



# Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186  
July-August 2020 • Vol. 24 No. 4

## Woodpeckers Abound



*Two Northern Flickers—Photo by Jolanta Jeanneney*

Who hasn't heard the unmistakable rat-a-tat of a woodpecker while walking in the woods? Worldwide there are at least 200 species of woodpeckers, with up to 29 in North America.

At least six of those have been spotted in or near Thacher Park, including the downy, the hairy, the northern flicker, the pileated, the red-bellied woodpecker, and the yellow-bellied sapsucker. (A checklist of all varieties of birds spotted in Thacher Park and the surrounding area can be found at <https://parks.ny.gov/parks/attachments/ThacherThacherParkBirdChecklist.pdf>.)

The downy and the hairy are nearly identical, with solid white breasts, black backs, a touch of red at the back of the heads, and short beaks. They are the only two with a solid white stripe down the entire back. The downy is the most diminutive woodpecker on the continent and one of the ten smallest in the world at 6 inches long. The hairy is almost 50 percent larger with a longer beak.

The northern flicker is named for the unique and brilliant red or yellow undersides of its wings and tail, which resembles flickering flames when flying. This species is also distinguished by a longer beak, black bib, slash of red on its cheeks, and spots on its breast and wings.

The pileated, nicknamed King-o'-the-Woods, is the largest woodpecker in North America, at 16 inches long with a wingspan of 30 inches. It has a mostly black body and, rare among woodpecker species, a red crest.

The red-bellied, one of the most abundant and easily detected woodpeckers in eastern North America, sports red on the top of its head from beak to neck and has a longer beak.

The yellow-bellied sapsucker, the most migratory woodpecker in the world, is named for its yellowish underparts. Primarily black and white, its most distinguishing mark is a red forehead. The male also has a red throat.

A characteristic common to most woodpecker species is a long tongue system. While the tongue may vary in length and features depending on the species' use of it (probing for insects vs. penetrating sap wells, for example), in most the system is so long it wraps around the rear of the head between the skull and the skin.

Another signature characteristic is drumming, as that rat-a-tat sound is called, with each species having its own



*Male Hairy Woodpecker—Photo by Jolanta Jeanneney*

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distinctive patterns and rhythms. This instrumentation has other uses besides drumming up a meal. Woodpeckers might be drilling a hole for a spring nest or a cold-weather home, communicating with other woodpeckers, wooing a mate, marking their territory, or warning off predators.

They will drum on anything that amplifies the sound, including your house, shed, garbage can or mailbox. While this might make them happy, you might not be pleased to find holes in your wood siding or dents in your metal gutters and soffits.

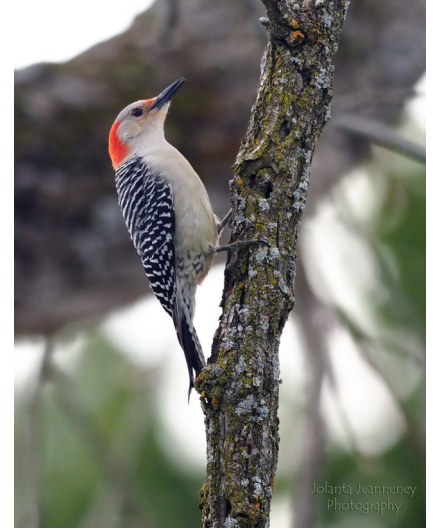
If that doesn't deter you from wanting to attract woodpeckers to your property, put out fruit (oranges, grapes, apples), sunflower seeds, peanuts (whole or shelled), peanut butter, mealworms, nectar sold for use in Oriole and hummingbird feeders, jelly (grape, apple, marmalade) and, in cold weather, suet. Be sure to provide a water source at any feeding station.

A final note of praise on their wood-working skills: "More than 40 bird species in North America depend on woodpecker carpentry for their nest and roost cavities," writes Stephen Shunk in the *Peterson Reference Guide to Woodpeckers of North America*. Secondary nesters, such as

tree swallows, bluebirds, titmice, wrens, flycatchers, and some owls and ducks, repurpose holes carved out by woodpeckers, as well as numerous small mammals, invertebrates, and even a few reptiles. Holes also can serve as sap wells for hummingbirds and butterflies. Ruby-throated hummingbirds, for example, follow yellow-bellied sapsuckers to take advantage of this food source before flower nectar becomes available.

The next time you're in Thacher Park, keep your eyes and ears alert to see if you can identify any of the resident woodpecker species. And if you should spot one with an unruly red crest, a blue onesie and a raucous cackle, you've just had a Woody Woodpecker sighting, and that means you've been in the woods too long.

- by Jill Harbeck



Red-bellied Woodpecker—Photo by Jolanta Jeanneney

## Virtual Native Plant Sale

It's Not Too Late! Thacher Nature Center's Virtual Native Plant Sale Continues!

Perennials: quart pots – **NOW \$5 each**; any 4 for \$18

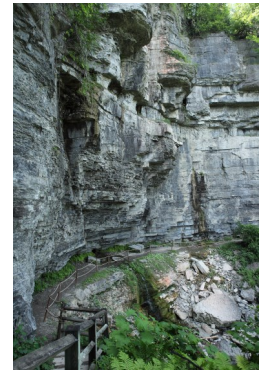
All are grown without neonicotinoids and will be beneficial for pollinators in your landscape. Contact Laurel at Thacher Nature Center for an updated availability list at: [laurel.tormey-cole@parks.ny.gov](mailto:laurel.tormey-cole@parks.ny.gov)

Looking for something beautiful, deer resistant and great for pollinators? Consider the Showy Goldenrod (*Solidago speciosa*, see photo). It doesn't give people hay fever. They are insect pollinated – their pollen isn't wind borne. Ragweed "blooms" at the same time but is not easily visible. And this goldenrod is a well behaved plant that doesn't spread.



## Park News

The Indian Ladder Trail opened 6/20 after being scaled. It is now a one way trail beginning at the LaGrange parking area and ending at the Visitor Center. There are hand sanitizing stations at entrance and exit.



Nature Center staff are planning to offer a variety of walks and outdoor programs for small groups beginning after July 4<sup>th</sup>. Participants will be required to register in advance and follow social distance protocols. These will be announced on a week by week basis for now. Look for postings on the Thacher Park facebook page or give us a call for updated information at 518-872-0800. We look forward to welcoming visitors and spending time out on the trails. Stay well and hope to see you all soon!

## Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2020

As of now, board meetings are tentatively scheduled for July 8, September 9, and November 11, 7:00pm at Thacher Visitor Center. Please stay tuned for updates due to Covid-19.

## ... Full Moons 'til December ...

Today we use calendars to keep track of important dates and times throughout our year but our ancestors did not have that luxury. They kept track of these things by following the moon cycles; when to plant, when to harvest and many other important dates. There are 12 to 13 full moons during the course of the year. They come every 28¼ days. Many cultures gave these moons names to mark their importance in their lives. Whether they be Celtic, Old English or Native American, they all held importance. We published the full moons of the first half of the year in an earlier newsletter edition. The following is a list of the full moons for the second half of the year.

The July full moon, which will be coming up on July 5, was known as the Buck or Wort Moon. When the sun was in Leo the wort (a middle English word referring to herbaceous plants) was ready to be harvested and dried for storage. The Buck Moon was the more common name because deer would begin to grow antlers for the coming breeding season. August was the Sturgeon Moon or Barley Moon. Sturgeon were most easily caught in the lakes and rivers during this month. The Barley Moon came from the fact that the barley was becoming ready for harvest. Persephone - the Virgin Goddess of Rebirth - carried a sheath of barley to celebrate the harvest. September is the Harvest Moon. It is the full moon that occurs closest to the Fall Equinox. A very important time for Native Americans. It was when corn, squash, beans and wild rice would be harvested and stored for the upcoming winter. October is the Blood or Hunters Moon. Leaves would be falling from the trees making it easier for hunters to spot their prey. Very important when you need to store up meat for the upcoming winter. November was known as the Beaver or Oak Moon. Beavers would be active this time of the year allowing trappers to catch them more easily so they could use the pelts to stay warm through the winter. The name

Oak Moon came from the Druids who honored the oak because of its ability to withstand the strong winter storms. December is the Long Night Moon. Easy to guess why.

For those of you counting this only covers twelve full moon cycles. The other two full moon names are the Blue Moon which happens when there are two full moons in the twenty eight day cycle. It is thought to be a time to set specific goals for yourself. The other is the Black Moon. Not a name you hear often. It is when there is no full moon in a calendar month. It is thought that the Black Moon is a time of great power in the spiritual world and that any magic worked at during this time is especially powerful. I hope this adds some interest to your moon gazing. Looking at the night sky from the porch.

Looking at the night sky from the porch -

- Brian Horl



Photo by Christine Gervasi

Can you find the little animal that made an appearance on the Thatcher Park Critter Cam? Look closely. In the lower left hand corner, hiding behind a branch but clearly curious about the camera is a little mouse! Thank you, Katie!



Check for updates at [www.friendsofthacherpark.org](http://www.friendsofthacherpark.org)

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As always, call (518) 872-0800 or (518) 872-1237 to verify activity times and dates.

Please feel free to call board members with questions or suggestions.

Many thanks to Jill Harbeck, Jolanta Jeanneney, Brian Horl, Laurel Tormey-Cole, Nola DalGallo, Katie Blaylock, Savannah Wilson and Nancy Engel for their contributions to this newsletter.

Want to contribute? Please email me at [cgervasi@albany.edu](mailto:cgervasi@albany.edu). Christine Gervasi—Editor

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Wednesday, July 8, 2020

Next:

## Board Meeting

7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center (on the Patio outside - please bring a face mask)



Turkey Vulture—Savannah Wilson

Spring has been in full bloom here at Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center! While programs have been cancelled and the nature center doors have been closed, flora and fauna are still going through their natural cycle and continue to give a beautiful display to visitors and staff who are out on the trails.

While we figure out the logistics of in-person programming, we have been working on increasing our presence online with educational posts to Facebook and ironing out ideas for zoom-like programming or outreach type education. This spring has shown more individuals reaching out to the outdoors for an escape from quarantine and to bring peace to a new lifestyle that Covid-19 has introduced to the world.

As the summer nears, we're getting ready to open to the public! We have been working on updating and changing some displays to remove the heavily touched items while still

trying to use signage and take-home booklets for a fun learning experience. As we move through phases of re-opening, we're excited to begin in-person education through guided hikes throughout the Thacher properties. The goal is to introduce visitors to lesser known trails and see/find traces of animals or plants that call Thacher home.

Our interns, Katie and Audrey, have been hard at work monitoring our blue bird nest boxes and updating signage in the Nature Center. The blue bird boxes have been dominated primarily by tree swallows but there has been some bird drama with territory battles between the swallows and blue birds, each species fighting over one box and kicking out the previous nest pair. Bobolinks have been sighted often in the fields as well! Singing their robot-like songs while performing flight displays within the fields. Katie and Audrey also manage the trail cameras around the property, catching photos of bears, ruffed grouse, deer and other small animals.

- by Savannah Wilson



Bobolink — photo by Savannah Wilson

As always, you can find a color version of the newsletter at [www.friendsofthacherpark.org](http://www.friendsofthacherpark.org)