



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
May—June 2019 • Vol. 23 No. 3



Birds of a Feather



“Look! Over there!” “Can you hear it?” The call of the bird watcher is almost as familiar as the call of the birds at this time of year in Thacher Park. By May, birds will be decked out in their breeding finery, attracting birdwatchers from all over.

To leave their drab winter garb behind, birds molt. Except for the goldfinches who show up at feeders in March wearing a half-molted patchwork of grey and yellow, most birds molt off-stage where people aren't aware of what's happening. Often, molting takes place over weeks or months, gradually replacing feathers so that no one area is too much exposed. Ducks, who molt all at once, are an exception. They are rendered flightless during their molt. Thus the origin of ‘sitting ducks’ as a hunter's term, since the ducks can't fly to escape them.

It is commonly understood that the beautiful feathers of breeding season evolved to help with mate selection, advertising the fitness of the bird to be a parent. By being nattily attired in breeding season, yet more sedate at other times of the year, birds can avoid predation by being less conspicuous.

Another purpose of molting is to keep the population of feather lice under control. The keratin in feathers is fine food for lice. Birds spend their lives trying to stay ahead of these critters who can destroy the insulating and waterproofing qualities of feathers. While bathing in water or dust helps, it appears that sloughing off old feathers and growing new ones that are lice-free is worth the energy it takes to do so.

Repairing wear and tear is another function of molting. Wind, rain, snow, and flying all take their toll on delicate feathers. When the tips and barbs wear down, it's essential to replace the whole feather. The process of molting replaces all the feathers systematically. But at any time, if an individual feather is badly broken, the follicle will release that feather and a new one will grow in its place.

Thacher Park is an official Bird Conservation Area. One hundred and two species have been confirmed as breeders in the park. The forests support some of the area's highest densities of breeding songbirds such as



Photo by Joan Chasan of a male goldfinch starting to molt his winter plumage.
<https://images.app.goo.gl/RrV7nC9CXozmwJLq8>



Photo by Kurt Bauschardt of a male goldfinch in full summer plumage.
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/kurt-b/14298854761>

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Hermit Thrush, Winter Wren, Magnolia, Black-throated Blue, Black-throated Green, Blackburnian, Canada and Worm-eating Warblers and Louisiana and Northern Waterthrushes. You can download a Park checklist at <https://parks.ny.gov/parks/attachments/ThacherThacherParkBirdChecklist.pdf>. Come on up and find the newly-molted birds in their spring finery.

- by Sigrin Newell

Anybody interested in following the change of plumage in the American Goldfinch more closely can check out the slide show of the annual plumage cycle on the Sibley Guides webpage:

<https://www.sibleyguides.com/2012/05/the-annual-plumage-cycle-of-a-male-american-goldfinch/>

Bald Eagles at Thompson's Lake

You may have heard the news by now, there are Bald Eagles nesting on Thompson's Lake! We've had a nesting pair (presumably the same two adults) actively hunting and nesting along the lake for several years now. After two seasons of nesting in a site just off park property, we were excited to find the location of their newer nest, which is easily viewed (with binoculars or a spotting scope) from one of our trails!

Last year was the eagles' first nesting attempt in their new digs, and the mated pair successfully fledged two juveniles. Now, they are in the middle of their second year at this excellent nest site! Since the start of 2019, Nature Center staff and SCA interns have been diligently observing the pair, and noted that incubation began on approximately March 10. Fast forward to April 17, or day 39 from the start of incubation, when we observed feeding behavior on the nest. This distinctive behavior is a sure sign

they've got a newly hatched chick! We will continue to observe these amazing and attentive avian parents in hopes of seeing their young grow up to become fully-fledged adults. Stop in Thacher Nature Center to inquire about the nest observation spot along our trail!

- by Megan Mansfield



Photo of one adult and two juveniles taken in 2018, 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 Sigrin Newell, Megan Mansfield, Bert Schou, Brian Horl and Nancy Engel 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

Thacher Nature Center – Help Wanted !

The Nature Center is looking for a candidate for our summer maintenance position. Job duties include mowing, trimming, and garden care, as well as cleaning the Nature Center. Additional duties may include trail maintenance, invasive plant removal, and other projects.

Applicants must have experience with grounds keeping and garden work and be able to perform medium to heavy physical labor. Applicants must also be organized and able to work independently.

Work schedule is Tuesday through Saturday, 9am – 5pm. Pay Rate is \$11.10/ hour. We would like to fill this position as soon as possible for a mid-May start date (start date can be flexible to accommodate students).

Interested applicants should contact Nancy Engel at 518-872-0800.

Saturday, May 4, 2019
9am - 1pm



Help out our wonderful park by joining in the spring cleanup! The Friends will have a BBQ picnic lunch ready for you afterwards! We will meet at the Pear Orchard picnic Shelter. Hope to see you there!



Hannaford Helps Reusable Bag Program!

The Friends of Thacher Park received \$45 from the Hannaford reusable bag program. Thanks to all of you who made this happen by buying a bag at the Voorheesville Hannaford in March!



Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2019

May 8, July 10, September 11, and November 13 (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 8, 2019

Next:

Board Meeting

7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center

Mayday

Mayday (also known as Beltane/Roodmas and other names depending on culture and era) is a festival of feasts and rituals to celebrate the fertility of the land and people. It is celebrated between April 30th and May 2nd, but most commonly on May 1st. Some cultures considered it the first day of summer because it falls half way between the spring equinox and summer solstice. It was also thought to be a time where the boundary between our world and the faerie world is thin. The festival has been celebrated mostly in Germanic countries. Its most recognized ritual is the Maypole dance. The pole would be erected in the center of town and the people would dance around it wrapping it in ribbon and greenery.

In ancient Celtic traditions Mayday was known as Beltane, or "Fire of Bel". The name is derived from the Celtic sun God Belos. It was a celebration of unabashed sexuality and promiscuity. The young people would go into the woods the night of the 30th and not return until morning looking rather disheveled and they would participate in the Maypole dance. Marriages of a year and a day were undertaken (though rarely practiced today). And older married couples were allowed to remove their wedding rings (and the restrictions they imply) for this one night. I'm not sure I would recommend trying that today either.

The Puritans of New England banned the celebration of Mayday in the mid 1600's due to its sexuality and it being considered Paganism. They also banned the Maypole because it was derived from phallic symbols that were erected in villages to celebrate the holiday. That is why to this day it is not a widely celebrated holiday in this country.

Mayday is still honored in some European countries with dances, bonfires and other traditions. French custom is to give a flower called the Lily Of the Valley. This custom started in 1561 when King Charles the IX was given one as a good luck charm. And some areas of Austria and Germany still hoist the Maypole and brew a special beer (Maibock) on May 1st.



Photo by the editor shows the Maypole at Munich's famous open air market "Viktualienmarkt".

—Thoughts from the porch, by Brian Horl

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