



# Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186  
March—April 2021 • Vol. 25 No. 2



## Fire Lizards



"Western Red-Backed Salamander (*Plethodon vehiculum*)" by Seánín Óg is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/2.0/)

"Would you believe it? We counted seventeen Redbacked Salamanders and Red Efts on the Schoolhouse Trail." One misty moist morning a group of us found that the wet forest floor made it easy for these salamanders to move about in the daytime. It was exciting to see so many at once.

One fun way to extend the pleasure of a hike at Thacher is to go back home and read about the things you have discovered. Northern Woodlands magazine (<https://northernwoodlands.org/>) is an excellent place for such explorations. Put a topic in their search box to come up with several articles. Here's a collection of interesting things I learned about salamanders from Northern Woodlands.\*

It's not surprising that we saw so many Redbacks that day. Statewide surveys indicate that they are the most abundant vertebrate in the northern forests with possibly 14 billion Redbacked Salamanders in New York State. They are also the most abundant vertebrate by total biomass weighing an estimated 14,000 tons, twice the weight of all woodland birds in New York. It is surprising that such small

critters are a primary source of energy flow throughout our forests. They eat worms, slugs, and all sorts of invertebrates, in turn transferring this energy to higher levels of the food chain.

Our local herpetologist, Al Breisch points out that salamanders eat a lot of earthworms. If there were no salamanders, the earthworms would chew up a great deal of the leaf litter, leaving the soil bare to erosion and desiccation. Salamanders provide an important protective function to our forests.

Adult Redbacks are well camouflaged, but juvenile Red-spotted Newts, commonly known as Red Efts, are brilliant red orange. They are poisonous. Toads and snakes that swallow Red Efts have been seen to vomit them back up, unharmed, within half an hour. Predators who have learned their lesson are unlikely to attack another eft. The adults are toxic too though only 1/10 as toxic as the young ones. This is enough however to make it possible for adults to share pond waters with predatory fish.

Herpetologist Mark Urban discovered that evolution in action can be seen by comparing ponds that have different kinds of predators. He found that the tail muscles of our familiar Yellow-Spotted Salamander vary, depending on the predators in the pool. Yellow-Spots living in ponds where there are diving beetles have stronger tails. "Diving beetles don't seem to give up when chasing their prey," Urban said. Stronger tails give these animals a better chance of escaping.

Doing research after hike can yield fascinating information. The word salamander comes from Greek Roots meaning "fire lizard". Rotting logs are a favorite hideaway for many species of salamanders; these logs provide moisture and plenty of invertebrates to eat. In ancient

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times, imagine someone's surprise when putting such a log on the fire. The heat would drive a salamander to walk out of the fire and across their hearth. In just the same way, fun facts will emerge from the fires of your curiosity after a hike at Thacher.

-by Sigrin Newell

**\*References**

Li Shen, Secret Weapons Hiding in Plain Sight, Northern Woodlands, May 13, 2013  
MacLeisch, Todd, Evolution in Small Spaces, Northern Woodlands, Summer 2011  
McLeisch, Todd, Some Like it Moist, Northern Woodlands, Autumn 2009  
Thelen, Brett Amy, Salamander Party Tricks, Northern Woodlands, Sept 4, 2017  
Thelen, Brett Amy, Talking 'bout Regeneration, Northern Woodlands, Aug 19, 2019



"Red Eft (2)" by Nicholas T is licensed under CC BY 2.0

**Please welcome Grace Brennen as our 2021 SCA Environmental Educator!**



I'm Grace Brennen, I have a Bachelor of Science in Environment & Sustainability from Catawba College in Salisbury, NC. I moved home to Georgia in March 2020 when my school closed due to COVID, and I graduated virtually in May.

I love plants, especially succulents, and I propagate them in my free time. A few of them made the move to New York with me, and fingers crossed we will

all survive the snowy winters! I'm excited to be here at Thacher and I am looking forward to learning all about this unique region, and the species that call it home!

**Please welcome Anna Pirkey as our 2021 SCA Geology Educator!**

My name is Anna Pirkey. I grew up in Denver, Colorado where I spent my childhood going up to the mountains almost every weekend. I pursued Art History and Biological Anthropology at Montana State University in Bozeman, Montana. Living in

the Rocky Mountains gave me incredible access to the outdoors and created a lifelong love and connection with the natural world. I try to spend as much time as possible outside. In the winter I love to down-hill and cross country ski! In the warmer months you can typically find me kayaking, riding my road bike or gardening and my 2021 resolution is to practice yoga every day!

I am extremely passionate about the conservation of our natural world and I am eager to challenge myself and grow as a young professional so I can continue to educate myself and make a greater impact. I have learned many important life lessons from being outdoors and I am a deep believer in the educational power of the natural world. What I am most excited about is getting to work with, educate and create memories with people of all ages and hopefully instill excitement and love for the natural world as well as this beautiful park and all it has to offer!

I can't wait to see you out on the trails or in the Nature and Visitor Centers!



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

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Many thanks to Sigrin Newell, Grace Brennen, Anna Pirkey, Savannah Wilson, Brian Horl, and Laurel Tormey Cole for their contributions to this newsletter.

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

## 🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀 PAGANISM 🌀🌀🌀🌀🌀

The earliest known use of the term stems from 15<sup>th</sup> century Rome. It was used to describe those who practiced religions other than the main three, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. It is a word that conjures up many different images depending on your beliefs and upbringing. To some it is the image of a Pentagram drawn on the floor of a dimly lit room surrounded by people in dark robes holding candles. To others it may be the image of Druids gathered at Stonehenge to celebrate the Equinox and to still others it may be the gathering of a witch's coven. All of these images have some level of truth to them.

Unlike the mainstream religions, there is no set doctrine that all Pagans must follow. Though there is no set doctrine to follow, many who do practice Paganism follow many of the same basic principles. They honor and respect the natural world and many of the ancient Gods and Goddesses. Many believe in the mental and physical healing powers of items found in nature. They believe in the power of certain stones and crystals to aid in emotional health. They will collect certain herbs and grasses to bundle and dry. They will then smudge them to ward off bad energy. Some of them also give off a nice aroma. I suggest looking up the grasses used and try it sometime. They have also passed down knowledge through the centuries of plants and herbs that can heal illness and injuries. The people who have practiced this knowledge have been referred to by many names. The Native Americans called the Shamans, and they were greatly respected. The Puritans, on the other hand, called them witches and put them on trial. Over time scientists have come to understand that these people had a level of knowledge that science has taken centuries to reach.

They also celebrate many days throughout the year. Some to honor Gods and Goddesses, some to celebrate things in the natural world and some to celebrate their ancestors. Some of these I have written about in previous newsletters. Some of the major ones are the spring and fall equinoxes and the summer and winter solstice. These center very much around nature. There is also Samhain which celebrates the ancestors and is also what our current Halloween is based on.

Now for the downside of honoring nature and the ancient gods. As Christianity started to gain traction, some Popes decided that to increase their flock they would ban these celebrations. They then replaced them with Christian holidays in hopes of converting the people. In closing, I feel that honoring the natural world is a good way to live my life. A belief that I try to practice.

*- From the Porch, by Brian Horl*



Winter is a perfect time to explore the hidden lives of winter resident animals. Snow records movement and snapshots into what different animals are thinking and where they are traveling, letting us see the quick trot of a fisher, or the frantic food caching of a grey squirrel. Thanks to the Friends of Thacher, the Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center has 4 new trail cameras to help with tracking and capturing images of our wild neighbors. Recently we caught one of New York's smallest weasel species, the short-tailed weasel (top), and the largest weasel, the fisher (bottom). While typically a light to dark brown during the spring, summer and early fall, the short-tailed weasel changes to a pure white to help camouflage in the snow. The fisher on the other hand, remains dark colored and is a large, strong weasel that is one of the main predators of adult porcupines!

*- by Savannah Wilson*

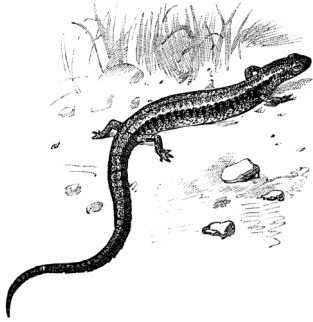
### Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2021

Meeting dates are Wednesdays, March 10\*, May 12, July 14, September 8, and November 10.

\*March 10 meeting will be by Zoom. Please email [cgervasi@albany.edu](mailto:cgervasi@albany.edu) for invitation link.

**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 10, 2021

Next:

**Board Meeting**

7:00 pm by Zoom

### Thacher Nature Center Native Plant Sale

It's That Time!! Time to start thinking about green, growing things and Spring!! The **Thacher Nature Center Native Plant Sale** is once again here with *dozens* of hard to find native perennials and grasses as well as native trees and shrubs! We are also offering pre-planned Garden Kits that take the guess work out of beginning to plant with natives.

There are numerous benefits to planting and landscaping with native plants. Native plants do *not* require *any* soil amendments, no additional watering after establishment, no staking, no deadheading, no fertilizing! There are beautiful native perennials, trees and shrubs for every situation in your yard. Need plants for a wet area? Plant our gorgeous Rain Garden Kit! Want plants to attract birds? We have great shrubs that do just that! Have a hot, dry spot? We have sun and sand lovers!

You can also schedule a one-hour in-person FREE appointment with a native plant expert who

can assist you with information on what plants to put where, creating a backyard sanctuary for wildlife, hummingbird and butterfly gardens, identifying invasive species and much more! Call 518-872-0800 to schedule your appointment (Appointments are available Sun., Tues., & Wed. 9am-3pm).

For a [Native Plant Sale Availability List](#) please email [laurel.tormey-cole@parks.ny.gov](mailto:laurel.tormey-cole@parks.ny.gov) and get started on creating the yard of your dreams!

- by Laurel Tormey Cole



Retrieved from <https://gardentherapy.ca/milkweed-for-monarchs/>

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