



# THE LAND STEWARD

Newsletter of the Finger Lakes Land Trust

Vol. 16, No. 2

working to protect the natural integrity of the Finger Lakes Region

Spring 2004

## Plymouth Woods Is Land Trust's 24<sup>th</sup> Preserve

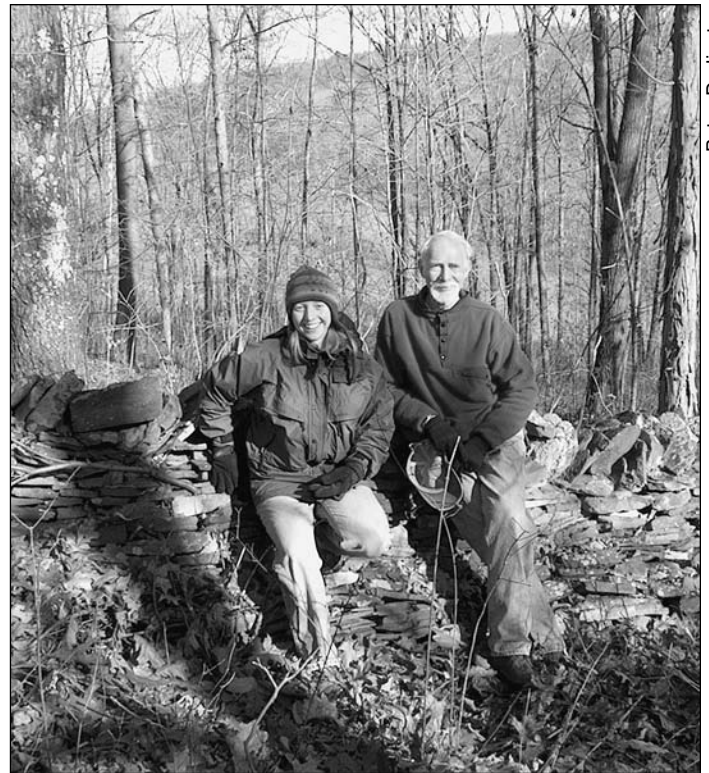
A walk through Plymouth Woods is a walk through history, from the old stone walls that belie the site's agricultural past to the story behind the name of the preserve itself. Now, thanks to the generosity of longtime Elmira resident and physician Dr. Edward Grandt, this 90-acre woodland sanctuary will soon be available for all to enjoy.

Plymouth Woods is located on Kneale Road in the Town of Big Flats, Chemung County. Extensive oak-hickory forests now grow where farmers once toiled. Red fox, porcupine, and forest songbirds such as the wood thrush live here. A remnant old field provides glimpses of surrounding hills as well as habitat for the occasional ruffed grouse.

Dr. Grandt purchased Plymouth Woods through four acquisitions over a twenty-year period. He named the site after a 1937 Plymouth automobile that was dismantled by a previous owner of the property so that his children couldn't drive the vehicle on nearby roads. Today, the hood of that same car proudly graces an entry sign to the property.

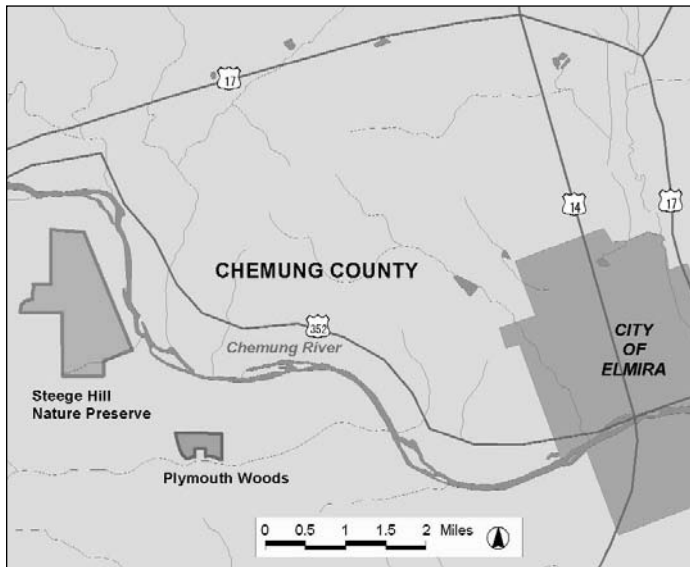
While on call for his medical rounds, Dr. Grandt would visit the woods to enjoy their solitude. Before the days of cell phones and pagers, he installed a telephone with a loud bell in the midst of the woods, so that the hospital could contact him when needed. He reports that the bell was quite effective at scattering the resident wildlife!

"Dr. Grandt's passion for conserving this land is evident from walking the land with him," says Andy Zepp, the Land Trust's executive director. "He has been an exemplary steward of the land and we are grateful that he has entrusted his land to the



Betsy Darlington

Dr. Grandt with outreach and membership coordinator, Emily Eisman



Karen Edelstein

Land Trust. We hope that his actions will inspire others to take steps to conserve their land."

Plymouth Woods is located just one mile southeast of the Land Trust's existing Steege Hill Preserve. With this latest acquisition, the Land Trust now owns and manages almost 900 acres on the south side of the Chemung River. During the coming months, the Land Trust will expand its outreach to landowners in this area to explore opportunities, such as conservation easements, for land protection.

Before formally opening Plymouth Woods to the public later this year, the Land Trust will complete a management plan for the property and develop marked trails. Funds will be raised to provide for long-term stewardship of the property and site improvements such as a small parking area. A dedication is planned for sometime this fall.

Please contact the Ithaca office if you would like to be involved in these efforts – volunteers are needed for tasks ranging from fundraising and outreach to trail maintenance and site monitoring.



## PERSPECTIVES

We've accomplished a lot this past year: seven land protection projects, two new nature preserves, and a rousing conclusion to our Nature's Gift fundraising campaign—thanks in large part to our many fantastic volunteers.

Far less visible, but perhaps even more important, were the many hours that our board of directors and staff devoted to crafting a new strategic plan. Through a process that involved conservationists and community leaders from both within and outside the organization, we've developed a clear plan to conserve threatened landscapes throughout the Finger Lakes region.

In order to protect these landscapes, the Land Trust must act strategically to ensure that our efforts will have the greatest impact. Toward this end, we will target critical lands while at the same time retaining the flexibility to respond to compelling opportunities when they arise.

We're already working with partners

to conserve those last remaining parcels of undeveloped lakeshore. These lands are disappearing fast and will require a well funded, concerted effort if we are to be successful. Through the use of conservation easements, we will also conserve the forested lake bluffs that define the setting of our Finger Lakes.

We'll branch upstream, too, to protect critical lands along our major streams and gorges. This will help ensure the lakes' water quality while at the same time conserving important wildlife habitat and recreational areas. We'll also continue our efforts to conserve regionally significant wetlands through the establishment of nature preserves and the use of conservation easements.

In the southern half of our region, we'll focus on conserving forestlands that are home to a variety of wildlife including black bear. We'll continue our efforts to secure woodlands along the Chemung River while also working to conserve private lands adjacent to our state forests. And along the Finger Lakes Trail corridor, we will acquire conservation ease-

ments to ensure that hikers will continue to enjoy the trail's rural setting.

To the north, we will work with farmers and local governments to conserve prime agricultural lands that are vital to our economy and provide cherished scenic views. Through partnerships with existing public programs, we'll purchase conservation easements that will provide for continued agricultural production while eliminating the threat of subdivision for housing developments.

These are lofty goals. They will require the Land Trust to continue to grow while at the same time developing strong relationships with public and private partners to further our mission. By following this path while introducing the Land Trust to new supporters, and through our members' continued generous support of our efforts, we can ensure the natural integrity of our Finger Lakes region.

— Andrew E. Zepp,  
Executive Director

## Land Trust Partners with Tompkins County to Secure State Farmland Protection Grant

A new partnership between Tompkins County and the Land Trust has resulted in a \$946,000 grant to support farmland protection in the county. This grant from the state's Environmental Protection Fund, provided through New York State Department of Agriculture and Markets, will provide 75 percent of the funding to support the purchase of development rights associated with a 430-acre farm in the northern part of the county.

Prime agricultural soils and extensive scenic road frontage distinguish this farm, which lies partly in Locke Creek Gulf, a county-designated "unique natural area." Land Trust executive director Andy Zepp hopes that this will be the

first of many partnerships with county governments and this state program. "Programs such as this are the only way in which we are going to be able to protect whole landscapes in our region," says Zepp. "While partnerships sometimes require a lot of work on everyone's part, the payoff is worth it."

"By purchasing the development rights on productive farms that lie between the well developed area north of Ithaca, and the highly productive agricultural region east of Cayuga Lake, the State is helping to buffer the sprawl that can erode a most critical agricultural landscape of the State," explains Ken Grudens, New York's farmland protection

program manager. Gruden's department often works with land trusts in conjunction with towns and counties across the state to complete these critical farmland protection projects. Grudens notes that "the department fully recognizes the importance of such partnerships, for many municipalities do not have the expertise to bring these projects to closure, and more importantly to provide the long-term stewardship necessary to maintain the agricultural easements that protect these properties in perpetuity."

Look for additional information about this and other farmland protection projects in upcoming issues of the *Land Steward*.

# A Walk Through the Parker Nature Preserve

Tucked away in the hilly terrain south of Keuka Lake, the Parker Nature Preserve feels comfortably isolated, snug. It's hard to believe that the Southern Tier Expressway lies just a few miles further south in the Cohocton River valley. The surrounding countryside, an intricate patchwork of farmland and forest, might in some ways seem unremarkable to Finger Lakers because the general landscape seems so familiar.

But the real wonder, the real beauty of the land, lies in its particulars. To get a closer look at the fascinating natural and human history of the area, pull your car over to the side of quiet Velie Rd. and take a walk in the Parker Nature Preserve.

Named after grandsons Chris and Mike Parker, the 170-acre preserve was donated to the Land Trust in 1993 by Gene and Joan Lane. They wanted to divest themselves of the property, yet intended the land to remain wild and free from development. A ramble through the preserve opens a window to a place that was once probably very busy and anything but wild.

Most of the area covered by the preserve was cleared for farming more than a century ago. The level eastern part of the land was farmed most recently. Taken as a whole, the preserve makes an interesting study in forest reclamation of abandoned fields.

The parcel is roughly square, sloping gently uphill from southeast to northwest, reaching an elevation of 1825 feet. A network of trails, lovingly maintained by steward Pam Maurey, begins in the northeast corner, from a small, grassy parking lot off Velie Rd. Pam is a devoted nature-lover, relishing the diversity of habitats at the preserve and the animals and plants found there.

The stone ruins of an old barn near the parking lot give silent testimony to busier days. The surrounding scrubland shows the early stages of moving from field back to forest. Grasses are slowly yielding to sumac, hawthorn and buckthorn, which in turn will yield to the ash, aspen, and maple saplings that have begun to grow up among them. In the meantime, this old pasture provides a perfect home for woodchucks, deer, and red foxes, and a great variety of birds, from sparrows and towhees to hunting harriers.

The main trail leads uphill to the west, leaving the scrubland and gently

climbing into a young forest of hickory and maple. Occasional white pines on this slope provide a splash of color in winter or a contrast to the flaming reds and oranges of the preserve's fall splendor.

The trail continues gently upward, past an abandoned pond, now a reedy wetland and perfect habitat for raucous redwing blackbirds in spring.

One of the prizes of the Parker Nature Preserve is the long, flat hilltop meadow in the west. Dotted with young white and red pines, the meadow affords a wide view of the surrounding countryside to the east. The meadow has certainly changed much since it was initially cleared for farming, yet it probably has changed less than any other part of the preserve, as its feeling of openness suggests.

By contrast, dense mature forest of oak, hickory, maple, ash, pine, and hemlock covers the slope to the south. At least one porcupine has taken up residence here. Common in the Adirondacks but quite rare in the Finger Lakes, porcupines typically denude trees of bark as far up as they can climb. They can be destructive, but it would take hundreds of the creatures to make a dent in these magnificent woods.

Given the relatively steep slope, early farmers might have felt tempted to give this part of the land a miss. But a 15-foot wide stone wall slices right through the heart of the forest here, a tes-



Betsy Darlington

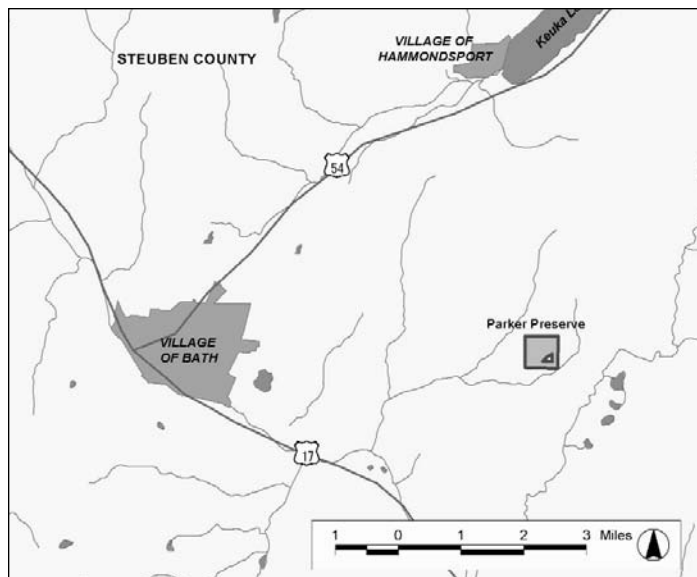
View from the hilltop meadow at the Parker Preserve

tament to the backbreaking labor of early farm life. Some of the trees now growing out of the middle of the wall are quite large—certainly well over a hundred years old!

Another sign of the old farm is a stretch of stump and root fence, possibly pine or chestnut, found amid young forest near the preserve's southern boundary. Even in decay, the fence still impresses with its gnarly, barricade-like presence.

No longer a place of sweat and toil, the Parker preserve now offers only quiet relaxation and peace of mind to those who wander through its natural beauty.

—Eben McLane



Karen Edelstein

**Directions to the Preserve:** Go west from Watkins Glen on route 409, and then 23, following signs to Hammondsport and Tyrone. Just before Tyrone, turn left on route 226. Just past the Bradford School, turn right on Yawger Hill Rd., then left at the stop sign in Bradford onto Telegraph Rd. (route 16). Take this to Velie Rd., turn right, and park in the mowed parking area on the left, or on the shoulder, just before the curve.



# VOLUNTEER PROFILE

## A Special Sort of People

The tasks and responsibilities of preserve stewardship attract a special sort of people—people of sensitivity, energy, and initiative—and Pam Maurey, steward of the Parker Preserve, is clearly one of those.

You might call Pam a “backyard steward.” Her home is surrounded by the preserve, a prime reason why she and husband Dan—both outdoor enthusiasts—bought the property in July of 1999. Pam volunteered almost immediately to steward the preserve and has been walking its trails daily, accompanied by her Australian Shepherd, Gator.

She brought to the job the experience of having maintained 6 miles of the Finger Lakes Trail System. “I love the outdoors,” she says, “and being out there mapping and then clearing new trails makes it that much more rewarding. The trail creation I have done has been with pruners, lopping shears, and a hand saw. It’s something I could spend hours doing.”

At the Parker Preserve, Pam has put in several new trails and a small overlook. She marks boundaries and maintains the trails and the parking area. “She is one of our most industrious stewards,” says Betsy Darlington, who tells of the time she took a group on a tour of the preserve. “Pam had prepared little baggies of snacks for everyone, and water bottles, too, all of which she had stashed in a cooler under a tree along an early part of our route,” Betsy says. “No one has done that before.”

Eben McLane, who walked the preserve with Pam (see his article on page 3), says, “She’s especially charmed by wildlife



*Pam with her happy pal, Gator*

Betsy Darlington

and tells stories about encounters she’s had with deer, fox, etc. She told me: ‘When my Australian Shepherd was a puppy, he and I were hiking the preserve and saw two beautiful buck deer on the trail. One was a 10-point; the other was an 8-point. They weren’t sure what Gator and I were, so we sat down and gently spoke to them. After a few minutes they started to stomp their feet in warning. I told them they should get going now, so they trotted off.’

“I took to her immediately,” continues Eben.” I admire her direct, unmediated relationship with the natural world. Her view is simple: the natural world is beautiful, and I want as much experience of it as I can get. She isn’t a naturalist in the sense of being up on the different species of trees or birds, but she is tremendously curious about it all.

Her eyes sparkle.”

Pam was born in Pennsylvania, but grew up in Elmira Heights. She does research in the Solid Oxide Fuel Cell Program at the Sullivan Park Research Facility of Corning Incorporated. It is demanding work and walking the trails of the Parker Preserve is one way she unwinds. “The preserve offers old rock walls, tree root fence lines, various bird species, flora, and wildlife. I love to look for wildlife tracks to see which ones of God’s creatures is sharing the peacefulness of the preserve with me.”

Pam is a woman full of wonder, enthusiasm, and energy—one of those special people who do so much to maintain and to be present in the Land Trust’s preserves.

— Caissa Wilmer

## Western Lakes completes “Nature’s gift” campaign

### *Chapter’s first capital campaign raises 42% over goal*

In December, the Western Lakes Chapter wound up its successful Nature’s Gift campaign, receiving a total of \$284,855 in gifts and pledges against its original \$200,000 goal.

The campaign served three purposes:

1. Ensuring long-term land protection. We set aside \$70,000 to endow stewardship and legal defense funds for the two Western Lakes nature preserves, Wesley Hill and Nundawao (Great Hill). In addition, we reserved \$15,000 to manage conservation easements.
2. Continuing chapter operations. \$63,000 will support an expansion of our land protection efforts in the region.
3. Future land protection projects. The balance of the funds—\$137,000—will directly support the cost of future acquisitions or easements. Currently, staff and volunteers are working with a dozen landowners on projects in the Western Lakes area.

Nature’s Gift brought new members and volunteers to the Land Trust and raised the organization’s profile in the community. Warm thanks to all our donors and campaign volunteers, especially Barbara Hamlin and Meg Ewing, co-chairs; Anne Fayko, Jim Fralick, Virginia Homsy and Jim Kersting.

## Volunteer?

We are looking for a volunteer to periodically deliver promotional materials in the Canandaigua area. Please call the Western Lakes office at 585-394-4189 for details.

Here is some good news, for a change. The coalition of Attorneys General from 13 states, led by Eliot Spitzer of New York, succeeded in their quest to block the Bush Administration's effort to weaken the Clean Air Act. A Federal Judge issued a "stay" order on Christmas Eve, preventing the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) from implementing new rules that would have allowed 17,000 old factories and utilities to upgrade their facilities without installing the new pollution-controlling devices required by the existing law. The order will remain in effect until the case is fully heard and decided.

## IN ALBANY

Governor Pataki has released his budget, and once again the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) is of great importance for land trusts. Usually funded at \$125 million, it pays for an "Open Space Program" (including land acquisition and farmland protection), parks projects (including stewardship of state parks and grants to local communities for parks), and solid waste programs (including funds for municipal recycling and a pesticide use database).

The Open Space Program includes \$500,000 administered by the Land Trust Alliance for projects by land trusts around the state. This past year we were awarded \$5,000 to support protection work at Bear Swamp Creek, a tributary to Skaneateles Lake. Bear Swamp has been identified as one of the state's top open space priorities.

Yet, as has happened these past few years, part of the EPF money (\$25,450 million) will likely be "off-loaded:" used to finance projects traditionally funded by the state's General Fund,

not by the EPF—for operating expenses for the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), the state parks, and the Agriculture and Markets Department, as well as some capital programs by the DEC and infrastructure in the state parks. This leaves only \$99,550 million for true EPF programs.

The EPF was established in 1993 as a legally dedicated trust fund to provide \$125 million each year toward open space, clean water, farmland protection, parks, and recycling and solid waste programs. It is financed through a percentage of the Real Estate Transfer Tax that we all pay when we buy homes or land.

## IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

An energy bill was not passed again last year, for the second year in a row. The choice seems to be between a bad energy bill (no change in gas mileage requirements, little attention to renewable energy or conservation, billions in subsidies to the oil, gas, coal and nuclear industries) or no energy bill. A bipartisan coalition defeated last year's bill. This will continue to be a highly contentious issue in this session of Congress.

An old familiar bill in Congress, H.R.7, comes up again and again, but has yet to be passed. Part of a "charities" tax bill, it would increase tax deductions to landowners who donate conservation easements to governmental agencies and environmental groups such as land trusts. It would also reduce the capital gains tax for those landowners who receive payment for conservation easements. So far, Congressman Boehlert is supporting this effort.

— *Merry Jo Bauer*

## Great Hill (Nundawao) dedication to celebrate cultural and natural values

On Sunday, May 16th, we will dedicate the Great Hill Nature Preserve at the south end of Canandaigua Lake. Members and friends are invited to join in the celebration, which will begin at 2:30 pm at preserve neighbor Richard Reuter's property on South Hill Road in Middlesex, Yates County.

Great Hill is also known by its Seneca name of Nundawao. The preserve protects a part of the Canandaigua Lake landscape that was sacred to the Senecas. Created in 2001 through a 221-acre donation by Thomas and Sandra Hansen and of a five-acre inholding by James and Ellen Fralick, the preserve is also important for its scenic value and its role in maintaining Canandaigua Lake's

water quality.

Great Hill's steep slopes, held in place by oaks and hickories, are a prominent feature of the lake's landscape. Indeed, the property stretches for nearly 1 1/2 miles through the towns of Middlesex and Italy, and includes 400 feet of shoreline.

Natural areas within the Canandaigua watershed are being lost to development at a rapid rate. Had this land not been protected, it would likely someday have suffered the same fate, to the detriment of the lake, a primary source of drinking water.

In addition to Nundawao's cultural and ecological value, the preserve also reflects the region's interesting geological

history. As the glaciers of the last ice age retreated, they left behind Canandaigua Lake's basin and the steep slopes of Great Hill. Streams subsequently cut several gorges into the hillside, a process that continues today. The ice also left erratics, boulders transported over vast distances and deposited on the hillside. Following the brief dedication ceremony on May 16th, visitors will be able to see some of these natural marvels on guided tours of the preserve.

Additional information about the event, including directions, is available at the Land Trust's web site, [www.flit.org](http://www.flit.org), or by calling the Western Lakes Chapter office at (585) 394-4189.

# Scenes' from our Nature Preserves...

*"I walked the trails of Steege Hill today and felt so blessed to be there. Winter melt running in all the little crevices and creeks. Sun blanketing the hills. White tails flashing through gray-barked trees. Heaven here now. Thank you for all you do."*

— Land Trust Member Rhonda Morton

Betsy Darlington



Alice Thurber, still lively at age 95, enjoying a June day at the Thurber Preserve in McLean, town of Groton.



Skaneateles Lake and Bear Swamp Creek corridor, part of which is protected by the Bahar Preserve.



F. Robert Wesley

The Canada Lily may be found at several of the Land Trust's nature preserves.





Betsy Darlington



Betsy Darlington

*Top: Echoes of a former time at the new Plymouth Woods Preserve*

*Left: Small stream at Plymouth Woods*



Betsy Darlington

*Ithaca High School students, attacking invasive honeysuckle shrubs at the Percy Browning Tract of the Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby, as part of a project for their Advanced Placement Environmental Studies class. L to R: Drew Evans, Mike Farthing-Kohl, Tom Jones, Nick Marshall*

# THANK YOU!

*The Land Trust's work is made possible through the efforts of over 1500 members and supporters. Your commitment to this region and the natural world has enabled us to conserve more than 7,000 acres of rolling hills, pristine forests, deep ravines, and productive farmland in the Finger Lakes region.*

*Thank you to all of our supporters and, in particular, those who made leadership gifts in 2003.*

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## A CLOSER LOOK

### Saw-whet Owls Sound Off

One cold, still evening in winter some years ago, as I was closing up the hen house, a soft, repetitive tooting came down from the wooded hillside. I might easily have failed to notice it, if field guides had not prepared me; now I recognized in this faintly audible disturbance the distant voice of the littlest owl in eastern North America, the Northern Saw-whet Owl.

Nightly thereafter I whistled the simple call, hoping for a look at the three-ounce raptor. My imitations were thin, but owls have excellent hearing: excited respondents soon appeared on nearby branches, or swooped very close, their shadows darting over the moonlit snow. A really satisfying view eluded me, though, until the following winter, when a Saw-whet flew in to perch on a sumac twig within arm's reach, tooting quizzically in the last glow from the western sky.

In time it became clear that Saw-whet Owls wintered annually here. Concealing themselves in dense conifers by day, active only at night, these pint-sized mousers are normally silent except at the onset of breeding season, and probably go undetected in many locations. The unusual midwinter calling that attracted my attention subsided after several years, but my whistle still elicits responses, and moonlight often reveals a curious little owl whose noiseless flight conveys nothing at all to my ears.

Saw-whet Owls breed from southern Alaska to Nova Scotia, hence the scientific name *Aegolius acadicus*, the 'Acadian owl'.



Fred Bertram

*Adult Saw-whet Owl*

Breeding extends southward in the Appalachians to the Great Smoky Mountains. Typical habitat is fairly mature coniferous or mixed forest with openings, often near water. Nesting birds are quiet, and their nest-holes are seldom discovered. Some Saw-whets reside year-round in breeding areas; others engage in seasonal movements of an unclear nature. In New York, many Saw-whets are found each spring and fall roosting in conifer groves along the shores of Lake Ontario and Long Island.

Between 1980 and 1985, volunteers surveying for the first Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State found Saw-whets chiefly in the Adirondacks. In the Finger Lakes region, reports of possible or probable breeding were scarce, and breeding was confirmed in just one location. Fieldwork for the second atlas, which began in 2000, promises to augment our picture of the regional breeding distribution of this very inconspicuous species.

In my neighborhood, a lush coniferous swamp amply furnished with appropriable woodpecker holes offered possible breeding habitat for Saw-whet Owls. One bright July afternoon in my third year of wading there, preoccupied with Brown Creepers, Northern Waterthrushes and other swamp birds, I ducked into a shrub-willow thicket and came face-to-face with Saw-whet fledglings, for an unforgettably close look at a bird that had captivated me since that winter evening by the hen house years earlier.

Nocturnal birds exert a compelling fascination over the susceptible. Unobtrusive to the point of inscrutability, the little Saw-whet Owl worked on my imagination like a remembered view of the night sky through a large telescope, intensifying awareness of the depth of nature, in which so many things pass unobserved. Friends say I'm very lucky to have Saw-whets return year after year, but on reflection it seems likely they were here long before I knew it. The luck may lie less in their continuing presence than in the way I came to be informed of it.

— Geo Kloppel

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## SPRING 2004 CALENDAR

**Saturday, April 17, 10 am: Cleanup at the McIlroy Bird Sanctuary** in Summerhill. Come for as much of the day as you can. Go east on Route 34B (Peruville Rd.) in Lansing, then left on Salt Rd. Go about 6 mi. and turn right (east) on Route 90. Go about 2 mi. and turn left on Lake Como Rd. Go 2.7 mi. to Lane A, on right. Drive down lane to parking area, on the right. From Skaneateles, go south on Route 41A. Turn right on Branch Rd., left on Lake Como Rd. Left on Lane A, and proceed as above. Bring water and food. Call 607-275-9487 for more information.

**Saturday, April 24th at 12 noon:** Please join us for the Land Trust's Fifteenth Annual Celebration at Taughannock Farms Inn, 2030 Gorge Road, on Route 89 at Taughannock Falls State Park in Trumansburg (please see insert for details and reservation form).

**Sunday, May 16th at 10:00 am: Get Them Alien Invaders!** Garlic mustard-pulling party at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in West Danby. (Maybe honeysuckle, too!) Wear long pants and gloves—there's a bit of poison ivy. From Ithaca, go south on Route 13; take left exit onto Route 34/96; go about 7 miles to the Preserve. Parking lot is about 1/2 mile south of Sylvan Dr. and the West Danby Fire Station, and is on left (east side) of road, at top of the hill, opposite house # 2500. Co-sponsored with the Finger Lakes Native Plant Society.

### 2004 Talks and Treks Series\*

- **Saturday, May 15th 7:00 pm:** Fifth Annual Artistic Roots in Naples.
- **Sunday, May 16th 2:30 pm:** Nundawao: Great Hill Preserve Dedication.
- **Friday, June 11th thru Sunday, June 13th:** Biodiversity Field Days: Celebrating Nature and Community at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve.

\*For details on these, and additional Talks and Treks series events, please see the enclosed insert.

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

WALKS GO RAIN, SUN OR SNOW. PLEASE BRING SNACKS AND WATER, AND WEAR STURDY SHOES. CALL THE LAND TRUST AT (607) 275-9487 FOR DETAILS.