



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
May-June 2018 • Vol. 22 No. 3



Bald Eagles at the Park

This spring at Thacher Park, we welcome the delightful singing of birds, the blooming of wildflowers, and the anticipated arrival of eaglets! Thacher Park is home to a pair of mated bald eagles that offer us a glimpse into the lifecycle of a truly captivating comeback species.

Our resident eagle pair set up home atop a tall aspen tree that affords easy access to Thompsons Lake, and an open view of surrounding fields and forests - prime real estate for bald eagles! A truly conspicuous couple, the bald eagles' nest is easily viewed from the highest point on the Nature Center Trail. By constructing a nest, or aerie, out of twigs, downy feathers, and insect-repelling moss, the eagles have given their eggs the best possible chance at survival.

Nature Center Interns Haley and Vanessa have been observing and documenting the eagles' activity since early February. After what appears to have been successful copulation, both birds have been hard at work incubating their eggs since mid March. Typically, bald eagle eggs hatch within 30-35 days after being laid. This means that if all goes well, we can expect the arrival of eaglets very shortly!

Make sure to stop by the Nature Center to learn more about bald eagles, and to keep up

with what hopes to be a new generation of bald eagles at the park!

-by Haley Oryell



Photograph of the eagle's nest. Catching the builders of the nest with a camera is more of a challenge!

Photos by Bert Schou

Advocacy Day



On March 5, members of the Friends of Thacher Park participated in the Parks and Trails Advocacy Day. Bonnie Schaller, a first timer, Bert Schou and I, along with representatives from friends of parks and historic sites from across the state came to meet with state legislators. After a morning session of presentations by Rose Harvey, Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, Senator Richard Funke, and Senator Jose Serrano to inspire us, we took to the halls of the Capitol and the Legislative Office Building to meet with legislators and their staffs. Our purpose was twofold. First, to thank them for all the support

they have given parks and historic sites over recent years with the increases in capital funding. Bonnie, Bert and I spoke about the benefits of our amazing new visitor center as well as the equally essential new rest room projects and other infrastructure improvements. Our second point was the critical need for additional operational funds to support the parks. Operational funding has been flat for over 7 years. The result is that critical positions remain unfilled and essential work remains undone.

By splitting into several groups, we were able to meet with 50 legislators and their staff. The group Bonnie and I were in met with assembly member John T. McDonald (see photo at left). Mr. McDonald and all the staff we met with showed their knowledge and support for the Parks and Historic sites. In light of all the competing issues these offices deal with, it is critical that we make sure they remember how important parks and historic sites are to friends' groups and all of the citizens of their districts. Our visits and the stories each of us bring about our parks help keep these issues in their minds. All and all, it was another successful Advocacy Day. Many thanks to Parks and Trails New York and the Open Space Institute for sponsoring and organizing this event each year.

- by Betsey Miller



Photos by Bert Schou

Our native salamanders, such as the spotted and the Jefferson salamanders, hibernate in the ground and emerge on a warm, rainy night to make their way to their breeding ponds. Our salamanders had to wait a long time for that night this spring! The pictures show two spotted salamanders that were spotted on route 157 in the park and transported to the safe side of the road to continue on their journey.

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 Haley Oryell, Betsey Miller, Bonnie Schaller, Laurel Tormey Cole, Sigrin Newell, Bert Schou and Nancy Engel for their contributions to this newsletter.

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

A Rose by any other Name.....

The month of May brings the annual Thacher Nature Center native plant sale. Which brings me to the idea of plant names. And how much of a bad rap native plants get.

When the colonists arrived they, of course, didn't recognize any of our indigenous plants, and promptly, and incorrectly, labelled many of them "weeds". However, the plants of our own country are just as beautiful and striking as those from other countries. And they aren't weeds at all. Rather, they are beautiful, floriferous and suited to soil, weather and moisture conditions that are found right in our own backyards. They evolved to support the butterfly and moth populations that yield caterpillars that all birds (excepting raptors) are dependent on for food for their young. Our native perennials, trees and shrubs are the first food for bees and support all manner of native insect populations that adult birds and bats are dependent on.

So, remember that just because a plant has the word "weed" in its name.... that doesn't imply that it *really* is. Case in point: Milkweeds. Our beautiful Monarch butterflies are in steep decline. The only

food that the caterpillars eat are milkweeds. So....no milkweeds – no monarchs. Besides – even if you *think* you know about milkweeds – I'm guessing that you don't know that there are 11 species of milkweeds native to N.Y. state alone. Many of these are gorgeous, fragrant, and easy to grow as well as some that are threatened or endangered.

To learn more about native plants stop by the annual native plant sale on Saturday and Sunday, May 19 and 20, 10am-3pm at the Thacher Park Overlook and check out the plethora of perennials, shrubs and trees that are specifically chosen because they will flourish in *your* yard under *your* conditions. And remember – don't let the plant names fool you – Ironweed is an incredibly stunning plant, statuesque in height, brilliant in color and a butterfly magnet.

For more information about native plants or the plant sale, contact Laurel at the Nature Center: 518-872-0800.

-by Laurel Tormey Cole



Monarch on Ironweed
photo by Chesapeake CLC

Garden Gang Cleanup 2018

It's hard to believe, but this chilly picture will be bustling with activity on May 5 – I Love My Park Day.

Hands willing to get dirty will transform this picture into the beautiful spring planter we all love. Flowers will be popping in time for the Native Plant Sale – May 19 & 20, showcasing some native plants of it's own.

Please come and join Friends of Thacher for a fun day of rewarding work followed by a BBQ provided by Friends.

Thank you!
– The Garden Gang



Save the Dates!

Saturday, May 5
9am - 1pm

I Love My Park Day

Please register online at www.ptny.org.

Saturday, May 19 & Sunday, May 20
10am–3pm

Native Plant Sale at Thacher Overlook

Saturday, June 2
9am

National Trails Day

Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2018

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, May 9, 2018

Next:

Board Meeting

7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center !

Thacher's mini-migration

Caribou thundering across the tundra. Monarchs wintering in Mexico. Salamanders crossing Rt. 157 in Thacher Park. Animals moving over distances are the stuff of migration stories. Yet right here in Thacher, you can observe a small wonder: migrating plants.

Follow the route the salamanders take, uphill on the Hop Field trail to the pond where they lay their eggs. In early April the pond surface will be clear. By mid-May the pond is covered with tiny green dots. This is duckweed, *Lemna minor*, the smallest flowering plant.

Throughout the summer, each plant has two tiny oval leaves and a dangling rootlet that hangs in the water. There are air pockets between the cells which make the leaves float. At the end of the summer, as the days shorten, a vegetative leaf called a *turion* grows on each plant. This darker leaf accumulates starch. Air pockets in the leaves also gain starch, making the plant denser so that they sink to the bottom of the pond, away from damaging winter ice.

By mid-April, a few Duckweed plants have popped up to the surface. The starchy *turion* has dissolved and air pockets serve as water wings, lifting each plant to the surface. Within a month, the migration is complete and the pond is once again covered with green. Depending on the depth of the pond, the entire migration covers only four to ten feet of distance.

This migration is fortunate for wildlife. Birds, fish, crustaceans, amphibians, insects, and mammals all feed on the abundant tiny dots covering ponds and swamps. Mallard ducklings favor duckweed as their first food, only later eating seeds and grains. Wood ducklings do just the opposite. They start out eating insects and as they grow, they develop a taste for the aptly named duckweed.

- by *Sigrin Newell*

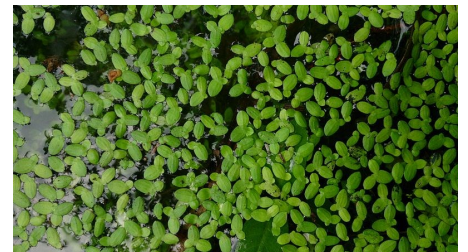


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As always, you can find a color version of the newsletter at www.friendsofthacherpark.org