



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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Shoreline to Summit Campaign Reaches the Top

For campaign chair Percy Browning, it's really all about the water. "Fresh, clean water is our most precious asset, and the land surrounding the water must be preserved and conserved. Our recent campaign was designed to accomplish these goals, and I am very pleased to have been a part of it," said Browning. Under her leadership, and with support from a core of committed volunteers, the Land Trust recently declared victory, both in reaching its fund-raising goals and in the numerous conservation projects that are flowing, and will continue to flow, from this successful campaign.

"We're very grateful to Percy and our volunteers, who are truly responsible for making this campaign a success," Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp added. "We certainly couldn't have done it without them or without the generous support of so many people across the region." *continued on page 4*

JULIE BERTRAM

Land Trust's 34th Nature Preserve Adds 200 Acres to Emerald Necklace

The Land Trust's latest jewel is a 200-acre parcel in Newfield, Tompkins County, that lies between the Newfield and Danby State Forests.

Known as the Charles Spencer Nature Preserve, the property is also in close proximity to the Arnot Forest, which consists of approximately 4,000 acres of undeveloped forest land owned by Cornell University.

The new acquisition is part of a larger vision. The Land Trust's Emerald Necklace project, which began in 2006, is an ambitious undertaking. The project involves identifying and preserving land to connect more than 50,000 acres of public forest around Ithaca, creating an arc of continuous greenbelt from the Hammond Hill State Forest in the east to the Finger Lakes National Forest in the northwest. This daunting, but worthwhile, objective cannot be achieved without the dedication and generosity of individuals and

continued on page 4

ANDREW ZEPP

Please Join Us!

Saturday morning, May 17th for the Land Trust's 25th Annual Meeting & Celebration, preceded by a guided bird walk at our Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby. (See Insert for Details.)

New York State's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) plays a key role in protecting our air and water, managing our solid waste, conserving open space, and ensuring the future of our family farms. Within the Finger Lakes Region, the EPF supports water quality programs that help keep our lakes clean. Allocations from the fund have also supported the protection of undeveloped shoreline and the acquisition of lands that provide enhanced access for sportsmen and hikers alike.

At the close of 2013, a grant from the EPF allowed Schuyler County and the Finger Lakes Land Trust to work together with the Argetsinger family to secure a scenic vineyard overlooking Seneca Lake. In the family for more than 100 years, this farm not only produces award winning grapes but also helps create those memorable vistas for which our region is so well known.

Before the recession, the state allocated as much as \$250 million annually toward these efforts. While we applaud the recently approved \$9 million increase for the EPF, the current funding level of \$162 million is far short of what is needed to ensure the quality of New York's environment and the future of our Finger Lakes Region.

With greater funding, our region can develop the "green infrastructure" we need to sustain our agricultural and tourism industries. For example, there is tremendous interest in the state's farmland

protection program, but the state has not offered an opportunity for farmers to apply to the program since 2009.

Most of the shoreline of our Finger Lakes is already developed, but we still have an opportunity to secure remaining parcels to accommodate access to the water for residents and visitors alike. We can also link our existing public lands and secure popular recreational resources such as the Finger Lakes Trail. The protection of additional farmland will not only secure our scenic landscapes but will also provide local farmers with capital that they can re-invest in their operations.

Without additional funding for the EPF, achieving these goals will be far more difficult. We will instead look back at lost opportunities that will not only diminish our children's quality of life but will also place at risk the lands and waters that serve as the basis of our economy.

Both for our region and for the state as a whole, this is a sound investment that we have got to make.



Andrew Zepp
Executive Director
Finger Lakes Land Trust



W. Stuart Schweizer
President
Finger Lakes Land Trust

Canandaigua Lake's West River Preserve to be Dedicated in Honor of Don & Skippy Raines

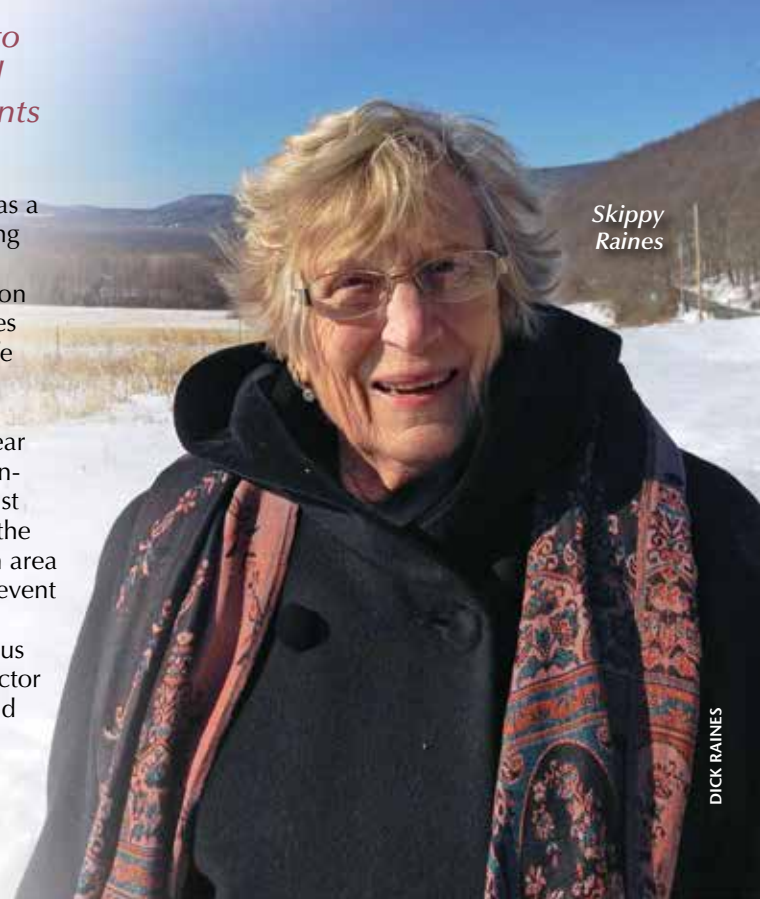
The Land Trust's Board of Directors recently decided to dedicate the West River Preserve in honor of Don and Skippy Raines—longtime conservationists and residents of Rochester and the Naples area.

The late Don Raines was a physician, while his wife Skippy served as a nurse. Though now retired, she continues to remain active, pursuing her interests in art and local civic causes in Naples and Canandaigua.

The West River Preserve was established in 2011 through a donation of land by Constellation Brands and the generous support of the Raines family. The Land Trust last year partnered with the US Fish and Wildlife Service to restore 65 acres of grassland bird habitat on what was an overgrown, abandoned vineyard.

The preserve is adjacent to High Tor Wildlife Management Area near the south end of Canandaigua Lake, and is located within an Audubon-designated Important Bird Area. During the coming year, the Land Trust intends to create a scenic overlook at the site; a birding trail will link the preserve with nearby state lands and provide access to an observation area to be located next to the extensive West River Marshes. A dedication event is planned for 2015.

"We're very grateful to the Raines family for making it possible for us to protect this wonderful natural area," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "I can't think of a more appropriate way to honor Don and Skippy, two dedicated conservationists who have made a difference in the Canandaigua watershed."



Skippy Raines

Onondaga County Farm Easement Curbs Urban Sprawl

IN December of last year, the Land Trust completed an important conservation easement agreement with John Rybinski, of Pompey, Onondaga County, protecting his 248 acres of farmland and forest from future development in an area south of Syracuse that is under persistent development pressure because of its scenic beauty and proximity to the city.

The new easement is the farthest east the Land Trust has ventured in its land protection efforts. The Rybinski farm sits in the rolling highlands east of I-81, in a landscape mix of forests, agricultural fields, and wetlands. The property slopes southward, draining into the Oran Gulf, a gully that eventually drains north into Oneida Lake, which lies within the larger Lake Ontario watershed, a water supply for countless communities.

The Town of Pompey has established a conservation priority area within which the Rybinski farm is located. The property affords significant habitat for native animals and plants, including approximately 140 acres of meadows, grasslands, and brush lands that host a diversity of birds and other wildlife, including deer, black bears, fishers, and beavers.

John Rybinski and his wife Katie are both active stewards of their property, working to maintain healthy woodlands, a productive apple orchard, and farm fields. The fields are leased to crop farmer neighbors. The Rybinskis grow much of their own food, taking pleasure in gardening, tending their apple orchard, and ultimately enjoying the fruits of their labor.

Like other conservation agreements held by the Land Trust, the Rybinski easement limits future development of the property, while allowing it to remain in private ownership and on the tax rolls. The easement protects the natural resources of the property, keeping the agricultural land intact, while allowing the Rybinskis to harvest timber on a sustainable basis. John Rybinski plans to work with the Land Trust in developing agricultural and forest management plans.

"This easement ensures the integrity of the land, while maintaining some flexibility for the owner," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "The result is the protection of a wonderful tract of land that would have otherwise been lost to development at some point in the future."

Rybinski teaches wildlife management around the state and advises the NYS DEC on deer management issues in particular. The new conservation easement will serve him as a demonstration project for other landowners; he would like to use the easement as a platform to show other landowners the benefits of working with a land trust.

"Over the last 50 years...suburban sprawl has replaced much over time that was wildlife habitat of one type or another," Rybinski said in an interview with the Land Trust's Director of Stewardship Chris Olney. "The Syracuse area has seen unsustainable development, with no end in sight. My opinion is that one of the most pressing conservation issues we face now today is the loss of farmland and open space due to development, in all areas of the state and nation."

Rybinski explained his plans for the land: "One long-term goal is to procure more property adjacent to mine if it becomes available and is affordable. Another goal is to try to keep my habitat diverse for the long haul. Grasslands quickly become shrub lands, and shrub lands turn into forests. Overall, New York has been gaining in forested lands while at the same time losing precious grass and shrub lands and the wildlife that inhabits it. My hope is to preserve a variety of habitat by actively managing it and not just setting it aside."

"The Land Trust deeply appreciates the care the Rybinski family has shown for the land," said Andy Zepp, "not just in choosing to protect their farm through conservation easement, but also in the thoughtful and committed stewardship they have demonstrated in the past and will surely continue in future years."

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorneys Sarah Pellerin and Paul Berndt of the law firm Harter Secrest & Emery LLP in Rochester for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.





Shoreline to Summit Campaign Reaches the Top *continued from cover*

The Land Trust's Shoreline to Summit Capital Campaign raised five million dollars to advance conservation projects across the Finger Lakes, and protect our water along the way. In fact, dollars raised during the campaign will forever protect over 400 acres of important habitat buffering wild streams, more than 23,000 feet of land bordering the creeks that provide our communities with clean water, and over 3,000 feet of undeveloped shoreline on Canandaigua, Cayuga, and Skaneateles Lakes.

In addition to direct protection of our streams, wetlands and shoreline, projects in the campaign include

- Adding four new nature preserves to the growing list of lands that are open to the public for recreation and exploration of our natural surroundings. The new conservation areas feature stunning lake views, protect fragile habitat, and strategically link adjacent, or nearby, conserved lands.
- Creating corridors between protected lands, enhancing their long-term viability and ensuring that wildlife populations will be able to migrate and disperse over time. This is a particular focus of the Land Trust's work within Ithaca's Emerald Necklace as well as conservation efforts underway at the south ends of Skaneateles Lake and Canandaigua Lake.
- Expanding outreach efforts to landowners, municipal officials, and community members to educate the public

about local land conservation.

- Strengthening the Stewardship Fund to expand support and training of volunteers, increase efforts to control non-native invasive species, and provide for the long-term management of the Land Trust's 16,000 acres of protected lands.

Board President Stu Schweizer couldn't be happier with all the Land Trust accomplished through the campaign. "The successful completion of the Shoreline to Summit campaign, is enabling the Finger Lakes Land Trust to significantly accelerate the rate at which it is able to preserve and protect the choicest, most threatened lands and waterways in its twelve county service area," Schweizer said.

"This is truly a milestone for the Land Trust," added Zepp. "Everyone who lives in or visits our region will benefit from these projects."

While the Land Trust's Shoreline to Summit campaign is now complete, the organization's fundraising and land protection efforts will continue, with near-term emphases on making lands acquired through the campaign accessible to the public and advancing the use of conservation easements to secure lands that will remain in private ownership.

—Kelly Makosch, *Director of Development and Communications*

Land Trust's 34th Nature Preserve Adds 200 Acres to Emerald Necklace *continued from cover*

communities committed to land protection and open space.

The Charles Spencer Nature Preserve was donated by the LUA Corporation, founded in 1976 by four Cornell graduate students. The members of the LUA Corp.—the acronym stands for Leave Us Alone—sought an unspoiled parcel of land to serve as a secluded retreat and sanctuary. They succeeded spectacularly, finding an exceptional property tucked away in the hills and hollows of Newfield with both abundant natural beauty and the desired isolation.

Nearly 40 years have passed since the members of the LUA Corp. acquired the property, and with an eye toward permanent protection of the land, the members agreed to donate the bulk of the property to the Land Trust. In addition to the 200-acre land donation, an additional 24 acres remain in LUA ownership and are protected under a conservation easement held by the Land Trust.

"Both of these donations are wonderful additions to our conservation efforts in the Emerald Necklace," said Land Trust Executive Director Andrew Zepp. "We are especially honored to receive a tremendous gift of land from the LUA Corporation, and we will confidently continue their tradition of land stewardship and protection."

Perhaps the most striking characteristic of the Charles Spencer Nature Preserve is the variety of the landscape. The property's highest point is an expansive open ridge currently being used by a local farmer for agricultural purposes. The ridge affords remarkable views of the surrounding hillsides, including the Arnot Forest. Stands of mature northern red oak dominate the west-facing slope of the ridge, while the eastern slope features a younger hardwood forest.

The eastern slope of the ridge gives way to a sizable wet meadow with a sweeping view down the valley. The hillside forest has begun to encroach on the meadow and

has overtaken it in spots. Part of the Land Trust's long-term management plan for the preserve will likely involve efforts to keep this semi-wetland meadow from fully reverting to woods and shrubs.

One other notable feature is a meandering stream that cuts along the property's eastern edge on its way to the Susquehanna River, eventually emptying into Chesapeake Bay, the nation's largest estuary. In addition, the preserve's topography, land features, and vegetation support a diverse array of birds and other wildlife.

The preserve, which is named for LUA Corporation members, who saw their vision of enduring land protection through to this final stage, will eventually open to the public in 2015 after the Land Trust completes a management plan and improves accessibility. The Land Trust will also begin a fundraising campaign to support the long-term management of the preserve.

It should be noted that, in addition to new nature preserves, much land conserved in the Emerald Necklace has been protected using conservation easements—which keeps land in private hands, on local tax rolls, and available for traditional land uses, such as agriculture, forest management, and limited residential use.

With the completion of this latest project, the Land Trust has secured more than 3,000 acres of significant open space lands within the Emerald Necklace, which is recognized as a priority project in New York State's Open Space Plan, given the increasing pressure of housing developments on local forested lands.

—Jeff Tonole

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

Two New Easements Protect Emerald Necklace Habitat and Ithaca's Drinking Water

At the end of 2013, the Land Trust accepted the generous donation of two conservation easements totaling 108 acres in Dryden, Tompkins County. The area is located near the headwaters of Six Mile Creek, the main source of Ithaca's drinking water.

The newly protected lands share more than a half-mile border with Yellow Barn State Forest and add to a nearly continuous arc of conserved land that includes three state forests, Cornell Natural Areas, and the Land Trust's Roy H. Park Preserve.

These properties lie within the Emerald Necklace, a forest and field landscape that includes more than 50,000 acres of public land that, from Yellow Barn State Forest, sweeps south of Ithaca through Danby State Forest, and west to the Finger Lakes National Forest.

The new conservation easements, both from an anonymous donor, allow for forest management on 82 acres, agricultural management of a 21-acre field, construction of a recreational cabin, and continued residential use of an existing home. By preventing further subdivision and development, these easements protect both water quality and wildlife habitat in the southern Cayuga basin.

A \$5,500 grant from Tompkins County's Capital Reserve Fund for Natural, Scenic, and Recreational Resource Protection helped cover transaction costs associated with the project. Additional fundraising is underway.

"We salute the donor's dedication to conservation," said Land Trust Executive Director Andy Zepp. "These gifts are a significant contribution to our protection efforts in both the Emerald Necklace and the Six Mile Creek Watershed feeding Cayuga Lake. We are also grateful for the ongoing support Tompkins County has given our work."
—Kris West

The Land Trust gratefully acknowledges Attorney David Tyler of the Guttman and Wallace law firm in Ithaca for providing pro bono legal services in support of this project.

And the Winner for Favorite Non-Profit is...

Edible Finger Lakes magazine announced in its March/April 2014 issue, now on newsstands, that the Finger Lakes Land Trust is this year's winner of the magazine's Local Heroes Award in the category of Favorite Non-Profit Organization.

The award is chosen by the magazine's readership, who are asked to select their local heroes from the Finger Lakes region in six different categories: Farm/Farmer, Restaurant, Culinary Artisan, Beverage Artisan, Food/Wine Retailer, and Non-Profit Organization.

The Land Trust was especially noted for having completed 14 land protection projects in 2013, in addition to a variety of special projects that included the installation of a handicapped accessible boardwalk along public access trails.

Thank you *Edible Finger Lakes* for displaying such good taste!



Our appreciation for gifts in honor of

Bob Beck
FROM
Barbara Keeton

Betsy Darlington
FROM
Kate Beare
Jean Darlington and
Eduardo Marchena
Sally Perreten

Robin and Luke Lorenzo
FROM
Peter Merrill

Sue Poelvoorde
FROM
Tom Lyons

Our deepest gratitude for thoughtful gifts in memory of

Nancy, Honey and Dobby Bertino
FROM
Karen Bertino

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FROM
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James Jenkins and Kathy Kelly
Jenna Milner
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Odell Scott
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Thomas and Jeanne Sheavly
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Bill Sistik
FROM
Jean Burns and family
Jane and Fred Hampton
Mark Muller
Sarah Muller-Robbins

Kathy Wray
FROM
Hana Newman and Rick Wray

SCENES

from Our Region...

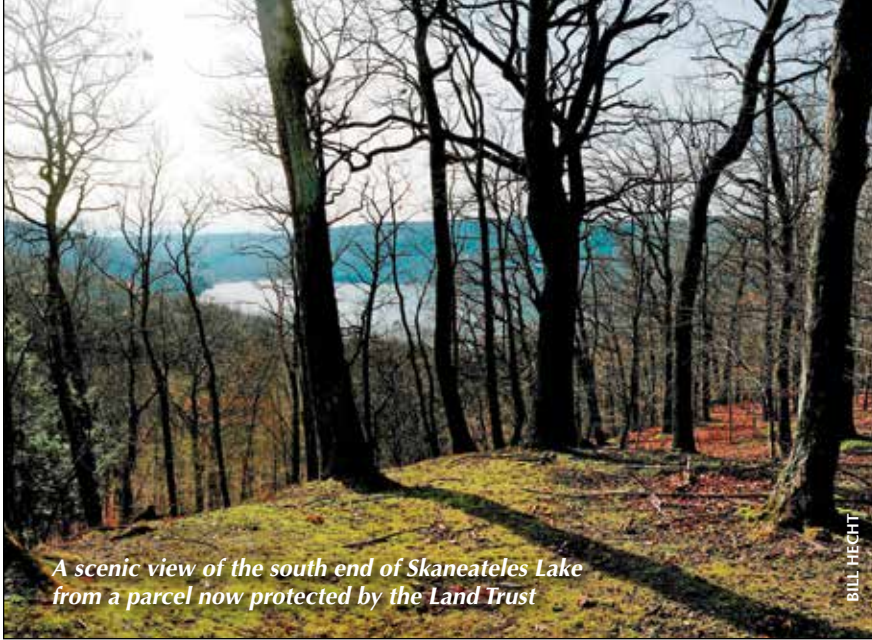
A view of Cayuga County's Great Gully Creek, this portion of which is now protected by a conservation easement held by the Land Trust

BILL HECHT



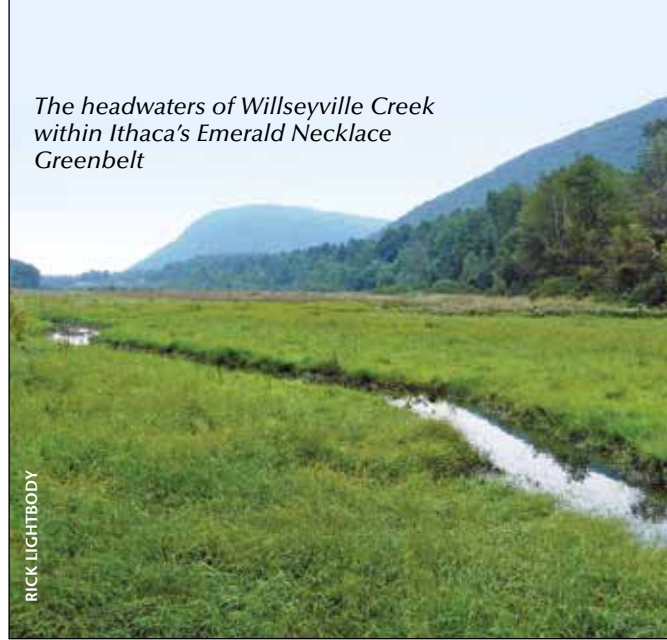
BETSY DARLINGTON

Scene from a previous Spring Bird Quest at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Nature Preserve in the town of Danby, Tompkins County (Please see insert for details on this year's Spring Bird Quest.)



A scenic view of the south end of Skaneateles Lake from a parcel now protected by the Land Trust

BILL HECHT



RICK LIGHTBODY

The headwaters of Willseyville Creek within Ithaca's Emerald Necklace Greenbelt



RICK LIGHTBODY

Participants on last year's Story Walk at the Ellis Hollow Nature Preserve in the town of Dryden, Tompkins County

thank you

Our work is made possible through the contributions of over 2,000 members, volunteers, and supporters. Your commitment to the future of the Finger Lakes has enabled the Land Trust to protect more than 16,000 acres of our region's most treasured forests, farmland, wetlands, gorges, and shoreline.

*We are grateful to have such dedicated members and supporters. In particular, we wish to thank everyone who generously made a gift of \$100 or more in calendar year 2013.**

Land and Conservation Easement Donors Anonymous (3) • David and Joanna Bock • Debbie Koop & Lenhart Saner • Andy Larkin • Tom Reimers • John Rybinski **\$150,000-\$499,999** Anonymous • New York State Office of Parks Recreation & Historic Preservation **\$100,000-\$149,999** Anonymous (3) **\$20,000-99,999** Joshua Allyn • Priscilla Browning • James Flaws & Marcia Weber • James & Ellen Fralick • Helen C. Bell Charitable Remainder Trust • John & Josephine Ingle • NYS Conservation Partnership Program through Land Trust Alliance Northeast and the State of New York • NYS Department of Agriculture & Markets • Park Foundation • Kate & Mont Pooley • US Fish and Wildlife Service/NAWCA **\$10,000-19,999** Anonymous • Peter & Ursula Browning • James & Terry Byrnes • Louise & Burch Craig • Betsy & Dick Darlington • Edward & Verna Gerbic Family Foundation • Estate of David Woodard • Meg Ewing • Fields Pond Foundation • Holland & Patience Gregg • Barbara & Stephen Hamlin • Doug & Kip Hargrave • Rick & Ellen Harrison • John & Robin Moss Hinchcliff • Patricia & David Maule • Carolyn & Scott Morehouse • Nora van der Stricht Charitable Annuity Lead Trust • Dorothy Rinaldo • Stuart & Lucy Schweizer • Myra Shulman & James Morin • Town of Dryden • Town of Ithaca • Walbridge Foundation • Charles & Jane Walcott • Josie Yunis & Marty Taylor • Yunis Realty, Inc. **\$5000-9999** Anonymous • David & Amy Allyn • Roland & Tacie Anderson • Anonymous Friends of Tom Galusha • Tom Babcock • Richard & Mary Anne Bolton • Canandaigua Lake Watershed Association • Canandaigua Lake Watershed Council • Cayuga Foundation • John & Louisa Cohan • John V. Dennis Jr. & Minfong Ho • Dominion Transmission • Finger Lakes Trail Conference • John & Gretchen Fox • Edward Grandt • John W. Bristol Trust • Lynn Leopold • James Lucey • M&T Charitable Foundation • Joane Molenock & Dan Karig • Oakcrest Builders • Kevin & Jean Parker • Stephen & Linda Pope • Chris Proulx & Varya Siegel • Douglas B. Sutherland & Nancy Kramer • Jan & Susan Suwinski • Tom & Maria Eisner Fund of the Community Foundation of Tompkins County • Tompkins County • Jennifer & Bill Warning **\$1000-4999** Anonymous (3) • John & Marilyn Abbott • Molly & Barry Adams • Anurag Agrawal • John Alexander • Lew & Dawn Allyn Family Fund of the Community Foundation of Collier County • Ben Arthur • Harry Ash & Rebecca Clark • Neil & Maggie Atkins • Dawn Bahar-Goellner • Mary Berens & Paul Feeny • Mary Berk • Betty Lewis Trust • Dave Birchenough & Carrie Lazarus • Edward & Deborah Brennan • Brooks Family Foundation • Marc Brown & Susan Taylor-Brown • Sonya Burgher • Canandaigua National Bank • Catherine Caneau • Ted & Susan Carman • Diane & Roger Cass • Cayuga Trails Club • Mark Chao & Miyoko Chu • Charles & Nancy Cladel • Corning Incorporated Foundation • Gregory Craig • Peter J. Davies & Linda DeNoyer • Patty & Tom Davis • Tanya & Blake Dillon • Gary & Linda Dower • Earth Share of New York • Anatol & Carolyn Eberhard • Brad Edmondson & Tania Werbizky • Martha Ferger • David Fernandez & Elizabeth Lawson • Edward Finegan • John & Molly Fitzpatrick • Marty & Cathy Gardner • Mark Gould • Bradley & Mary Grainger • Steve Green & Ann Moore • Mr. and Mrs. Kirk Gregg • Lorraine Gudas • Peter & Susan Henry • Ann Hinchcliff • Janet Hirschland • Eric Hobday • Eva & Roald Hoffmann • Home Green Home • Ruth & Roger Hopkins • Dr. & Mrs. Robert T. Horn Jr. • Isabel Hull • Ted & Joan Hullar • IBM Corporation • Mark & Mickie Jauquet • Peter & Peggy Kane • Marsha & Fredric Kardon • Rosalind Kenworthy • Carolyn Kenyon & Robert Dattola • Jim & Sara Kersting • David & Sherill Ketchum • Bruce & Jen Klein • Bill & Carol Klepack • Carl W. Kohls • Carrie & Michael Koplinka-Loehr • Leanna Landsmann • James Lassoie & Ruth Sherman • Lewis G. Schaeneman, Jr. Foundation, Inc. • Lloyd Lill • Frances Littin & Chuck Tauck • Lutheran

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A CLOSER LOOK

Opossums: North America's Only Native Marsupial

When I lived in Ithaca, the sycamore behind my house harbored an ancient creature from the Cretaceous: a Virginia opossum (Didelphis virginiana).

Captain John Smith observed that the opossum “hath an head like a Swine, and a taile like a Rat, and is of the bignes of a Cat,” which is probably as good of a description as any. Its movements are slow, almost mechanical. Disturb it at its work, and it may gape at you, hissing and weaving, its beady-eyed face implacable. It seems deeply *primitive*, like Mother Nature’s clumsy first attempt at a mammal—and, in some sense, that is exactly what it is. The didelphids (opossums) are an ancient order of marsupials that are directly descended from the small, nocturnal, warm-blooded creatures that lived in the shadows of the last dinosaurs.

Like all marsupials, opossums give birth to underdeveloped young that are no more than embryos. Joeys are born after a gestation period of about two weeks, when they are approximately the size and appearance of gummy bears. They must use their tiny arms to pull themselves from the birth canal to their mother’s pouch. There they will remain, attached to a nipple, until they are old enough to ride on her back.

Upon reflection, my neighborhood opossum was probably not a single animal but a series of them. Opossums have no home territories; if there is one in your yard, remove any food and it will disappear within a few days. Nor do opossums live longer than two or three years in the wild. The species’ survival strategy is to have very large litters twice a year in hopes that some of the joeys survive to adulthood.

The opossum is a jack of all trades, master of none. It will eat almost anything, from insects, small mammals, frogs, and snakes to vegetable matter, carrion, and garbage. It is semi-arboreal, with a prehensile tail and hind toe, but not a particularly agile climber. It prefers to live near water and can swim well, though it is not adapted to aquatic life. It is extremely successful despite the fact that it is not fast, fierce, strong, or clever: it has one of the smallest brain-to-bodyweight ratios of any mammal.

A surprisingly tough beast, the opossum is able to survive serious fractures and is well-protected—perhaps by a robust immune system, or by its low body temperature—

from viral diseases such as rabies, distemper, and Lyme disease. In fact, in areas with more opossums, there are fewer ticks harboring the Lyme bacillus. Additionally, the animal has a protein in its blood, Lethal Toxin Neutralizing Factor, which makes it immune to organic toxins, including snake venom, ricin, and botulinum.

Yet despite these big guns, the opossum is surprisingly vulnerable. If it cannot amble away from danger and its posturing is unsuccessful, it may try to bite, though it doesn’t stand a chance against most animals. Under extreme duress, it will go into an involuntary catatonic state in which its body stiffens, curls, and secretes a fluid whose scent mimics the smell of death. Playing possum sometimes fools other animals, but it unfortunately does nothing to stop cars. Opossums, attracted by roadkill, tend to hang around highways until they become roadkill themselves.

Before European settlement, the opossum was a warm-weather animal, restricted to what is now the southeastern U.S. and central America. Europeans brought reliable food sources in the form of crops, henhouses, gardens, and garbage—and wherever there is food, opossums can eke out a living. As a result, most of the country, apart from the arid and mountainous areas of the west, is now opossum territory.

As it has moved north, however, the opossum has been confronted with a climate for which it is entirely unprepared. It does not hibernate, accumulate significant amounts of body fat, or store food for the winter. Its fur is thin and its appendages are naked; northern animals often have ragged and broken tails and ears due to frostbite. Although generally nocturnal, when the mercury drops, it will often emerge during the day to search for food. If the weather is really bad, it will seek out a crevice (often within or underneath a building) or an abandoned burrow, where it can wait out the cold. You may have seen more opossums than usual this winter; by all accounts, they’ve had a rough time.

—Jacqueline Stuhmiller



Virginia opossum with winter coat



When identifying opossum tracks, look for opposable thumbs on the rear limbs. Prints measure about 2 inches with a 7-10 inch stride.

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Spring 2014 Calendar



SATURDAY, MAY 17TH, 9:30 am – 11:30 am: *The Land Trust's 25th Annual Meeting and Celebration* at the West Danby Fire Hall, 47 Sylvan Lane in West Danby. This year's keynote speaker will be John Fitzpatrick, Executive Director of Cornell's Lab of Ornithology. The event will be preceded at 8:00 am by a guided bird walk through the Land Trust's nearby Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve. *Please see insert for details.*

FRIDAY, JUNE 13th at 8:00 pm: *Lucinda Williams at Cornell's Bailey Hall, a Concert to Benefit the Finger Lakes Land Trust's 25th Anniversary.* Concert promoter Dan Smalls is donating a share of the proceeds from this concert to benefit the Land Trust's 25th Anniversary. For tickets, please visit www.dansmallspresents.com or www.universitytickets.com

PLEASE SEE INSERTS FOR THE SCHEDULE OF OUR 25TH ANNIVERSARY EVENTS, SPRING 2014 TALKS & TREKS SERIES, AND VOLUNTEER WORK DAYS

See our web site for maps and photos of the preserves.

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