

April - June 2007



WINGBEATS

Audubon Society of the Capital Region

Governor Spitzer Proposes Increased Environmental Funding But DEC's Lands and Forests Division Remains Badly Understaffed

by Sean Mahar & Graham Cox



In his first Executive Budget proposal, Governor Eliot Spitzer has proposed increasing the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) by \$100 million over the next two years, backed by revenues from a proposed expansion of the Bottle Deposit Law. The EPF is the state's primary funding source for environmental projects that protect and restore our air, water, wildlife and open space resources.

Audubon New York is joining with the Friends of New York's Environment, a coalition of over 200 diverse organizations, in strongly supporting the increased EPF by expanding the Bottle Deposit Law to include non-carbonated beverages like water and sports drinks, and supporting the restoration of the critically important staff for state agencies. The Governor's Executive Budget proposal brings the state closer to meeting the growing demand for projects to restore New York's natural heritage, and closer to Audubon New York's goal of a \$500 million EPF by 2010.

We need all Audubon members to call or write your Senate and Assembly representatives before April 1st to express your support for increasing the EPF by expanding the Bottle Deposit Law. If you need more information on the bottle bill or legislator addresses, please contact Sean Mahar, Associate Director of Conservation for Audubon New York at: smahar@audubon.org

Governor Spitzer has also proposed the restoration of critically important General Fund staff positions in the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (109 new positions, including a new Office of Climate Change), the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (52 new positions), and in the Adirondack Park Agency (5 new positions). These agencies have been drastically cut over the last decade and are in dire need of staffing assistance.

Though we are pleased with the increase in DEC staffing, one major problem remains - the DEC's Division of Lands and Forests remains seriously under staffed. Audubon New York and other advocacy groups with an interest in State Forest and Forest Preserve units and in lands covered by conservation easements, are urging Governor Spitzer to rethink some of the job titles funded in the proposed Executive Budget. The Division's severe staff shortage also affects sustainable management on the private forest lands, which make up three quarters of the state's forest acreage.

In This Issue ...

2007 ASCR Programs	2
2007 ASCR Field Trips	3
Spitzer Proposed Funding Continued	3
Audubon News	4

Continued on page 3...

Audubon Society of the Capital Region



**Cordially Invites You To Attend Our
Year 2007 Programs & Field Trips**



Audubon Programs

**Unless Otherwise Specified,
Programs To Be Held At:**

*William K. Sanford
Colonie Town Library*

**Thursday, April 12, 2007, 7:00-9:00 pm
Whip-Poor-Will Monitoring in NYS**

Speaker: Matthew Medler

Results from the second NYS Breeding Bird Atlas suggest dramatic decreases in the numbers of Whip-poor-wills and Common Nighthawks breeding in New York. Such declines are consistent with Atlas results and anecdotal evidence from neighboring states and provinces. As a result, a Northeast Nightjar Survey project was established in 2005 to study population trends of these poorly-known birds. In 2006, New York participated in this regional project on a limited basis. Join Matthew Medler for a review of the 2006 survey results, highlighting New York State hotspots, and find out how you can help with the 2007 survey effort.

Matthew Medler was born and raised in the Capital District, and he once again resides in the area, working at NYS DEC in Albany. His interest in Whip-poor-wills stems from childhood encounters with this species in the Lake Champlain Valley. A graduate of Cornell University, he worked as a sound archivist for several years at the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology.

Thursday, May 10, 2007, 7:00-9:00 pm

**New York's Montane Specialist:
Bicknell's Thrush**

Speaker: Julie Hart

New York's montane forests are home to a unique high-elevation bird community that includes the elusive Bicknell's thrush, the only bird endemic to the northeast region. Join Julie Hart to learn all about this specially adapted bird and about Mountain Birdwatch, a monitoring program for high

elevation bird communities throughout the northeast. Julie Hart is the Mountain Birdwatch Coordinator at the Vermont Institute of Natural Science. Julie attended the University of Vermont and has previously worked with Audubon New York and the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology. She personally surveys several Mountain Birdwatch routes.

Thursday, June 14, 2007, 7:00-9:00 pm

Pass-A-Dish Family Outing

Location: 5 Rivers Environmental Ctr.

Come be part of the fun at our first-ever Audubon Family Picnic. Bring a dish to pass, and your own table settings. Then at 8:00 p.m., join ASCR president and Five Rivers maven Craig Thompson for an invigorating "Walk into the sunset" along the Center's trails. Bluebirds guaranteed. In the event of inclement weather, an "indoor picnic" and bird presentation is planned.

Thursday, September 13, 2007, 7-9:00 pm

Giants of the North Woods

Speaker: Mark Picard

Join us as Mark Picard explores the secretive and elusive life of one of North America's largest mammals - the moose. This eye-popping pictorial captures the moose in every season, in all weather conditions, and in all behaviors in its natural environment, from a fragile new-born calf to the enormous adult bull moose weighing in excess of 1200 lbs., while standing 7 feet tall at the shoulder!

Mark Picard is a professional photographer and moose guide. His passion for photographing moose began in 1980. Now, 27 years and 8,000 quality images later, he is still in awe of this magnificent creature's grace and beauty. For more info, check out www.markpicard.com

Refreshments will be served. As always, we encourage you to bring your friends and family. For directions or details, call Greg Rucinski at the Colonie Library at (518) 458-9274.



Audubon Field Trips

Saturday, May 12, 2007, 9:00 am

Birding Vischer's Ferry

Location: Vischer's Ferry Preserve

Join ASCR president Craig Thompson on a field survey of spring migrants at Vischer's Ferry Preserve, one of the Capital District's premier birding destinations. Suitable for the birding novice, this "citizen science" outing will continue our chapter's "Adopt An IBA" initiative at this site. Bring binoculars. The program is free, but please contact Craig at president@capitalregionaudubon.org or 756-3610 by Wednesday, May 9 to register and get directions. In the event of inclement weather, this program will be cancelled.

Saturday, June 23, 2007

Helderberg Butterfly Count

Location: Multiple Locations

Join butterfly expert and ASCR treasurer Sue Adair for the annual Heldeberg Butterfly Count. The count, part of the North American Butterfly Association's annual Fourth of July Count, will visit 3 venues: Five Rivers Environmental Education Center; Thompson's Lake / Thacher State Parks; and Partridge Run Wildlife Management Area. We will be out all day identifying and counting every butterfly we find. Our cumulative 4-year total is 33 species! If rainy or heavily overcast, the count will be held on Sunday, June 24. For more information or to register, please call Sue at 355-8008 evenings before 9:00 p.m.

Saturday, July 7, 2007

Vischer's Ferry Butterfly Walk

Location: Vischer's Ferry Preserve

Join butterfly expert Sue Adair for a 2 hour butterfly field trip at Vischer's Ferry Preserve (rain or overcast date: Sunday, July 8). We can expect to see a variety of butterflies at this date. Suitable for the butterfly novice, this "citizen science" outing will continue our chapter's stewardship initiative at this site. The program is free, but please call Sue at 355-8008 evenings before 9:00 p.m. for time and place details.

Spitzer Proposes Increased Funding

...Continued From Page 1

Throughout the years of the Pataki Administration, Audubon New York and other advocacy groups supported the state's purchase, either in fee or easement, of lands totaling more than one million acres, to add to the state's open space resource and conserve critical habitat. In December 2006, then-Governor-elect Spitzer, commenting on the final Pataki purchase agreement, made it clear that he supported these purchases and said that all New Yorkers have benefited from Governor Pataki's vision to preserve natural resources and enhance the state's great outdoor tradition. The total cost was put at \$658.4 million for the 1,020,000 acres of new open space acquisition. All told, the state has increased its public land and easement management responsibilities from about 3.8 million acres in 1997 to almost 5 million acres today. But with land ownership comes stewardship responsibilities.

Meanwhile, DEC's Division of Lands and Forests, sole caretakers of this open space largesse, has been steadily losing staff for 15 years. In 1997, the Division had 220 staff including forestry and real property staff assigned to these public and private forestry tasks. Division staffing levels had already been on a steady decline in the five years previous, losing an estimated 33 positions going back to 1992. Now, in 2007, the Division has 170 full-time professional, technical and administrative staff items. In total, the Division has lost about 80 full-time professional items in the last 15 years or so, including 50 positions in the last ten years, while state land holdings have increased over 30 percent! The public, at meeting after meeting, has insisted that the state not add to its open space inventory unless and until it improves its land management and stewardship capabilities. Audubon New York and other land conservation groups have supported these land purchases as being in the best interests of the public overall and in the long run, but we have also made it clear that improved stewardship is essential.

Audubon New York is asking incoming DEC Commissioner Grannis to make a thorough evaluation of the Division's management responsibilities and its present and future staffing needs. This includes a comprehensive review of the job titles assigned to the Division, to give the Director more flexibility in hiring for sustainable forestry activities, GIS, planning, real property management and forest health duties. As a first step, we are asking that the DEC budget request be modified in FY2007-08 to start the Division of Lands and Forests on the road to repair of its stewardship capabilities.

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Audubon News

ASCR members are cordially invited to attend the Spring Audubon Council of New York State meeting, to be held March 23-25 at the Gideon Putnam Conference Center in Saratoga. Congressman Maurice Hinchey, Audubon New York's 2007 Hoyt Award recipient, will key-note the conference Saturday night. For information on field trips, presentations, accommodations, etc., log on to www.ny.audubon.org or call Audubon New York at 518-869-9731.



In Memoriam

It is with sadness that we note the passing of Bernice Leighton, one of our organization's original founders, on February 23. Bernice always loved nature, especially birds, and in 1969, along with her husband Eric, helped organize the (then) Albany County Audubon Society (now ASCR). She served for many years on our board and commonly fielded the whole gamut of wildlife inquiries on her home phone. Bernice was very active in many community endeavors, and played a key role in the establishment of Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in 1972. Her considerable legacy will be carried forward through all those whom she touched.

***** For Programs, Field Trip, & Further General
Environmental Information, Visit Us on the Internet at:
www.CapitalRegionAudubon.Org**



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