



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
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More Bald Eagles at the Park!



When a bald eagle sets up a nest in your backyard, it's wise to not get your hopes up too high for the nestlings that may follow. Despite adult bald eagles being very capable predators,

odds of survival in their first year of life can be grim: According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, less than 50% of eaglets will survive to adulthood. Young eaglets can succumb to territorial aggression from other eagles, food shortages, and even predation from owls. However, if an eaglet does survive its first year, the chances that it will live to see full adulthood are much improved.

Luckily, here at Thacher Nature Center, the odds seem to be in our favor. While our eaglets are only around two months old, they are showing promising signs. They are fully feathered and nearly as large as their parents, and we've seen them demonstrating auspicious behavior: flexing their wings, which strengthens their flight muscles, and self-feeding, which indicates growing self-sufficiency. We've even observed them hopping out of their nest to nearby branches! This means that they are preparing to fledge, and

approximately one month after fledging, the eaglets will be ready to begin hunting and foraging on their own. However, at these early stages of flying the young eagles are still partially dependent on their parents for food, returning to the nest to try to steal their parents' catch. This can help the eaglets learn how to scavenge food from competitors when they are unable to catch their own fish.

By late September, the parents will tell the kids it's time to move on, no longer tolerating them in the nest. Around this time, the young eagles will strike out on their own in search of plentiful feeding outside of their parents' territory. For the next few years, the young eagles will be transient, always searching for the most plentiful food source without building a nest.

Bald eagles reach maturity at around four years of age; they will then seek a mate, build a nest, and establish territory of their own. Most young eagles build their nest within 250 miles of the nest in which they were hatched. Be sure to stop by the Nature Center for our latest update on the eagles, or venture out on the Nature Center Trail or down to Thompson's Lake to try to get a glimpse of them for yourself!

- by Vanessa Gabel



The image on top is of the two parents at the nest, taken in April of this year. Images at the bottom were taken about two weeks ago. Bottom left shows the nest with one eaglet exercising its wings; middle shows both eaglets with one parent perched on a nearby branch; right shows a close-up of the two eaglets. Photos by Bert Schou.

Campfire Stories at Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center

When summer arrives at the Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center, nothing rounds out a beautiful warm evening like stories and s'mores around the campfire. Local storyteller **Claire Nolan** entertains visitors and campers with a variety of folk and literary tales, myths, nature and personal stories that resonate with audiences both young and old. Join us **July 21st** and **August 18th** beginning at 6pm for two hours of stories that will capture your imagination.

Stories can range from an explanation of how the Chipmunk got its stripes to Claire's telling of Peter Pan at Mermaids Lagoon and Pirates Cove. Learn where the term tree-huggers came from: the true story of a little girl rallying her village in India to save the trees.

Claire has been telling stories at the Nature Center for at least ten years to an audience of

campers (little ones sometimes arrive in their pajamas), newcomers and some who come back year after year to enjoy an evening filled with stories, fireflies, the sounds of night creatures and the gentle lapping waves of Thompsons Lake. And sometimes, even local lake residents will paddle over with their family from nearby camps. And nothing goes better with stories at the campfire than roasting marshmallows, an age-old pastime that listeners of all ages enjoy, especially with chocolate on graham crackers.

If you miss Claire at the Nature Center or if you want more, she can also be found this summer telling tales at Grafton State Park and Schoharie Crossings.

- by Bert Schou



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 Vanessa Gabel, Bert Schou, Sigrin Newell and Nancy Engel for their contributions to this newsletter.

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

The Well-defended Eagle Claw Fern

With spring ephemerals long gone, summer is a time to focus on ferns at Thacher Park. There are many different sizes, shapes and textures of ferns in the park. To help with your explorations, you can find guide books in the Thacher Nature Center gift shop. *Ferns of the Capital Region* was written by local expert Ed Miller. The shop also carries a handy pocket-sized guide, the *Fern Finder*.

There are ferns growing all over the park. A good place to start hunting for them is on the Hop Field trail. One you will probably find easily is Bracken. This fern tends to grow in patches. Individual plants have a single stem which divides into 3 fronds. These fronds give rise to my all-time favorite Latin name for a plant. Bracken is *Pteridium aquilinum*, which translates as ‘claw of the eagle’. The *pter* is the same as in the familiar *Pterodactyl*, the dinosaur with claws on its wings. *Aquilinum* is familiar in the description of a sharp nose as an aquiline nose, i.e. looking like an eagle. Bracken earns the name ‘claw of the eagle’ for the three-parted curled frond that comes up early in the spring (see image bottom right).

Worldwide, bracken is attacked by more than 100 species of insects plus many mammals. Over the 500 million years of its existence, bracken has evolved poisons for protection. Ecdysone is a hormone which causes uncontrollable repeated moulting in insects, leading to death. Throughout history, bracken was used for animal bedding. In England, at an archeological site, the floor of a stable from AD100 was strewn with bracken. Archeologists found pupa of 250,000 stable flies, all showing arrested development, presumably from eating bracken.

Bracken also produces hydrogen cyanide whenever an insect bites into it. This must be an unpleasant surprise. The most abundant poisons in bracken are tannins which have a bitter taste and are toxic in large quantities. As if this wasn't enough, bracken also produces an enzyme that breaks down vitamin B1. This protects the fern against

horses, cattle, sheep, and other grazers who develop ‘staggers’ from vitamin B1 deficiency.

Fortunately, cooking destroys these nasties, so you can eat fiddleheads in the spring with no worries. While enjoying your feast, marvel at the incredible evolutionary interaction between bracken and its enemies. Each time the fern develops a new defense, some species of insect develops the ability to overcome it. Over time, this dance creates balance. Throughout the eons, it is tit for tat. You can see the current state of this standoff by looking for brackens at Thacher Park.

- by Sigrin Newell



By Homer Edward Price; <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/>, Wikimedia Commons



Photo by Holly A. Heyser; <https://honest-food.net/bracken-fern-edible/>

Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2018

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, July 11, 2018

Next:

Board Meeting

7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center

Interested in some fun bald eagle facts?

- * Bald eagles hold the record for the biggest nest ever built—10 feet wide and weighing almost 3 tons. Mated pairs usually return to the same nesting site and continue to enlarge their nest over the years.
- * Adult bald eagles are 30 -40 inches tall and weigh 6-14 pounds. They also have a wingspan of up to 7 feet ... and about 7,200 feathers.
- * Adult male and female bald eagles look identical, though the females tend to be larger. Bald eagle pairs usually mate for life.
- * Bald eagles eat mostly fish, but also smaller birds, bird eggs and small mammals.
- * Bald eagles can see more colors than humans and can also see in the UV range of light, enabling them to spot the urine trail of prey.
- * Bald eagles almost became extinct in the 70's due to overhunting and the use of the pesticide DDT. Today, numbers have recovered and there are more than 10,000 nationwide.
- * Bald eagles have no sense of smell but can taste.
- * Bald eagles can't swim but have been observed to sit in the water and row themselves across with their wings.



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