bird's body, up to 20 times per second. The tongue contracts again when it passes back out through the narrow bill tip, ensuring that the nectar remains inside.

Male Ruby-throated Hummingbirds in the breeding season drink nectar every 15 to 20 minutes, alternating feeding sessions with moments of rest and high-intensity flights, courtship displays, and battles with other males. They maintain a very precise energy balance during these times, quickly burning through the sugar that they take in. At night, without blood sugar replenishment, hummingbirds can slow their metabolisms to a profound torpor, allowing their body temperatures to approach ambient air temperatures.

The nest of the Ruby-throated Hummingbird is about the size of a ping-pong ball. The female builds the nest out of plant fibers, scales of buds, and spider silk with lichens for camouflage, on branches 10 to 90 feet above the ground. She lays two eggs, each the size of a small bean. The nests have a distinctive ability to stretch to accommodate growing young. Indeed, fledgling Ruby-throated Hummingbirds are much larger than their parents, reaching around 4.5 grams as opposed to 2.5 to 3 grams for typical breeding adults.



Toward the end of the breeding season, adult Ruby-throated Hummingbirds change their routines and metabolic activity, doubling their body fat percentage and approaching the size of the fledglings. Then, during southward migration, their finely-tuned reliance on frequent sugar intake becomes a total dependence on stored fat. The journey to wintering grounds in Central America can be as long as 2,000 miles, including a nonstop trip of 500+ miles across the Gulf of Mexico.

The closest living relatives of hummingbirds are swifts. Scientists believe that the first hummingbirds evolved about 42 million years ago. Surprisingly, the earliest fossil records of hummingbirds are from Europe, where no hummingbirds remain today. This evidence, combined with DNA analysis, suggests that hummingbirds expanded their range to the Americas, then died out in Eurasia. They became established in South America and radiated into many new species starting around 22 million years ago. Now there are more than 300 hummingbird species. Evolution is thought still to be ongoing. But the Ruby-throated Hummingbird remains the only hummingbird species that regularly occurs in eastern North America.

Thus, the Ruby-throated Hummingbird is much more than a charming little curiosity or a spark of glittering color. It's a high-revving fuel-switching hybrid hovercraft-rocket offering short-range and long-range settings, plus "economy mode" on demand – the culmination of millions of years of engineering refinement through evolution, revealed by modern science.

—Mark Chao

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Spring 2021 Calendar

Tuesday, June 1 at 7:30 pm

Birding for Beginners

Interested in learning a new hobby enjoyed around the planet by millions of people? Join Jason Gorman, FLLT Nature Preserve Manager, to learn the basics of birding at this online event. Registration required. Visit fllt.org/events to learn more.

Wednesday, June 2 at 7:00 pm

Filling the Gap: Conservation Easements for the Finger Lakes Region

Max Heitner, FLLT Director of Conservation, will provide a brief overview of the organization's work within the Canandaigua Lake watershed, and describe available conservation tools for landowners with a focus on conservation easements. Hosted by the Canandaigua Lake Watershed Association. Registration required. Visit fllt.org/events to learn more.

See details about our June 2021 Bioblitz on page 8 or visit fllt.org/bioblitz2021.



Tree Swallow