

WINGBEATS

Audubon Society of the Capital Region



The Endangered Ranger - "Service Level Adjustment"



by Bob Budliger

When you visited a National Park a decade ago you no doubt came into contact with that world-renowned icon of America's scenic and wild lands - the Park Ranger. Uniformed in green and gray and sporting the trademark "flat hat", a Stetson of felt or straw, the Park Ranger ensured your visit was enjoyable, informative, and even inspirational. And above all else, safe. Visit now and look for a ranger !

The Ranger is endangered, and your next National Park visit will likely be impaired because of it. If budget projections become reality, there will be a lot of reductions in service, reduced hours of operation, and even some closures. Acadia National Park, on the Maine coast, is facing a 53% "shortfall" in budgetary needs.

Newspapers recently spotlighted a memo to the managers of parks in the Northeast, headquartered in the Philadelphia office of the National Park Service. Managers are advised to seek ways to live within budgetary reductions. Among the suggestions are: close park visitor centers on Federal holidays; eliminate Ranger-led tours; let the grass grow; turn campgrounds over to concessionaires; close on

Sundays and Mondays. These are only suggestions. Under no circumstances are managers to talk about "closing". These are to be called "**service level adjustments.**" (It is reminiscent of a time when I was told not to use the term "closed" when faced with similar budget problems. We used "not open." Wish I'd heard of "service level adjustment.")

Here are some facts gleaned from a few sources familiar with the National Park Service budget. Since 1980 there has been a reduction in the permanent ranger staff of 16% and a reduction in the seasonal ranger staff of 24%. While on the surface that may sound manageable, bear in mind that in the same 25 years there are an added 60 million park visitors each year, and the number of park units has increased by 54, bringing the number of park units to 387. Every time a new park is established, rangers are moved from somewhere else to staff it. It's become a really thin "green line."

Park budgets in the past 25 years, when corrected for inflation, have been reduced by 20%.

The current Executive budget request of \$2.4 billion is less than 65% of what is needed.

Park budgets grew 9% a year in the 1990s; they've grown 1% a year the first three years of this administration.

The US National Park Service (NPS) has an enormous responsibility. We are all familiar with the big parks with the great scenery--Yellowstone, Yosemite, Grand Canyon. We also know the important historic sites--Saratoga, Independence Hall, Gettysburg. Some of us know of the less well-known recreational rivers, seashores, and lakeshores. There are a multitude of small historic sites that protect our diverse heritage; and don't forget that the monuments in our nation's capital are the responsibility of the NPS. The very White House is managed by the NPS, 387 units in all.

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Audubon Society of the Capital Region



**Cordially Invites You To Attend Our
Year 2004 Programs & Field Trips**



Audubon Programs

Audubon Field Trips

**All Programs To Be Held At:
William K. Sanford
Colonie Town Library**

**Multiple Dates
BIRDING 101
See Details on Page 3.**

**Thursday, May 13, 2004, 7:00-9:00 pm
*Postcards from the West***

Speakers: Larry & Maryde King

This 40-minute film features Yellowstone, Rainier, and Olympic National Parks. In Yellowstone, visit the high falls in the Yellowstone River, the hot springs, and Old Faithful. In Rainier, hike to a glacier and see wildflowers in a mountain meadow. In Olympic, take a walk in the rain forest and along the Pacific coast. A final section of the movie features wildlife and wildflowers of the west. Larry and Maryde King are long-time active participants in our chapter and enjoy presenting their nature films to local groups.

**Thursday, June 10, 2004, 7:00-9:00 pm
*Butterflies of the Capital District***

Speaker : Sue Adair

In order to help prepare us for the butterfly count field trips, Sue Adair will present a program on butterflies of the Capital District. Almost all of the photos she will use were taken by Sue in upstate New York, most right around Albany. Sue will cover some basic identification techniques, where and when to find butterflies, and a bit about their life cycles. Please come to learn how to identify a few of these beautiful flying creatures or just sit back and enjoy the colorful photographs!

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.

Saturday, June 26, 2004

Fourth of July Butterfly Count

Leader: Sue Adair

ASCR will sponsor the second annual Heldeberg Butterfly Count on Saturday, June 26 (rain or heavy overcast date of Sunday, June 27). The Fourth of July Butterfly Counts were started by the North American Butterfly Association and are held all over Canada, the United States and northern Mexico. The counts are organized like a Christmas Bird Count and take place within an 15 mile diameter circle. Ours takes place in Five Rivers Environmental Education Center, Thompson Lake and Thatcher State Parks and part of Partridge Run WMA. We will be out all day identifying and counting every butterfly we find. Last year we did a "dry run" with four people and found 26 species and 883 individual butterflies. This year we invite you to join us. Participation will be limited based on the number of experienced leaders that join the count. If you are interested in helping on the count, please call Sue Adair at (518) 355-8008 before 9:00 p.m.

Sunday, July 10, 2004

Albany Pine Bush Butterfly Walk

Leader: Sue Adair

Join Sue Adair for a 2 hour butterfly field trip on Sunday afternoon, July 10. Mid-July is a great time to find several species of hairstreaks in the pine barrens including the stunning Coral Hairstreak. A number of other species should also be present. There is a limit of 8 participants on this field trip. To participate, call Sue at (518) 355-8008 before 9:00 p.m.

Endangered Ranger, Continued from Page 1...

It takes a lot of people with a diverse set of skills to make our visit enjoyable and safe. It is equally important to protect the park resource from us, the visitor. We don't often see the manager, the recreation planner, the archeologist, the biologist. We do see the maintenance working in the background. It's the ranger that makes our visit—the naturalist or historian that gives meaning and focus to our visit; the law enforcement ranger that makes the visit safe. We also see, in increasing numbers, dedicated volunteers, students and retirees, who help out.

There are fewer than 2,000 law enforcement rangers and an equal number of interpretive rangers in the whole system. Their numbers continue to drop. More park services are being taken on by volunteers-- some 125,000 of them donating over 4.5 million hours, an equivalent of another 2,000 employees. There still is serious shortfall in necessary services. It is estimated that there is one interpretive ranger for every 100,000 visitors.

This is compounded by the current war on terrorism. Every time we got to Orange Alert, the NPS spends an added \$60,000 a day in unbudgeted activity. Rangers are pulled from park duty to guard bridges and dams. In one of the more bizarre episodes, rangers were sent on temporary assignment to the Statue of Liberty from Bandelier National Monument in New Mexico. This left precious Native American archeological resources unguarded.

A really unhealthy trend in park management philosophy is "contracting out." Privatization. This is not the same as concessioning, where certain supporting services such as hotels, restaurants, marinas, and gift shops are leased to private sector businesses to operate. This is turning over the core responsibilities to business interests. The interpretive tour on the tram at Everglades National Park's Shark Valley is a good example. The fear is that the tour leaders are trained to give the "spiel", but lack the breadth of knowledge to answer questions, which are rarely in the script. Then too, the NPS is no longer telling its story and then visitors get to pay extra for the service.

The NPS is facing the greatest crisis in its history. It all come down to whether or not we value our heritage, and how much we value it. I can't help but point out that the \$87 billion we will spend in Iraq would run the National Park Service for over 40 years !!

Suggestion-- look at these websites and let your elected representative know how you feel.

nps.gov npca.org bushgreenwatch.org

Birding 101

The Audubon Society of the Capital Region will offer a short course in beginning birding on four days in June. All classroom and field activities will take place at Five Rivers Environmental Education Center in Delmar. The cost of the class is \$20.00 per person and there is a class limit of 15. The classes will be lead by expert birder Bob Budliger and other birders from the ASCR board. To register for the class call Bob at (518) 439-0006 between May 1 and June 1.



Two, two hour evening classes will be held on June 8 and June 15 (Tuesdays) from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. These classes will cover birding tools such as binoculars, field guides, audio recordings of bird songs, and birding organizations. We will also cover the basics of bird identification including what to look at and look for, and bird identification clues such as behavior, habitat, and time of year. The field trips will be held from 8:30 to 11:30 a.m. on June 12 and 19 (Saturdays). On the first outing we will practice using our optics (a must in order to see those birds - you can't identify them if you can't find them!) and practice basic identification of what we find at Five Rivers. During the second field trip we will begin observing behavior and talk about field methods, birding ethics and behavior.

It has been a number of years since a birding course was offered in our area. We hope you will take advantage of this great opportunity and sign up today!

Sixth Annual Northern Catskills Bird Festival



Explore the wonders of migratory and resident birds of the Northeast at the Sixth Annual Northern Catskills Bird Festival on Saturday, June 5 from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. at the Edmund Niles Huyck Preserve and Biological Field Station. The Festival, which will include live birds, birding walks and educational displays, will take place at the Preserve's Eldridge Research Center on Pond Hill Road in the Hamlet of Rensselaerville, New York.

A variety of activities will be sure to please bird enthusiasts of all ages. Wildlife Rehabilitator and Huyck Preserve educator Kelly Martin will be on hand with live birds of prey, avian expert Rich Guthrie will be demonstrating mist netting and bird banding, Audubon NY's Larry Federman will lead bird walks, Dan Rubino from Mirakel Optical will be providing binocular cleaning, and artist Jim Coe will be providing copies of the Golden Guide to Birds that he wrote and illustrated. There will be activities and games for children and a showing of the movie Winged Migration.

The Edmund Niles Huyck Preserve is a two thousand acre nature preserve that encompasses varied habitats, including forests, a one hundred acre lake and an eight hundred foot waterfall. The Bird Festival is an excellent opportunity for exploration of the trails and facilities at the Huyck Preserve. Admission to the Bird Festival is free of charge. For more information, call the Preserve office at (518) 797-3440.

OFFICERS & DIRECTORS

President: Craig Thompson
508B Stanton Road
Coeymans Hollow, NY 12046
(518) 756-3610 (home)
cdthomps@gw.dec.state.ny.us

**Vice:
President:** Graham Cox
18A Michael Terrace
Albany, NY 12203
(518) 456-1489 (home)
gcox@audubon.org

Secretary: David Gibson
107 Longkill Road
Ballston Lake, NY 12019
(518) 877-8678 (home)
(518) 377-1452 (work)

Treasurer: Louise Desormeau
P.O. Box 487
Latham, NY 12110
(518) 433-0227 (home)
auntlouisd@aol.com

DIRECTORS

Sue Adair
107 Fox Run Drive
Schenectady, NY 12303
(518) 355-8008 (home)
adair@nycap.rr.com

René-Yves Facchetti
1392 Delaware Turnpike
Delmar, NY 12054
(518) 768-4630 (home)
rfacchet@albany.net

Robert Budliger
36 Groesbeck Place
Delmar, NY 12054
(518) 439-0006 (home)
rbudliger@aol.com

Frank Murphy
7 Finch Court
Rensselaer, NY 12144
(518) 577-8005
thrush@nycap.rr.com

Jane Graves
133 York Ave.
Saratoga Springs, NY 12866
jgraves@skidmore.edu

Erin Willsey
182 Stage Road
Box 290B
East Berne, NY 12059

COMMITTEES

Conservation: David Gibson
(518) 877-8678 (home)

Education: Erin Willsey

Programs: Scott Stoner—Co Chair
(518) 785-6760 (home)
Robert Budliger—Co-Chair
(518) 439-0006 (home)

Field Trips: Robert Budliger
(518) 439-0006 (home)

Membership: Louise Desormeau
(518) 433-0227 (home)

Publicity: Sam Katz
(518) 372-8412 (home)

**Editor of Wingbeats /
Webmaster:** René-Yves Facchetti
(518) 768-4630 (home)
rfacchet@albany.net

NY Returnable Container Act



Currently, New York's Returnable Container Act, or Bottle Bill, requires a 5-cent deposit on all soda, beer and wine cooler containers sold in New York State, but does not cover non-carbonated beverage containers, like water, juice, iced tea, or sport drinks. The original Bottle Bill was created to reduce litter and support recycling of beverage containers, and has made a tremendous impact in reducing this waste. However, non-carbonated beverage containers are now littering parks, beaches and other important bird habitats across the state.

A.3922-a/S.1696-a or the "bigger, better bottle bill" sponsored by Assemblyman DiNapoli and Senator LaValle seeks to expand the Bottle deposit law to include non-carbonated beverages. This proposal will also take back the "unclaimed" nickel deposits, or the bottles that are not redeemed, and put that money into the state's Environmental Protection Fund to support recycling and other critically important environmental funding projects. Dedicating these unclaimed nickels to environmental funding projects makes good fiscal sense for New York, as it faces a looming budget deficit. We need your help to get this legislation passed. Please go to: <http://www.capitolconnect.com/audubon/stateissues.asp> to learn more about this measure, and let your voice be heard.

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



**AUDUBON SOCIETY
OF THE CAPITAL REGION, INC.
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Latham, NY 12110**

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