



Friends of Thatcher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
November—December 2016 • Vol. 20 No. 6

NestWatch: Looking Back on A Not-So-Silent Spring

NestWatch is a citizen science monitoring program that focuses on tracking the reproductive biology of birds, including when birds start to nest, how many eggs were laid and hatched, and how many young survived. My co-workers, Laurel and Emily, and I cleaned out and restored the nest boxes back in March and April and began our monitoring efforts in May. On the state park fields near the nature center, all 27 bluebird nest boxes were monitored for cavity-nesting bird (namely Eastern Bluebirds, Tree Swallows, House Wrens, and Black-capped Chickadees) activity. All of the data that were collected were then transferred onto our online NestWatch database. Subsequently, scientists will use the data to help them determine the statuses of the bird populations and how they may fluctuate over time due to climate change, habitat loss, encroaching human development, and invasive species.

We have monitored each brood from when they were eggs to when they hatched out as naked young to when they became fully feathered. Each nesting attempt

by the birds ended two weeks after a brood fledged from the nest. To help maintain the health and safety of the broods, we remained vigilant of any evidence of blowfly larvae or brown-headed cowbirds that can parasitize the nests. Thankfully, there were no parasitized young. We always went out with our bucket of tools, such as a screwdriver to open up some boxes, a mirror to help look into taller nests, and a scraper to carefully scrape out potential fly larvae, and a clipboard of datasheets to record all the necessary information.

This year we documented a total of 159 eggs, 115 hatched young, and 68 known fledglings. The rather skewed data indicates that we could not clearly see all the eggs or young in a nest. Some eggs were hidden well in the nesting material and some young were not entirely visible within the blob of feathers huddled up together. Therefore, we had to finalize our numbers based on how many eggs and young were counted for the last time before the fledging period.



Bluebird eggs and young. This year, we had 5 successful broods of 19 young bluebirds.

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There were 4 cases of predation: one bluebird clutch of 5 eggs, one tree swallow clutch of 2 eggs that followed in the same box, one chickadee clutch of 6 eggs, and one house wren clutch of 4 eggs. We discussed these matters with NestWatch scientists who believed that a snake was able to climb up the galvanized metal pole and into the bluebird and tree swallow nest box, which is surrounded by tall grass. Snakes are extremely muscular predators and the slipperiness of the pole was not enough to deter them.

The chickadee nest box is also on a galvanized pole and placed in the woods of the Meadow Loop trail. We found that the opening was chewed up and that the eggs were broken into, leaving us to believe that the most likely predator was in fact a flying squirrel. Last year, a family of flying squirrels occupied the box; the adult(s) must have glided from the tree canopy to the top of the box and was able to enter the hole from there. As for the house wren

box, which is on a pegged garden stake on a grassy knoll, something must have easily climbed its way up and cleanly snatched all the eggs. The predator is unknown and hardly left any evidence.

The risk of predation seemed high for the rest of the season, so we invested in two stovepipe baffles to be wrapped around the poles below the most vulnerable boxes that sheltered bluebird and tree swallow nests. We found them to be successful when we continuously monitored the young and decided to create more baffles out of sheet metal. Each of our boxes will soon have a baffle to improve success for next year.

With the addition of the baffles and the constant care and attention of nest boxes for when next year's broods come, we hope that we can keep contributing to the conservation benefit of native birds. Here's to the feathered and flying ones!

- by Katie Leung

Best of Luck to Katie and Emily

Since January we have had two awesome Student Conservation Association (SCA) interns working with us, Emily Crampe and Katie Leung. They contributed a lot in their 10 month commitment, which is nearly over. They helped us raise hundreds of plants in the greenhouse for our Native Plant Sale, launched our new maple sugaring program, grew milkweed from seed for our new Monarchs and Milkweed program, monitored 24 nest boxes and reported citizen science data to Cornell, helped with invasive species projects, created brochures, assisted with school group programs, developed and presented public programs, and pretty much anything we asked them to do. Katie also surveyed wildlife in the park with trail cameras and Emily helped gather tons of fossil rocks at local quarries that have been incorporated in the

hearthstone wall of the new visitor center. We've had great fun working with Katie and Emily and will surely miss them when they go. We are very grateful for everything they've done here and wish them the best of luck in the future!

- by Nancy Engel



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 Katie Leung, Nancy Engel, Laurel Tormey-Cole and John Kilroy 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.

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

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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



Fall...

....at Thacher Park!



Friends of Thacher Park Annual Meeting on November 9

6:30 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, November 9, 2016

Next: Annual Membership Meeting

6:30 pm at Thacher Nature Center

Followed by a talk on Sustainable Hop Farming by Dietrich Gehring at 7:00 pm—come join us!

Holiday Bazaar

Local artisans gather at Thacher Nature Center on Saturday and Sunday, December 3 & 4, to offer finely crafted works, many from natural materials. A wonderful alternative to the mall, this Holiday Bazaar features nature photography, handcrafted wood bowls, honey and maple syrup, soaps, jewelry, gorgeous ornaments - and so much more. Please join us for this holiday shopping event accompanied by the live music of Tune Folk - wandering musicians playing fiddle, mandolin and guitar. Hours are 10am-4pm on Saturday, December 3rd and 11am-4pm on Sunday, December 4th. Please call 872-0800 for more information.

-by Laurel Tormey-Cole



The Friends Need YOU!

Hello Friends! The board of trustees is in need of a few more folks who love Thacher as much as we do. Would you like to get more involved with the park staff and events here? Please join us. There's nothing to it. We meet six times per year at the nature center and actually do some of our business via email. We eat pretty well at some of the meetings too! This is a chance for you, a dedicated member of the Friends of Thacher State Park, to get more involved with some of the park's activities. With the new visitor center opening soon, this is a wonderful time to join the board! We're looking for some new faces around the meeting table. If you're interested in or intrigued by this offer, talk to me at our annual meeting on the ninth or give me or one of the other board members a call. Please consider this opportunity to do a little more for our slice of heaven in the Helderbergs!

- by John Kilroy