



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
March-April 2018 • Vol. 22 No. 2



Not a snipe hunt: a snag hunt

A well-known practical joke among teenagers once was to take an unsuspecting friend into the woods on a moonless night to hunt for a non-existent 'snipe'. So common was this prank in years gone by that it has entered our language: a "snipe hunt" is a fool's errand.

A more productive hunt that anyone can do today is a snag hunt. The next time you hike through the forest at Thacher, count how many standing dead trees you find. These trees, called snags, may be dead, but they are essential to providing for the ongoing life of the forest.

When you encounter a snag, don't just brush past it. Stop and study it. Nothing goes to waste as the snag slowly decays. It is home to many organisms. Fungi and bacteria, bark beetles and carpenter ants are at the bottom of the food chain. Woodpeckers, chickadees, and nuthatches dig holes in close proximity to their food source. Nest cavities are often re-used by tree swallows, owls, and squirrels. Small birds shelter from winter cold in the larger nests. At the other end of the size spectrum, ospreys and great blue herons build large nests of branches at the top of snags and other trees.

Mammals also use snags; raccoons and porcupines in particular favor such shelter. In the summer, woodland bats nest under the loose bark of snags. Leaning snags that have only partially fallen provide a runway to the upper forest layer for small animals like mice and weasels.

Look carefully. Any given snag can show evidence of use by one or more of these animals.

When a dead tree falls over water, it can improve habitat for fish. Not only does the fallen tree provide shade, branches in the water can create small ponds. This change in water flow increases diversity of water insects, and therefore, of fish.



Not all the benefits of snags are visible. Decaying trees provide nutrient capital for the forest ecosystem by acting as carbon reservoir. As much as 6% of the carbon stored in Northeast woodlands is in dead trees. Depending on how hard the wood is, snags can stand for five to ten years; once they have fallen, they can last for another twenty years. Downed trees also act as mulch and as a seedbed.

Mutualistic interactions with microbes result in nitrogen fixation, providing an essential nutrient to the forest ecosystem.

On your next trip to Thacher, take your family and friends on a snag hunt. The US Forest Service says that altogether some 1200 forms of fauna rely on dead and dying trees. Bring along a notebook to tally how many signs you can see here in our local Park. A snipe hunt is an exercise in foolishness, but a snag hunt is an excellent way to learn about new life arising from death, a fundamental tenet of ecology.

-by Sigrin Newell

Updates from the Park

Much has happened this past year at Thacher park and we are looking forward to a new and exciting season at the park this year!

- ◇ The most exciting event this past season was of course the opening of Thacher Visitor Center on May 5. Since its opening, 50,000 visitors have stopped by to explore exhibits, learn about the park's history or geology, enjoy the kids features or take advantage of beautiful Helderberg room for events.
- ◇ Rock climbing was opened for the first time at Thacher park and it was hugely popular. Almost 900 individual climbers used the park coming from 26 states, 162 New York State Cities and 5 countries.
- ◇ One of the exciting new attractions in the park opened its door late last year: WildPlay Adventure Park was open for a little over a month, but admitted 1200 individual participants. The adventure course, located close to the east entrance of the Thacher park, offers 15 ziplines, 60 aerial games and a 40 foot jump. Several different courses offer challenges for all levels of daring, including a kids course (ages 5 to 12) which was especially popular this past season for kid's birthday parties. Barbecue pits and picnic areas offer added incentive to come up and enjoy the adventure (for additional information, hours and pricing see <https://wildplay.com/thacher/>).
- ◇ The 1,340 square foot Helderberg room at Thacher Visitor Center was very popular and hosted 13 events this past season.
- ◇ For this upcoming season, the park hopes to have a concessionaire for the Overlook Café, possibly also offering locally brewed beer.
- ◇ The old park office at Pear Orchard is currently being rehabbed and will serve as a substation for the park police.
- ◇ Hailes Cave and Paint Mine will be furbished with new bathrooms. Construction will start in April and the Paint Mine and Hailes Cave picnic shelters will not be available through the season. To compensate, tents will be erected at Horseshoe I and near the old pool area. If you are planning an event at any of the shelters this year, book early!
- ◇ The Indian Ladder Trail is scheduled to re-open this season.



Sunrise at Thacher Visitor Center

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 Sigrin Newell, Maureen Curry and Nancy Engel for their contributions to this newsletter.

Other Trustees

Jim Schaller	861-7452	Ethan Willsie	588-4148
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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 _____

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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 \$ _____
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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

15th Annual

NATURE ART EXHIBIT

at Thacher Nature Center

March 10th through 28th

Tuesday through Sunday, 9am - 5pm

Opening Reception

Saturday, March 10th, 1pm - 4pm

The exhibit will feature nature-inspired artwork in a variety of media ranging from watercolors, oils, photography, fiber to wood. Come to the reception and meet the artists and enjoy complimentary refreshments!



Be sure to check the program calendar for painting and drawing workshops!

Save the Dates!



Saturday, May 5, 2018
9am - 1pm

"I Love My Park Day"

Join us in the statewide volunteer effort to help spruce up Thacher Park for summer. We will provide a complimentary barbecue for all volunteers! Please register online at www.ptny.org.

Saturday, June 2, 2018

"National Trails Day"

Details will be available closer to May and June

Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2018

March 14 (Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center),
May 9, July 11, September 12, and November 14 (Thacher Visitor Center).

7:00 pm. 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 14, 2018
Next: Board Meeting
7:00 pm at Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center !



Caught on Camera! The Thacher trail camera captured some nocturnal park visitors — a fisher wandering past and a couple of cavorting coyotes.

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