



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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Finger Lakes Forever— A Campaign for the Future



BILL HECHT

The FLLT recently announced “Finger Lakes Forever,” a \$20 million dollar capital campaign to protect and steward critical lands and waters across the region.

The organization has already raised \$18 million toward this ambitious goal, much of it quietly raised over the course of the pandemic. The FLLT is both thankful for and inspired by the donors who made early commitments to the campaign.

“The resources this campaign will provide are absolutely critical for ensuring our success in conserving the region’s last undeveloped shoreline and the best of our signature landscapes,” says Finger Lakes Land Trust executive director Andy Zepp. “It will also allow us to expand partnerships to advance watershed protection throughout the region.”

The larger Finger Lakes Forever campaign goal is further divided into three supporting goals, including

priority land and water conservation projects, the Stewardship Fund, and annual operating support through 2022. Campaign funds have already enabled the FLLT to open new nature preserves in the Keuka, Canandaigua, and Owasco lake watersheds, add to existing conservation areas overlooking Skaneateles Lake, and acquire lands in partnership with state and local agencies on Otisco Lake, within Ithaca’s Emerald Necklace, and along the Chemung River.

Over the course of the next year, the FLLT plans to protect an additional 2,000 acres and 4,400 feet of lakeshore through a mix of acquisitions and conservation easements. Upcoming projects include acquiring the 470-acre Bell Station property on Cayuga

Lake, creating three new public access points to the popular Finger Lakes Trail, protecting over 1,000 feet of pristine Seneca Lake shoreline, and securing additional parcels within the Canandaigua and Skaneateles lake watersheds. Through these efforts, the organization will secure 21 miles of frontage along our region’s streams, helping to protect water quality.

The FLLT will also initiate model restoration projects to help filter runoff and enhance habitat for fish and wildlife. Currently, the organization is partnering with both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the Seneca County Soil and Water District to restore a stream on the VanRiper Nature Preserve on Cayuga Lake. During 2022, the

continued on page 2



SCOTT LEVINE

Thanks to many generous donors, our Finger Lakes Forever campaign is already living up to its name. More than a mile of lakeshore has been secured through the campaign or is under contract, and we have the resources needed to protect 21 additional miles of streambank during the next year alone! Away from the lakes, the campaign has already made possible the creation of a new nature preserve in Ithaca’s Emerald Necklace and supported additions to growing greenbelt projects along the Chemung River and within the highlands near the south ends of Canandaigua and Skaneateles.

While we can point to many successes, we have never before faced such challenges. Real estate values are soaring and pressures on our undeveloped lands are ever-increasing. At the same time, our region continues to be vexed by cyanobacteria outbreaks (aka toxic algae). Both climate change and non-native invasive species present new challenges for us on what seems to be a daily basis!

Finger Lakes Forever provides the Land Trust with the resources we need to continue to achieve our

conservation goals while navigating these challenges. The campaign will allow us to accelerate our land protection efforts so we are able to secure key parcels that link existing conservation lands, ensuring that they won’t be isolated from one another.

The campaign will provide the resources needed to build strong partnerships with our lake associations and government conservation agencies to effectively address our water quality challenges. And most importantly, Finger Lakes Forever will help us build our Stewardship Fund to ensure that we are able to live up to our commitments by capably stewarding our nature preserves and conservation easements.

Please give as generously as you can to support this special investment in the future of our region. Together, we really can make a difference.

Andrew Zepp, Executive Director

Finger Lakes Forever—A Campaign for the Future

continued from cover

FLLT will again work with the USFWS to restore wetlands near the south end of Owasco Lake. These projects, and others like them, will help protect our lakes and drinking water.

“The health of our lakes depends on the health of our land,” said Dave Birchenough, President of the FLLT Board of Directors. “The Finger Lakes Forever campaign will help ensure the Finger Lakes region retains its beauty and vitality for generations to come.”

In addition to funding land and water conservation projects,

the campaign is also building the organization’s Stewardship Fund to help fulfill the promise of ‘conserved forever’. The FLLT owns and manages over 45 nature preserves, has already conserved more than 28,000 acres of land, and has plans to conserve much more. This amazing achievement presents a huge challenge for the future, one where staff will need to work together with volunteers and partners to take care of these protected lands. Building the Stewardship Fund will help the Land Trust continue saving lands

and waters with confidence that it has the resources needed to protect them forever.

The FLLT would love for all of its members and supporters to be a part of this campaign. A video, project highlights, and additional campaign information is available at fllt.org/forever. To support the campaign, learn about naming opportunities, or make a multi-year pledge, please contact Senior Director Kelly Makosch at (607) 275-9487 or kellymakosch@fllt.org.

— Kelly Makosch

Stream Restoration at VanRiper Conservation Area

Thanks to a partnership between the Land Trust, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the Seneca County Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD), more than 600 feet of deeply eroded streambanks are now stabilized and in the process of recovering.

A small stream flows through the Land Trust's VanRiper Conservation Area on its way to Cayuga Lake. Many years ago, the stream's hydrology was dramatically altered during the construction of nearby State Route 89. Surface runoff was concentrated into a culvert that passes under the state highway. This change increased flows into the stream, especially during storm events, leading to significant erosion and the deposition of topsoil and nutrients into the lake.

The Land Trust requested assistance from the USFWS Partners for Fish and Wildlife program. A biologist from the program worked with staff from the Land Trust and the SWCD to design the project, which involved restoring more natural "riffle and pool" flows by installing carefully placed log and rock structures. In contrast to more typical "riprap" erosion control projects, this approach more closely mimics natural processes and creates higher quality habitat for fish and wildlife.

More than 600 feet of stream corridor was restored by first raising the level of the stream bed and then installing step pools that serve to dissipate the stream's energy, reducing erosion. After completing the work,



An excavator installing log and rock structures designed to control erosion

CHRIS RAY

Land Trust staff and volunteers planted native trees and shrubs in the disturbed areas. The site will now be carefully monitored and additional work will occur as needed to complete and maintain the restoration project.

Funding for the restoration was provided by a grant from New York State's Water Quality Improvement

Program and contributions to the Land Trust's Finger Lakes Forever campaign.

The public is welcome to view the restoration site, but visitors are asked to stay on marked trails to minimize disturbance to the area. Directions and additional preserve information can be found at fllt.org/vanriper.



The stream showing severe erosion before work began

ANDY ZEPP



Land Trust staff and volunteers planted native trees and shrubs along the disturbed stream bank.

CHRIS RAY

Conservation Easement Donation Helps Protect Rochester's Drinking Water



Directly upstream from the Hemlock-Canadice State Forest and bordering the Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area, a conservation easement now adds 53 acres to the network of conservation lands in the Hemlock Lake watershed.

The property includes two tributaries to Springwater Creek, which flows into Hemlock Lake. Hemlock Lake provides water to the city of Rochester, and conserving the forested land around it provides natural buffers and filtration that reduce water treatment costs.

"Water is a prime reason for wanting to protect this property," explains Bob Good, the landowner. The property also encompasses much of Reynolds Gully, a classic Finger Lakes gorge rimmed with sugar maples.

Each spring, Bob and his family tap maple trees on the property, one of their many traditions that makes this piece of property special. "We loved it from the beginning," Bob said. He and his wife, Sue, purchased the first 11 acres in 1982

and camped frequently on the property with their young daughters. By 1988, with the help of family, they built a small cabin on the property and soon after, jumped on an opportunity to purchase a neighboring 17-acre parcel. In 2015, Bob and Sue added the last 26 acres—the piece that connects the original two parcels with Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area. In addition to this important connection, the property also lies in priority conservation areas named in the 2016 New York State Open Space Conservation Plan and the 2010 New York State Strategic Plan for State Forest Management.

Although Sue passed away in 2016, she and Bob had talked about permanently protecting the property that holds such special memories.

Bob and his children decided that a conservation easement offered the best option to conserve the land they still love and enjoy. Bob decided to donate a conservation easement to protect the property in honor of Sue and their family's connection to the land.

"The idea that the conservation is permanent to generations beyond us that I will never meet, that's kind of special," Bob says. Yes, it is.

The Harriet Hollister Spencer State Recreation Area includes approximately 20 miles of trails for hiking, running, biking, and skiing. The Hemlock-Canadice State Forest includes a system of trails that allows hikers to explore the shores of these two pristine lakes. Check out gofingerlakes.org for more information.

—Alli Sribarra

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Karianne Polimeni of Harter Secrest & Emery LLP in Rochester, NY, for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

Land Trust Establishes Tuff's Island Conservation Area

Near the end of 2021, the Land Trust purchased an unusual property located in the Susquehanna River, southwest of the village of Owego, in Tioga County. Known as “Tuffs Island,” when the river runs low, the property actually consists of two islands totaling over 40 acres. But, when floodwaters rise, the property can shrink to a scant acre amidst rushing waters.

Under the ever-changing forces of deposition or erosion exerted by the Susquehanna River, the islands are constantly shape-shifting.

It appears that the powers wrought by the river on Tuffs Island have been in equilibrium for at least a hundred years because the islands are shown on topographic maps dating back to the early 1900s. They shift a bit in size and configuration, but their presence on maps for more than a century indicates they have been relatively stable.

Gravel bars and sand deposits left by the river serve as important habitat for wildlife, including migrating shorebirds passing

Gravel bars and sand deposits left by the river serve as important habitat for wildlife, including migrating shorebirds passing through each fall and turtles looking to lay their eggs.

through each fall and turtles looking to lay their eggs. These same areas offer ideal conditions for the germination and development of sycamore trees that thrive in floodplains and which may help anchor the islands in place. On a recent sunny day, the quiet, slow channel waters north of the island provided shelter for loafing ducks and stalking herons.

The Land Trust will oversee the islands as a conservation area where wildlife habitat will be safeguarded and the river will be afforded space to continue exerting its will. The Susquehanna River is the largest single source of fresh water to the Chesapeake Bay, which

is, in turn, the largest estuary in North America. Tuffs Island Conservation Area is located about five miles downstream of Hiawatha Island which is owned by the Waterman Conservation Education Center and protected by an FLLT-held conservation easement.

It is said that no one can step in the same river twice—because both the river and the person change with each new encounter. It is a reminder that all things are in flux and that change flows through every life. So it is with Tuffs Island, but one thing is certain—it will remain protected as an ever-changing feature of the Susquehanna River.

—Kris West



Conservation Easement Protects Family Heritage in Cayuga Lake Watershed

Layers of family history and a deep connection to the landscape recently inspired William (Bill) and Gail Shaw to permanently protect 45 acres on the west side of Cayuga Lake. The property, located in Covert, Seneca County, has been in Bill's family since 1940 when it was jointly purchased by his parents and friends of their family.

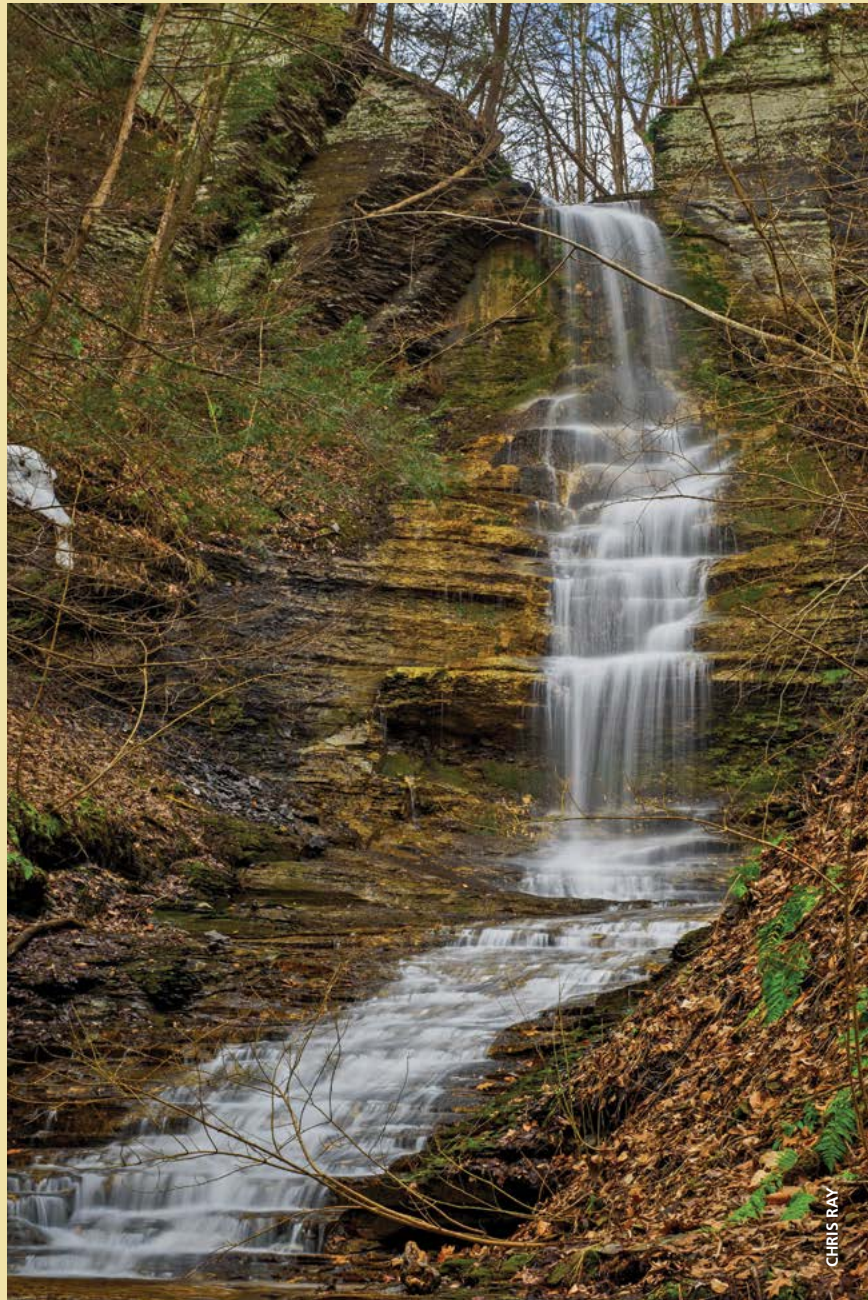
In December, Bill and Gail donated a conservation easement, permanently protecting the property which features 1,500 feet of frontage on State Route 89, part of the Cayuga Lake Scenic Byway. Entirely situated in the Cayuga Lake watershed, the land contains woodlands, a former orchard, and 1,825 feet of streambank along Hogback Creek, thoughtfully named by the Shaw family.

A rare shale column, rising 100 feet from a creek bed separates two majestic, secluded waterfalls. It was here in 1971, that Bill and Gail were married at the top of the falls. Over the next several decades they acquired adjoining lands to preserve their family heritage.

The Shaws enjoy hunting and hiking on their property and own a seasonal cottage here with 300 feet of lake frontage. The conservation easement will forever conserve this family treasure, prohibiting subdivision, securing steep slopes and unique waterfalls, and safeguarding water quality. The easement also provides an important buffer from development to nearby protected lands. The Shaws' property is just north of Camp Barton and Frontenac Point, two miles north of Taughannock Falls State Park, and across the lake from Bell Station and the FLLT's Sims-Jennings Preserve at Cayuga Cliffs.

"We are grateful for this wonderful gift from Bill and Gail Shaw," said Finger Lakes Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "This property is a remarkable natural area in its own right, and also plays an important role in helping to maintain water quality in Cayuga Lake."

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney Jim Miller of Miller Mayer LLP in Ithaca, NY, for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.



CHRIS RAY

Recent Acquisitions Add to Public Conservation Lands

The Land Trust recently sold and transferred two conservation properties to the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation. In the Southern Tier, a 104-acre parcel was added to the state's Big Flats Wildlife Management Area in Big Flats, Chemung County. This property features more than 4,000 feet of frontage along the

Chemung River as well as a portion of the Palisades, a well-known local landmark with steep, fluted bluffs.

In Tompkins County, 70 forested acres were added to Danby State Forest. This latest addition to the state forest is located on Coddington Road in the town of Caroline. It is adjacent to a 144-acre property recently added to the forest as well as another parcel

that is awaiting transfer to the state.

Both of these properties were first purchased by the Land Trust using its Opportunity Fund—an internal revolving loan fund that enables time sensitive acquisitions. Proceeds from the sale of these lands to the state is returned to the Opportunity Fund to make possible additional acquisitions in the future.

Thank You to Our Public Sector Partners

With over 45 nature preserves in the Finger Lakes region, the FLLT relies on the generosity of local and state partnerships to help us provide free and safe public access to our conservation lands.

WE are especially grateful to the towns of Big Flats, Canandaigua, Dryden, Fayette, and the New York State Department of Transportation for keeping our nature preserve parking lots clear of snow during the winter of 2021-2022. Thanks are also in order to the Town of Newfield for clearing an illegal garbage dump on newly-acquired land in Tompkins County. These contributions of time and service are especially meaningful now as the FLLT is seeing an increase in usage at many of its preserves in the region.



Land Trust Assists Village of Odessa with Rail Trail Acquisition

For years, railroads were constructed throughout the Finger Lakes region, connecting cities and rural villages, carrying goods, and serving general transportation needs for tourists and locals alike. While active railroads are still in use in the region, many have been abandoned over time. These old railroad beds are essentially flat and

linear and they make very suitable corridors for multi-use trails. As the rails-to-trails movement gains steam, more old rail corridors are being converted to trails that traverse our landscape of fields and forests. Some existing examples within the region include the Black Diamond Trail, Cayuga-Seneca Canal Trail, Ontario

Pathways, and the Keuka Outlet Trail.

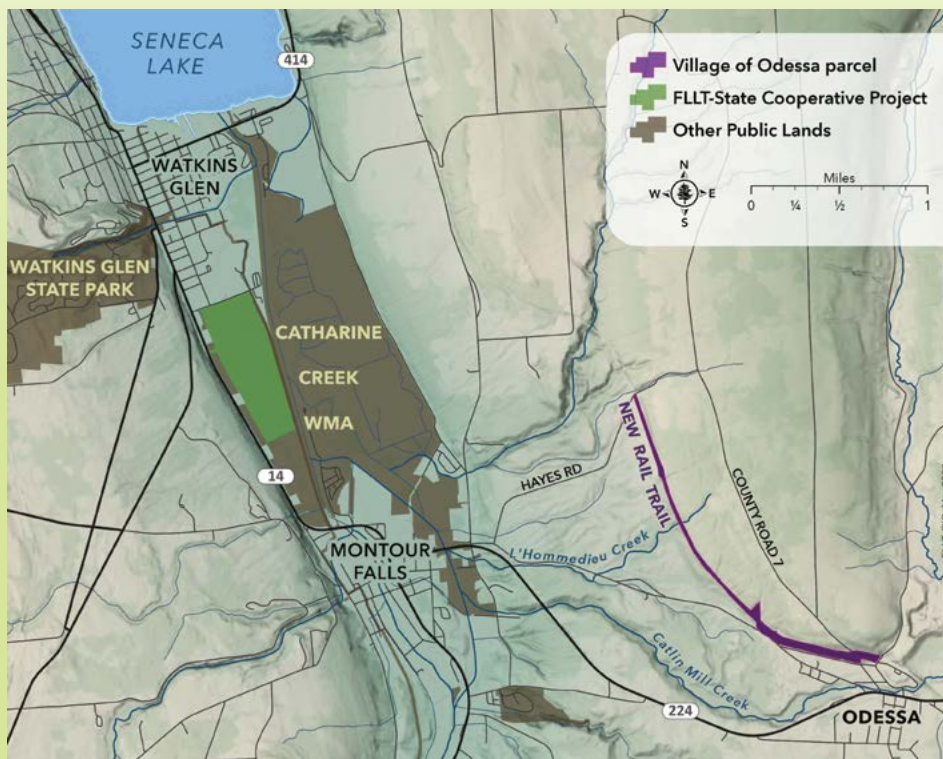
In the spring of 2021, the Village of Odessa reached out to the Finger Lakes Land Trust seeking assistance to secure a 44-acre property that encompasses more than two miles of an existing rail trail. The Land Trust agreed to provide technical assistance and a \$17,500 grant in support of the trail, and the village completed the acquisition in February 2022.

The newly protected trail passes through the towns of Catharine and Montour, and provides expansive views of the hills and valleys to the west. In order to open the trail to the general public, there are a few public access and infrastructure projects to complete.

Gerry Messmer, Mayor of the Village of Odessa, said of the project, "The Village of Odessa is excited to partner with Finger Lakes Land Trust and other private donors to secure our very own rail trail that connects right into Odessa. We look forward to working to clear the trail, build a couple of bridges, and make this a fully functional addition to our community for years to come."

For more information on rail trail recreational opportunities throughout the region, check out the list provided on our *Go Finger Lakes* website: gofingerlakes.org/the-best-rail-trails-in-the-finger-lakes-region.

—Max Heitner
SPRING 2022 • 7



thank you

You helped us make a difference this year! Thanks to your tremendous support, we have conserved over 28,000 acres, ensuring scenic vistas, local foods, clean water, and wild places for everyone.

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 2021. Please accept our heartfelt thanks!*

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continued on page 10

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continued on page 12

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A CLOSER LOOK

Songs in the Key of Life

A closer look at why and how birds sing

ALL around us, birds are heralding the arrival of spring. From tanagers and vireos resounding through the deciduous canopy, to warblers buzzing and trilling from the sunny edges, to Winter Wrens and waterthrushes pealing out their presence in our gorges, and more—in every habitat in our Finger Lakes, the few weeks from May into mid-June offer a dazzling soundscape of the year’s most diverse and ardent bird songs.

But what does it all mean? Why do birds sing? How? And how can we figure out who exactly is singing what?

Bird vocalizations fall into two categories—*songs and calls*. In general, we define bird song as a structured, usually complex vocalization serving either or both of two purposes—to defend territories and to attract mates. Most bird song is by males, though females do also sing territorially or for pair bonding, especially in the tropics. Bird calls are usually shorter and structurally simpler, serving a wider range of functions, including courtship, signaling alarm, or communicating a change in location.

We can therefore surmise that a Scarlet Tanager singing strings of burry phrases for minutes on end from the same perch is saying, “Here I am...I’m a male Scarlet Tanager, and this is my territory...Females, come check me out...Other male tanagers, stay away!” But this same tanager or his mate might call out “chick-brrrr!” to say simply, “I’m over here!” or a nasal whistle to announce the delivery of food to nestlings.

Almost no songbirds know their songs by instinct. Rather, most need to learn to sing. Songbirds begin learning songs as nestlings by hearing the songs of adults nearby. In this way, song traditions (known to biologists as “memes”) are passed down in songbird neighborhoods from year to year. Many songbird species have area-specific dialects.

Birds sing using a specialized organ called the syrinx. The syrinx is similar to our larynx, but whereas the larynx consists of one air passage, the syrinx branches into two tubes like an upside-down Y. Air flowing over vibrating membranes and cartilage near the intersection of these tubes generates sounds. Birds can modulate the air flow separately in each half of the syrinx. Thus they can make two sounds at once—and some, such as the Wood

Thrush, can even sing rising and falling notes at the same time. They can also switch from one branch to the other without pausing to breathe.

The songs of individual bird species are usually highly distinctive, especially to the ears of the birds themselves. This makes sense, as songs are usually directed at members of the same species. But one notable exception is with Philadelphia and Red-eyed Vireos. They sing

songs so similar to each other that even Red-eyed Vireos themselves cannot tell who’s singing, though Philadelphia Vireos can. As a result, Philadelphia Vireos can keep Red-eyed Vireos as well as other Philadelphia Vireos out of their foraging territories.

We humans can also learn to distinguish bird songs and thereby identify the singers to species, but it can take some work. One simple way is just to listen as much as possible, ideally seeing and visually identifying a bird as it sings. Describing a bird song in words to oneself can help. So too can starting with a very familiar bird song and then using it as a point of reference for others that are slightly different.

“That song reminds me of the TYU TYU tyu tyu tyu tyu tyu that Northern Cardinals sing outside my window at home. But this song is higher-pitched and has a jumble

after the TYU TYU...aha, I see it in the ravine—a Louisiana Waterthrush!”

And now there are amazing technology-driven shortcuts to bird song ID. One powerful yet highly accessible option for birders is Merlin, an app developed by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. The Sound ID feature of Merlin allows users to record songs on mobile phones and get real-time suggestions of the most likely species. Merlin deduces singers’ identities by comparing pitch and pattern with songs in the vast media archive of the Lab’s Macaulay Library, and also by taking eBird distribution data into account. The app also lets users conveniently read up on species and listen to songs for comparison.

As the drama of early-season courtship and territory defense turns to parental care and preparation for migration, the avian soundscape will gradually subside. By fall, only the chips and chatter of year-round resident bird calls will remain. So now is the time to get out, tune in, and enjoy the spring concert while it lasts!

—Mark Chao



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Spring 2022 Calendar

Bioblitz 2022

MEMORIAL DAY WEEKEND
Saturday, May 28 through
Monday, May 30

Visit Finger Lakes Land Trust preserves, discover and document living things, and submit your observations via the online platform iNaturalist. Participate any time during the course of the weekend, or join us for a guided in-person event. See full details at fllt.org/bioblitz2022.

33rd Annual Meeting
Thursday, June 16 at 7:30 p.m.

The 33rd Annual Meeting will be hosted online. Visit fllt.org/2022annualmeeting for more information on board candidates, voting, and registration.



CHRIS RAY

*Great Egret at Lindsay
Parsons Biodiversity Preserve
in Tompkins County*