



Friends of Thacher State Park

Emma T Thacher Nature Center • 87 Nature Center Way • Voorheesville, NY 12186
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What is a Fisher?



This is what some of us wondered at the November meeting of the Friends of Thacher Park. At that meeting, Thacher Park interns treated members to clips from the park's trail cameras that captured on film animals you might never glimpse on your own. Among them was the fisher (photo above).

At first glance it might be mistaken for a giant black fox squirrel, a large mink, or even a polecat because it produces loud growls and hissing coughs when upset. It looks something like a cross between an otter and a cat. According to National Geographic, the name "fisher" is thought to have come from early American immigrants who noted the animal's resemblance to the European polecat, which was also called a "fitchet," "fitch," or "fitchew." In fact, this dark, brown-black furred creature is a member of the weasel family.

Weasels are the smallest carnivore on the planet, with larger types growing to 10 to 12 inches long and weighing 3 to 12.3 ounces. In comparison, female fishers can reportedly weigh 3 to 8 pounds and range from 30 to 40 inches long while males can weigh 7 to 14 pounds and range from 35 to 47 inches long!

Natural cavities, such as tree holes, logs and rocky outcrops serve as their dens. Females have 2-3 young per litter, and fishers live for at least 10 years. They prefer dense forest habitats.

Wide five-toed feet and semi-retractable claws make the fisher well suited for walking on snow. Because their hind feet rotate nearly 180° they can descend trees head first. Their claws also serve them well in climbing trees and capturing prey.

Like humans, fishers are omnivores. They eat a wide variety of small to medium sized mammals such as squirrels, rabbits, mice and voles, along with birds and frogs. They also eat beechnuts, acorns, apples and berries. Despite their name, fishers seldom eat fish. What makes them distinctive in their dietary habits is that they are the only known North American mammal with the ability to kill and consume porcupines. They eat almost the entire animal, leaving behind only the quilled hide and a few larger bones. Porcupines beware!

Fishers are native to and now found only in North America, commonly in the Adirondacks. They are not, however, commonly seen by humans, which is fortunate for them since we are their only natural enemy. By the 1930s they were almost gone due to over-trapping. Their fur was valuable. Reintroductions have been successful in restoring fishers to northern areas of the United States.) They are hard to spot because they are nocturnal and solitary (except during breeding) and rarely travel in open areas.

If you despair of ever seeing one yourself, stop by the Thacher Park Visitors Center, where you just might spot one on perpetually-playing trail cam clips.

- by Jill Harbeck



Photo of this Fisher captured on a trail camera by John Kilroy

Fascinating Paper Birches



Photo by Christine Gervasi

Imagine a birch bark canoe. Hold the image in your mind. What color is it? If you said salmon colored, you can paddle your imaginary canoe around Thompson's Lake all afternoon. If you visualized a white canoe with black lines, you could go out on the lake, but you would spend a lot of time bailing. You might even sink.

The iconic white birch bark canoe has it all wrong. The dark lines are lenticels which function as one way valves to let air and water into the growing cambium layer underneath the bark. A real canoe must be built with the bark inside out; the oily salmon layer on the inside of the bark should be on the outside of the canoe. Then the one-way valves will serve to keep water out.

Lenticels, which help to keep the cambium nourished, are but one of the fascinating adaptations of the paper birch. Here is a puzzle. In a forest full of dark colored tree trunks, why should paper birch be the only trees with white trunks? The answer has to do with

geography. Birches evolved to occupy the most northerly areas of North America.

In the winter, the sun is low, aimed directly at the trunks of the trees, warming them in spite of surrounding temperatures which can be below zero. When the sun goes down the bark cools quickly but the wood underneath cools more slowly. The different rates of contraction result in frost cracking, vertical lines of damage which you can see while hiking in the forest. To protect against this, paper birches' white bark reflects the sunlight so it does not get so hot in the daytime, an adaptation for life at high latitudes. The white birches in Thacher Park are near the southern end of their range, but they evolved up north.

An additional adaptation is bark that peels. Bark that has been colonized by lichens and mosses is darker. As this layer peels off, the bark always stays fresh and white.

Come for a hike at Thacher on a snowy day to see another adaptation. Paper birches do not shed their seeds until late November or early December. Stand beneath a white birch tree on a day with crusty snow and wind. The snow looks like it's been attacked by a giant pepper shaker. There are hundreds of tiny triangular seeds with miniature wings. When the wind blows, the seeds skitter across the icy snow, being carried far from the parent tree. Fairy Olympics: Figure Skating.



- by Sigrin Newell

<https://www.nps.gov/articles/netn-species-spotlight-paper-birch.htm>

Check for updates at www.friendsofthacherpark.org

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

Many thanks to Jill Harbeck, Sigrin Newell, Savannah Wilson, Peter Farquharson, Marina Dreeben, Shannon Duerr, John Kilroy and Michelle Johnston for their contributions to this newsletter.

Christine Gervasi—Editor

Please welcome the new Student Conservation Association Interns of 2022!



My name is **Peter Farquharson**. I'm originally from Deer Park, New York, but have spent the past four years living in Binghamton while working towards my BA in Art History. Life on Long Island is often removed from the plants, animals, and terrain we typically associate with wilderness

spaces here in New York. Living upstate, however, gave me ample opportunity to explore the Allegheny Plateau, Catskill, and Adirondack Mountain regions. I've since learned to appreciate the complexity of the ecological web that pushes life forward, as well as the ways humans make sense of this web through literature, art, and the sciences. I'm excited to kindle this appreciation in others over the coming months, and hope to learn more about the unique topography and history of Thacher State Park as well!

My name is **Marina Dreeben**, and I recently graduated from Brandeis University where I studied biology and anthropology. I am interested in the intersections of social sciences



and hard sciences, so I am excited to bring my background in anthropology to my role as an environmental educator at Thacher! Since graduating in May, I spent the summer as a member of an archaeology crew working on the Georgia Sea Islands. From this experience, I learned that it really is possible to build a career out of working outside in the dirt, so at Thacher, I am excited to combine my academic interests with my love of the outdoors. In addition to academics, I also love rock climbing and I am looking forward to exploring the sport climbing in the park!

Helderberg Homesteading Day

Early settlers found the Helderbergs a beautiful but challenging place to build a life. Join us at Thacher Nature Center on February 26 to try some of the skills that were important to these pioneers! Learn carpentry, soap-making, wool spinning, open-fire cooking and more with a full day of demonstrations and hands-on activities for all ages, taught by skilled craftspeople.

- by Shannon Duerr



Photos of the Park by Michelle Johnston



The board members of Friends of Thacher wish you all a Happy, Healthy 2022!

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, January 12, 2022

Next:

Board Meeting

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



Native Plant Presale

It's never too early to start thinking about gardening! Our 18th annual Native Plant Sale kicks off in January with preordering available for many species (see inserts in

this newsletter). Native plants not only look beautiful, but they provide important food and shelter to native birds and insects. And it's more complicated and important than you might think! Bees and butterflies rely on nectar, of course, but did you know that some kinds of bees stay snug in winter inside the stems of native flowers? Or that butterflies and other insects require native plants to reproduce, and native birds rely on those insects to feed their young? Hummingbirds even use fuzz from certain species of native fern to build their nests! The choices you make for your yard can make a difference. If you're new to gardening with natives and don't know where to start, contact Shannon at the Nature Center (shannon.duerr@parks.ny.gov) for ideas suited to your yard and gardening style. Experienced native gardeners will find old favorites and some new offerings in this year's sale. Plants ordered now will be available for pickup in time for spring planting. - by Shannon Duerr

Snowshoeing

Why stop hiking just because the snow is piling up? Snowshoe season is almost here! Enjoy the quiet of a snowy forest on our miles of scenic trails, or try snowshoeing for the first time while tromping around the Nature Center with pointers from our experienced staff. We're also offering snowshoeing programs for beginners on January 22 and February 5 if you'd like company on the trail! You can bring your own snowshoes or rent a pair from us – we have shoes available for adults and children (minimum weigh of 30 pounds). Call ahead to reserve your size (518-872-0800).

- by Shannon Duerr



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