



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
March-April 2016 • Vol. 20 No. 2

Salamander Rains are Coming Soon!

We've had a very mild winter and it's nearly over! In just a few weeks the mole salamanders in Thacher Park will be ready to make the annual trek to their breeding ponds. When the salamanders make their move, spring has arrived!

The salamander migration takes place on the first warm rainy nights of spring, usually late March or early April. Hundreds of salamanders make their way across Thacher Park Road every spring in the vicinity of the Hop Field picnic area and head up the hill to their birth ponds. They come up out of the rocky crevices where they spent the winter and wait anxiously for a night when they can make their journey. The ideal conditions are steady rain and temperatures close to 40 degrees. If everything is perfect, we have a "Big Night", when there is a mass movement over a period of a several hours.

Mole salamanders live in the forest and spend most of their time underground. They emerge and breed in woodland pools in the spring. Most of the mole salamanders in the park are Yellow-spotted salamanders,

amazing creatures 5 - 8 inches long, dark grey with bright yellow spots down their backs. There are smaller numbers of Jefferson salamanders, also large and dark, with light blue flecks on their undersides. During salamander rains they head across the dark road in the rain with determination.



Crossing the road is dangerous business for these critters, as cars speed by unaware of their presence. Here in the park, volunteers walk up and down the road with flashlights hoping to find and move them out of harms way. It's a memorable experience for kids and adults

alike who come out and assist these critters on their important journey. If you are interested in volunteering, please contact the Nature Center at 872-0800, and we will put you on a call list. Then watch the forecast for salamander rains. We do our best to call and alert volunteers. When the night looks right, dress warmly, wear a raincoat and boots, bring a flashlight and a bucket, and head for the park. Drive carefully and watch out for amphibians in the roads! Spring is here!

- by Nancy Engel

School Bus Fund Drive for 2016



It is that time of the year again when we reach out to our members to help continue the effort to bring school children to Thacher Park. We want to thank everyone who has already sent in their contribution for the current year. For those of you who missed the initial outreach in our December newsletter, please consider sending in your support now.

In our increasingly digital age, a growing number of children are losing any connection to nature. The purpose of the bus fund is to fund buses to bring school children to Thacher Park and the Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center. As you know, some school districts no longer have funds for school trips. Through the bus fund you can help children experience our wonderful park. For some children this will be their first walk in the woods.

In their letters thanking Nancy and Laurel for their visits, the children talked about their favorites: "finding the queen bee", stroking the furs, and learning about tracks in the snow. One child wrote "The hike was awesome. I liked the way we felt the moss, and how mushrooms grow on the tree." Another wrote, "Overall the whole experience was great and it was something better than I ever would've thought. I can't wait to do this again."

We hope for some children this is the beginning of a lifelong connection with nature. For others it helps strengthen a connection they have already begun. Contributions are welcome at all levels; \$5 buys a seat for one child, \$20 supports 4 children and \$250 funds a whole busload of children. Thank you for your support, and know that your contribution may be the key to starting a life long connection to nature for a child.

- by *Betsey Miller*

It's never too late to help out with this year's Friends of Thacher Bus Fund Drive. We're in full swing booking buses with lots of children from the Albany, Troy and Schenectady areas.

\$5	_____	One Child
\$10	_____	Two Children
\$50	_____	Ten Children
\$250	_____	Fills a Bus
	_____	Other

Please make checks payable to "Friends of Thacher Park" and mail to 87 Nature Center Way, Voorheesville NY, 12186.

Friends of Thacher Park is a 501(c)3 non profit organization. All monies go to the drive—there are no administrative costs.

Check for updates at www.friendsofthacherpark.org

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As always, call 872-0800 or 872-1237 to verify activity times and dates.

Please feel free to call any board member with questions or suggestions.

Many thanks to Nancy Engel, Betsey Miller, Sigrin Newell, Laurel Tormey Cole, Bonnie Schaller and Joy Scism for their contributions to this newsletter.

Want to contribute? Please email me at cgervasi@albany.edu
Christine Gervasi—Editor



Friends of Thacher Park Member Form

Member benefits: Newsletter, Scheduled Events Calendar & 10% Discount at the Nature Center Gift Shop.

Renewal date follows name on address label.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ Cell _____ Email _____

I'd like to become a member of the Friends of Thacher Park. Enclosed is my check for \$ _____.

I am renewing my membership. Enclosed is my check for \$ _____.

Individual \$20 Supporter \$40 Donation \$ _____

Family \$25 Corporate \$100 Senior (62) \$5

Student \$5 Benefactor \$100

Please make checks payable to the **Friends of Thacher Park** and send to Bonnie Schaller, 6324 Hawes Rd, Altamont, NY 12009. For more info: bschaller@nycap.rr.com

Interested in Wildlife Monitoring?

As the temperatures begin to plummet, it is nonetheless time to begin to think of Spring! Migratory bird species will begin their return over the next two months and cavity nesting species, like the Eastern Bluebird and the Tree Swallow will be scouting for real estate. Good habitat for birds includes water, sources of cover such as dense bushes and evergreens, lots of native plants that provide insects for nestlings and adults, and places to raise young.

Thacher Nature Center is seeking volunteers who would like to experience monitoring nest boxes and the opportunity to see live young of Tree Swallows, Eastern Bluebirds and Black-capped Chickadees! For less than 2 hours once a week, every other week or once a month, you can learn new skills and support citizen

science as you record data from our nest boxes. An excellent activity for an adult and child over 8, teens or adults. Training and all supplies provided. Call the Nature Center to sign up for Nest Box Monitoring at: 872-0800.

- by Laurel Tormey Cole



Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation **13th Annual NATURE ART EXHIBIT**



"Birches III" by Faith Weldon

Thacher Nature Center

March 5 – March 25, 2016 Tues. – Sun. 9 am – 5 pm

Reception: March 5, 2016, 1 – 4 pm Open to public!

Check out our art classes throughout the month of March!

Please call 872-1237 or 872-0800 for information!

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation Andrew B. Cuomo, Governor Rosemary Commissioner

Save the Date!

May 7, 2016

9:00 am at

Pear Orchard



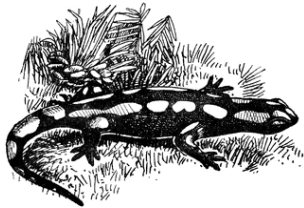
Please call 872-1237 or go to www.ptny.org/events/i-love-my-park-day to register and for more information.

Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2016

March 9, May 11, July 13, September 14, and November 9.

7:00 pm at Thacher Nature Center. Come join us!

Friends of Thacher Park
c/o Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center
87 Nature Center Way
Voorheesville, New York 12186-2601



Wednesday, March 9, 2016

Next:

Board Meeting

7:00 pm at Thacher Nature Center

Winter Without Snow

This winter without substantial snow has been difficult for all the animals at Thacher and elsewhere. Predator-prey interactions are affected, sometimes positively, sometimes negatively. Mice and voles are exposed, making an easy meal for hawks and owls. Ruffed Grouse also provide an easy meal for hawks and owls as well as fishers, bobcats, and coyotes.

Ruffed Grouse face death whenever there is less than 10 inches of snow. These grouse usually create caves in the snow to shelter from low temperatures and predators. In the cave the temperature rarely drops below 20 degrees F. When there is too little snow, the grouse bed down on the ground, often at the base of a tree to get some shelter from the wind. Unless the birds found remaining snow drifts for a cave, the bitter cold of Valentine's weekend may have seriously depleted the Park's Ruffed Grouse populations.

Ruffed Grouse do however have some adaptations to help deal with winter snows. They have feathers between their toes that act as snowshoes. Feathers also grow on the face covering the nostrils, helping to warm and moisten the air the bird breathes.

In deep soft snow, grouse create a cave by diving from the air directly into the snow. With only five inches or less, the bird somehow knows not to dive. Rather it lands and walks along until it finds a place to roost for the night. Even an inch or two of snow can help protect from predators, though it doesn't provide much insulation.

When you hike or (hopefully) snowshoe at Thacher, watch for signs of Ruffed Grouse roosts. Typically the birds defecate before leaving the roost in the morning. You will see two kinds of scat. Dry cylindrical pellets consist of the remains of twigs, leaves and catkins. The other is a soft brown plop which resulted from more extensive digestion of the more nutritious cambium layers of tree bark.

- by *Sigrin Newell*



As always, you can find a color version of the newsletter at www.friendsofthacherpark.org