



# Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186  
July — August 2021 • Vol. 25 No. 4



## Playing Shape Scavengers



The next time you bring children to Thacher, invite them to play Shape Scavengers. This game teaches basic skills of observation and description. It's a fun way to learn some botanical and historical knowledge. Children hunt for particular shapes in nature, seeing how many examples they can find. Bring a notebook to keep track of what they find. **Stop!** Before you reach down to explore a plant, scan the surrounding area for the **triangle of danger**. Poison ivy has three leaflets on a single stem that makes a triangle, one pointing up two pointing sideways. Leaflets three, let it be.

The game has two parts. Start with geometric shapes. Circles are easy. Many flowers are radially symmetrical. No matter which direction an insect approaches from, the bug will be directed towards the center of the flower where they will pollinate the flower. Some leaves are almost circular. Keep an eye out for them.

Another easy to find circle is a gray green lichen that commonly grows on tree trunks in almost perfect circles. Its nickname is "Forty miles an hour" lichen because you can recognize it even if you're driving a car at 40 miles an hour.

Triangles are also easy to find in nature. Many evergreens and some deciduous trees are triangular or cone shaped. This helps the lower branches get sunlight and not be shaded by branches above them. After scanning the horizon for tree shapes, look down at your feet. Sedges look like grass growing in bunches. The stems of sedges are triangular. If you think something might be a sedge, roll the

stem between your fingers and you can feel the ridges. Also pay attention to the shapes of leaves, many are nearly triangular.

Squares are the hardest to find, but mustard family members are good examples. Mustard flowers have four petals so they are rather square. Most mustards are small, with many flowers growing in a cluster. Seed pods make the plants easy to recognize. They are slender and point upward. Such pods have a silly name – siliqua (sill-leek).



The stems of mints are square in cross-section. You can feel it if you roll it between your fingers. If you think you might be looking at a mint, cut one stem and look at a cross section. Then crush a leaf and sniff it. Most mints have some sort of an odor, but many of them smell quite awful and not like the pungent toothpaste smell we associate with mints.

When the kids are happy with their list of basic geometric shapes you can turn the tables and start the second part of the Shape Scavenger game. Find a flower or a plant and try to think of a something man-made that is similar to this plant. A trumpet? An umbrella? A shoe horn? Old ripped jeans? This can be a fun game for children and is also excellent practice in the art of creating similes, one thing is like another.

With some shapes, it is easy to come up with a simile; others are more challenging. Jack the flower of Jack-in-the-Pulpit is a complex shape, difficult to describe. Is it like a trumpet? An ice cream cone? What it does not look like is a

*Continued on the next page .....*

... continued from the previous page

pulpit, at least the pulpits found in contemporary churches. In churches the hood over a pulpit is a thing of the past. You might explain to the children that before microphones and loudspeaker systems, the curving structure above the preacher served to focus the sound and direct it back out towards the people who were listening to him. For a history lesson, search on 'pulpit' and look at all the images of pulpits with hoods. You might also explain that the name "Jack" has traditionally been used to stand in for any male.

A useful guide to help in playing shape scavengers is "A Field Guide to Wildflowers by Peterson and McKenny. It categorizes plants both by color and shape.

You might begin or end your day of exploration by stopping in at the Thacher Nature Center gift store to look at the book. Speaking of shapes, you'll find this book to be a rectangle.

- by Sigrin Newell

Photo of a 'Forty miles an hour' Lichen retrieved from [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flavoparmelia\\_caperata\\_240112.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Flavoparmelia_caperata_240112.jpg)

## A Year in Review

What a year it has been! The pandemic led to a lot of uncertainty as to where we as a society would wind up. Businesses shut their doors, people kept to themselves, and describing the year as "normal" was rarely heard. The same can be said for your Thacher State Park. Events were cancelled, masks were worn, social distancing was respected, and an amount of cleaning and sanitizing never seen before was done to keep the public safe. In times of stress and anxiety and uncertainty, people need something to keep them centered, give them strength, somewhere to turn to find peace. Many of you turned to us.

You turned to us.

Not "us" as in Thacher singularly, not even "us" as in New York State Parks. It is the green space, the natural world we exist in, the places where humans transcend to reason and think deeply about their place in the world we live in.

With all the restrictions for public health, remote learning and employment, people were told to go outside. Get some fresh air where the trees grow freely and tall and wonder awaits. Henry David Thoreau said "The indescribable and beneficence of nature, - of sun and wind and rain of summer and winter, - such health, such cheer, they afford forever."

Parks around the nation were able to provide this health and cheer in a time of need. If anything good can be taken from the year in review, it is the reminder that the natural world exists, and is needed for the health of society. This reminder is seen by the sheer number of visitors we saw this year. The attendance numbers at Thacher nearly doubled from 2020, to over 1.1 million people visiting. Overall, New York State Parks had another record year of attendance, clocking in at over 78 million visitors!

I feel lucky being able to work at such a beautiful place with amazing new faces I meet every day. Every day I think about the importance the work we do. It can be a tall order, but we strive to make Thacher accessible and pleasurable to all.

We here at Thacher want to thank you for visiting your State Parks during these trying times. It means a lot to "us".

*"Wilderness is not a luxury, but a necessity of human spirit"*

-Edward Abbey

Bill Hein  
Park Manager  
John Boyd Thacher State Park

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

### **Officers of the Friends Board of Trustees**

President:	John Kilroy	(518) 872-1501
Vice President:	Laure-Jeanne Davignon	(518) 578-4718
Treasurer:	Betsey Miller	(518) 869-0739
Secretary:	Christine Gervasi	(518) 872-1501
	Immediate former President: Sigrin Newell	

### **Other Trustees**

Jim Schaller	(518) 861-7452	Brian Horl	(518) 872-1383
Chuck Ver Straeten	(518) 872-2223		
Bert Schou	(518) 221-8693		

**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 Sigrin Newell, Bill Hein, Grace Brennen, Anna Pirkey, Savannah Wilson, Laurel Tormey-Cole and Betsey Miller for their contributions to this newsletter.

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

## Cicadas!



Have you heard the buzz? Everyone is talking about the cicadas that are coming to town! From Georgia to New York Brood X has started to emerge. These mysterious insects spend 17 years underground surviving on tree sap, slowly growing until their 17<sup>th</sup> summer when they emerge. They only live a few short weeks, just enough time to mate and lay their eggs.

In that time the males will make a cacophony of noise to attract a female, and in the attempt, many will end up as a tasty snack for the other animals of the region. Those that manage to evade predators long enough to die a natural death will litter the ground en masse and act as a fertilizer, adding important nutrients back to the soil as they break down.

Today in New York it's believed that these incredible insects can only be found on Staten Island, but back in 1868 they could also be found in Brooklyn and Rochester and everywhere in between! Their range has slowly decreased over the years, and some dedicated scientists are using this brief opportunity to try and discover where in New York this brood still exists. The next time scientists will have the chance to study this brood again is in 2038.

- by Grace Brennen

## What's happening at the Nature Center ...

Summer is in full swing and we have been very busy at the Nature Center! The CDTA Nature Bus program started in June and we have been offering weekly roving education at Thacher Visitor Center for the patrons getting off the bus and patrons who are exploring the Visitor Center. Our July and August program calendar is full of fun programs and I am eagerly awaiting the reopening of the Indian Ladder trail so I can start leading my guided hikes about the geology and fossils you see along the trail. Grace and I recently received our certifications as Leave No Trace trainers and I have been very excited about creating some new curricula and exhibits that focus on teaching and inspiring people to enjoy the natural world more responsibly.

- by Anna Pirkey



## Bog Garden

You may not know!.....Thacher Nature Center has a Bog garden!

Be sure to check out the above ground bog at the Nature Center! A truly amazing little piece of real estate, the bog measures about 8' x 4' and is filled with amazing plant treasures like Sweet Gale, Bog Rosemary, Small Cranberry, an enormous, blooming Pitcher Plant that is carnivorous, and much more! A native orchid, blue flag iris and buckbean are all plants blooming in the bog. Located just behind the Nature Center, the bog is a fascinating journey amongst tiny plants that you can see up close and at almost eye level; and you don't have to get your feet wet!

The Nature Center has resumed it's normal schedule and is open Tuesdays thru Sundays, 9am – 4pm.

by Laurel Tormey-Cole



## Save the Date!

July 17 is the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center!

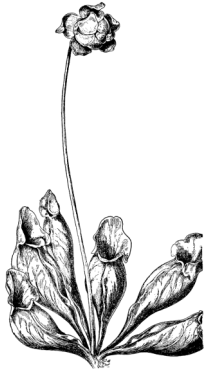
Join us for educational guided walks, food, vendors, crafts and so much more!

## Friends of Thacher Park Meeting Dates for 2021

Meeting dates are Wednesdays, July 14, September 8, and November 10.  
7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center. Come join us! (Masks may be required)



Friends of Thacher Park  
c/o Emma Treadwell Thacher Nature Center  
87 Nature Center Way  
Voorheesville, New York 12186-2601



<https://etc.usf.edu/clipart/>

Wednesday, July 14, 2021

Next:

**Board Meeting**

7:00 pm at Thacher Visitor Center (masks may be required)



## Friends Support the Nature Bus

The Friends of Thacher Park have had a long-standing commitment to bring children to the park, especially children from the inner city who may not have easy access to the park. For this reason, we began the bus fund to pay for buses to bring children from schools who could not afford field trips to the Park. It was clear that the members of the Friends strongly supported this effort through the level of their contributions. Others thought this was such a good idea that the state began a statewide program to provide this funding for parks across the state. In light of state funding the Friends of Thacher no longer do independent fund raising for this project.

When the Board of Friends heard about the Nature Bus, we invited a representative from the Mohawk Land

Conservancy to our Board meeting to explain the Nature Bus program. This pilot program will run buses from various locations in Albany out to nature locations, including Thacher Park. The buses began on June 12, 2021 and will run through September 25, 2021 on each Saturday. Rides are free and the schedule is on the CTDA website at [www.cdta.org](http://www.cdta.org).

The Board of the Friends of Thacher Park believes strongly in the mission of this program. MHLC Conservation Director Sarah Walsh, the architect of this partnership, said, "Access to nature is something we all need, but not something we all have. Through Nature Bus, we will take an important and long overdue step towards ensuring access to these spaces for everyone."

To support this pilot project the Board voted to provide \$4,000 to become a partner with local, county and state organizations as well as private individuals. We look forward to learning from this pilot program and hope this can become a long-term part of our community. We want to thank the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy for both the idea and bringing together the resources to bring that idea to life.

- by *Betsey Miller*

More information on the Nature Bus, where it stops and where it goes, can be found here: <https://mohawkhudson.org/hop-on-the-nature-bus/>

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