

Network News



INSIDE...

PAGE 2... Watershed Stewards Message—Get Out and Explore Your Watershed!

Network at Work—Bidding Farewell to Stalwart Guy...

PAGE 3... From Rare Plants to River Otters: A Few of the Finds at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve

PAGE 4... One More Winner from Our 2003 Essay Contest!

PAGE 5... Paddling the Watershed

PAGE 6... 2003 Lakefest Makes a Big Splash!

PAGE 8... Hurlbut and Patterson Farms Honored for Their Stewardship



Loons Over Cayuga!

By Bill Foster, Watershed Educator

For many, the image of the Common Loon goes hand-in-hand with the solitude of our northern forests. What most do not know, however, is that loons are actually seabirds. Each fall, after breeding in isolation on our northern freshwater lakes, adult and juvenile loons migrate to the sea, to live in large flocks off our southern coasts.

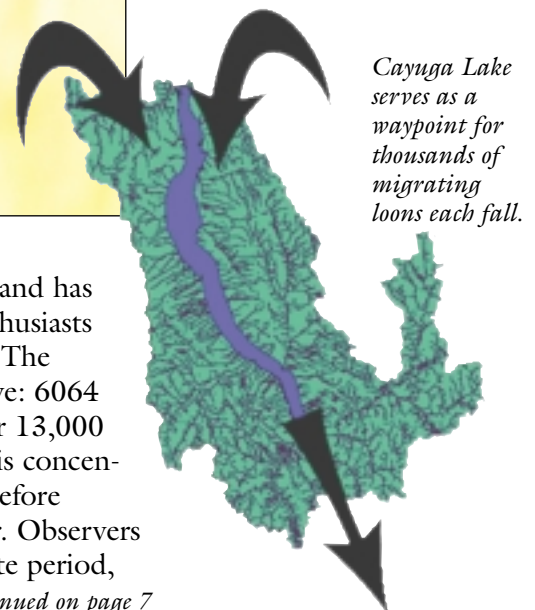
During the fall of 1992, a significant migration route was discovered over Cayuga Lake, and it is speculated that nearly half of the loons wintering off the southeastern coast of North America may use Cayuga or Seneca Lake as a waypoint. While loons remain scattered in small groups during much of their migration, the size and orientation of the Finger Lakes seem to invite loons to congregate. With an extensive overland portion of their fall trip ahead of them before they reach the Chesapeake Bay, the loons—which need open water to land—often opt to spend the night on Cayuga's waters if weather conditions are not ideal. These factors

combine to make Cayuga Lake one of only a few locations where the annual loon migration can be observed in spectacular fashion.



A Loon Watch was established at Taughannock Falls State Park in 1993, and has attracted a growing number of bird enthusiasts from as far away as England ever since. The numbers of loons counted are impressive: 6064 loons on November 10, 1997, and over 13,000 in total during 1995! Each day's flight is concentrated in the morning, beginning just before dawn and ending about two hours later. Observers have counted 1400 loons in a 15-minute period,

continued on page 7



Cayuga Lake serves as a waypoint for thousands of migrating loons each fall.

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WATERSHED STEWARD'S MESSAGE

Get Out and Explore Your Watershed!



By Sharon Anderson, Watershed Steward

The Network will soon be releasing *Living Wisely in Our Watershed*, a guide for watershed residents that compliments our 2000 *Issues in the Cayuga Lake Watershed* by providing information and opportunities for individuals and families to take positive action. One of the most important suggestions in the publication is deceptively simple—get to know your watershed! There is no reason to wait, however. Fall is here, the sun is still warm, the leaves are falling, and its a lovely time in the Finger Lakes—a great time to explore your watershed.

This edition of the *Network News* presents some great options for re-establishing your personal connection with the land and water around you. If canoeing the entire Oswego Basin with Bill Huston sounds a little too ambitious, consider a hike in the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve, a Loon Watch, or a sojourn to your local creek to contemplate the words of Peggy Arcadi, our adult-category essay contest winner. The opportunities abound in our region. Set aside a beautiful day this month and explore a new place near your home or neighborhood—it's a wonderful way to get away from it all. I think you'll be glad you did. 🐾

THE NETWORK AT WORK

Bidding Farewell to Stalwart Guy...

By Bill Foster, Watershed Educator

It is with particular sadness that we bid farewell this month to one of our most valued volunteers, Christian Boissonnas. His presence in our office on a weekly basis for more than a year has had quite an impact. A librarian by training, he applied his considerable skills to the task of single-handedly creating a workable file system for Network staff. We now know where everything is, and where it belongs—and for this, we may never forgive him. Seriously, the Network staff would very much like to thank Christian for his invaluable assistance, and leadership at the right times, in bringing the office to a more functional level of organization.

Christian might also serve as an inspiration for those persons who may be thinking, "Well, I would like to get involved, but I don't feel that I know much about the field". Christian confided to me many times that this whole field of natural resource management, and particularly watershed issues, was not something with which he was well acquainted. Nevertheless, he responded to an initial curiosity with open eyes and an open mind, and an uncanny ability to apply his life-experience to a new topic. Christian became active not only with the Network, but with Tompkins County's Environmental Management Council, and then with the County's Water Resources Council. I think that all of us—Sharon, Diane and myself—will

continued on page 4

From Rare Plants to River Otters: A Few of the Finds at the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve

By Andy Zepp, Finger Lakes Land Trust Executive Director

Located just eight miles south of Ithaca, the Finger Lakes Land Trust's Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve can provide visitors with the feeling that they are much farther away from the trappings of civilization. Several weeks ago, I looked across the preserve's Coleman Lake at the steep forested walls of the Cayuga Inlet Valley. As a wood duck took wing off the lake, I was reminded of similar scenes I'd witnessed up in the Adirondacks. And yet, here I was just 10 minutes from Ithaca's commercial strip!

The Lindsay-Parsons Preserve was established in 1995 as the world's first temperate zone reserve for bioprospecting. Through a unique partnership between the Finger Lakes Land Trust, Cornell University, and Schering-Plough Pharmaceuticals, the preserve has served as a source of genetic materials that hold the potential for pharmaceutical use. All three partners have benefited from this partnership: Schering-Plough obtained access to explore the biochemistry of the temperate forest, Cornell University gained a new site for teaching and research, while the Land Trust secured funding, as well as the prospect of future royalties, to fuel its conservation efforts.

Located astride the Cayuga Inlet, the preserve has since grown to 450 acres in size. Its varied landscape includes steep hillsides, a 20-acre lake, several kettle ponds, and a diverse assemblage of wetlands, open fields, and extensive woodlands. The preserve's value for wildlife is enhanced by the fact that it borders Danby State Forest.

While no drugs have yet been developed from materials obtained at this preserve, its value has been demonstrated in many other ways. An impressive array of plants and animals has been documented from the site, including the globally rare Wood Reedgrass (*Calamagrostis porteri*, spp. *Perplexa*). This plant is known only from this area and has been documented at the site for over a century.

The preserve's diversity stems from its glacial history. Glacial action resulted in the steep hillsides that

characterize the Inlet Valley as well as the undulating topography of the valley floor. This habitat diversity has been recognized by Tompkins County through its inventory of Unique Natural Areas; three exemplary natural areas have been identified on the preserve. The preserve is also remarkable for its diversity of wildlife.

Surveys have revealed 95 bird species that are believed to nest on the preserve – including the county's only breeding population of the worm eating warbler. Large mammals such as the river otter and black bear are also seen on the preserve with increasing frequency.

Visitors to the preserve can enjoy several miles of trails that pass through a mix of open and wooded habitats. The overlook at Coleman

Lake provides a great spot to contemplate nature and to view the variety of birds that use the Lake and its associated wetlands.

So, what's next for the preserve? Continued growth, for one thing. The Land Trust recently secured a contract to add 30 acres to the preserve. As development pressures increase, the Land Trust is taking steps to ensure that the full range of plants and animals found at the preserve continue to thrive. The Trust is also developing plans to enhance management of the preserve and add an educational kiosk to the site. Fundraising efforts are now underway.

Fall is the perfect time to get out to visit this spectacular preserve. For additional information about the Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve or to find out how you can assist our efforts to grow the preserve, contact us at (607) 275-9487 or check out our web site at www.fllt.org 🐾



View from Lindsay-Parsons Biodiversity Preserve in Danby.

PHOTO BY MARIE READ

Directions to the Preserve:

From Ithaca, take Route 13 south. Exit onto Route 34/96 and follow south for approximately seven miles to the preserve. The parking lot is located about one-half mile south of Sylvan Drive and the West Danby Fire Station on the east side of Route 34/96. A network of marked trails starts at the north end of the parking lot.

Bidding Farewell to Stalwart Guy...

continued from page 2

be able to look back on any of a number of earnest conversations shared with Christian, and benefit from his wisdom. Christian and his wife, Barbara, are leaving the Ithaca area to join their children in Illinois and we wish them the best of luck.

On other fronts, the Network has been active over the summer. The Board of Directors has gained new momentum, as a vacant Seneca County seat has been filled by Gary Catt, and one at-large seat has been accepted by Keith Tidball. Biographic information on each of the new members of the Board of Directors will soon be available on our website. Network staff have also been busy, as I have continued to act as educator for “floating classroom” boat trips hosting groups from George Jr. Republic School in Dryden, Ithaca High School and Cooperative Extension, and have presented watershed concepts to some 140 seventh graders at Seneca Falls Middle School. Our Steward has also been quite busy as we begin to plan for the 2004 program year. Along with maintaining her administrative duties, Sharon has found time to tackle on a number of educational events, including LEAPE and a watershed presentation to the Groton Lyons Club. ♪



Sharon Anderson receives a check from South Seneca Sportsmen's

Club representative Bill Wech, in support of our efforts to keep Water Chestnut out of Cayuga Lake.

Thank You!

One More Winner from Our 2003 Essay Contest!

Winners of our 3rd Annual Essay Contest were selected this past spring. Excerpts from the winning essays in the middle school and high school categories were included in our Summer 2003 Network News. Below are excerpts from our adult category winner. The full text of all winning essays is available on the Network website. This year's topic, "Why Is Water So Special" generated nearly 100 excellent essays, and we look forward to our 2004 contest with great expectations. The 2004 theme will be announced in January.



Peggy Arcadi shares her appreciation of Taughannock Creek.

2003 Cayuga Lake Watershed Essay Contest Winner—Adult Category

Peggy Arcadi, Trumansburg, NY

When I sit by the running waters of the creek, I feel like I'm listening to my own blood flow. The creek brings life: this message seems plain to me, but not, it would seem, to everyone. I visit this stretch of creek in all seasons and moods, mine and the creek's. The creek never fails to restore me to peace, to interest me or to buoy an already happy day. But I am also brought, here in the woods with no human dwelling in sight, face to face with our most cavalier treatment of the natural world.

It seems a gift from the earth, water appearing in a spot in the fields that seems no different, on the surface, from any other spot, gathering to itself more and more water from invisible sources to produce the drama of Taughannock Falls. The creek ripples along with its cheerful conversation, and even in its dry season shares secrets: little caves, stones with holes bored through, the discarded exoskeleton of a crayfish. Over the years the creek bed has altered, at times devouring the bank and flooding through the nettles, then shrinking to a rocky stream. Fallen trees have made bridges that later rot or wash away. But the creek remains a welcoming presence, offering its various faces, calm or passionate, flowing or locked in ice, music in the rain, company in the snowy woods, running away out of the woods and yet staying right here at the same time. This is what I love about the creek, the sense it gives me of movement and connection, and at the same time, its constancy.

The creek's animation may belie its health. Standing on the bank I am reminded that through the water flowing here I am connected to a living, and fragile, cycle. It emerges from the earth, traverses the woods, and travels not as the crow flies but as the creek meanders, to Cayuga Lake, ten miles distant. It is barely a capillary in a system that viewed from above looks like the arteries and veins and organs of the planet. But I know that every part of this living system of waters affects the whole. Researchers have found arsenic in a nearby creek that feeds the lake. Farm chemicals and liquid manure cascade down the steep bank just above the spot I visit. Leftover silage washes down in storms and melting snow. Freshly dumped household garbage, including appliances, clothing, construction debris and furniture are heaped at the top of the bank, waiting to tumble down and join the rusted car that sits below. . . . I know that ownership is linked with the license to use: objects, vehicles, land. Stewardship suggests a different relationship, one that could be developed with every creek in the watershed, and with the lake as well. *Read the complete essay at www.cayugalake.org!* ♪

Paddling the Watershed

By Mary Hegarty

The last lock spat out Bill and his 11-foot canoe toward the vast waters of Lake Ontario. Driving rain and waves initiated him to the “Pouring Out Place,” the Native American meaning for Oswego. Paddling to stay afloat, weary and hugging the shore, Bill landed on rocks, and found a little patch of sand to pitch his tent. It stormed all night, waves crashing upon rocks too close to his tent. The next morning, blue sky and sun shown brilliant. The lake outside of Bill’s tent could not have been the same lake of last night; it was calm as glass.

That is the end of the story; let me start at the beginning. Bill Huston has called Ithaca home since 1998, and prefers to live a simple life—in touch with nature. He plans and packs very little for his periodic canoe trips, and relies on the sun for a timepiece. Bill was inspired by a movie he saw as a child, called “Paddle to the Sea,” a 1966 Canadian film by director Bill Mason. Therefore, when my friend Bill said he was going to paddle the watershed, I knew he was ready to paddle the watershed.

He began his canoe trip on Sunday, August 26, from Cascadilla Creek in Ithaca. Averaging 16-17 miles per day, Bill completed his voyage six days later in Lake Ontario. That first day, Bill had lunch at Camp Baileywick, and camped on the east shore of Cayuga Lake, just north of Milliken station. The second day he caught a small mouth bass and had lunch north of Long Point State Park, an area he considers the most beautiful part of the Cayuga Lake. Taking advantage of the noticeably clearer water there, he took time to snorkel a rocky outcrop. That night he camped on Frontenac Island, off-shore

of Union Springs, Cayuga’s only natural island.

Lunch on the third day was at Mudd Lock, at the outlet of Cayuga Lake. Bill notes that it was exciting to get to the north end of the lake because the ecosystem begins to change; feeling “a bit like a swamp.” Birds, turtles and other wildlife become more visible, as well. The size of Cayuga can make it lonely for a small craft, and Bill’s

brought him past Cross Lake, where Bill felt the Erie canal give way to the original river; meandering past a more natural shoreline with many lily pads! Bill was nearing his destination on the sixth day of the trip when the storms blew in. After hiding under a bridge for two hours, it came time to approach the next lock, where he was shocked to see large freighters! Having never been to Oswego or



Left: Watersheds nest within larger watersheds. Cascadilla Creek watershed lies within the Cayuga Lake watershed, which then lies within the Seneca – Oswego Basin.

Below: Bill Huston paddled an eleven-foot fiberglass solo canoe that weighed 24 lbs.

first human contact was at the lock. He brings a whistle on his trips because the lock workers cannot see or hear small canoes, but they can hear the whistle.

About five miles north of Mudd Lock, Bill arrived at Howland Island, where he encountered local men who told him they had just put up a plaque commemorating the island’s history as a WWII German POW camp. Camping about 20 feet from the canal, Bill heard coyotes that night.

The fourth and fifth days

to Lake Ontario, he was in even greater shock when he saw the lake. By this time the storm was kicking up again. As our story began, Bill hugged the shore. Knocked about by the waves of Lake Ontario, Bill could still feel a sense of mystery on the water—and enjoyed a whole new view of the watershed. 🐦



2003 Lakefest Makes a Big Splash!

By Roxy Johnston, Outreach Committee Chair

Nearly two hundred Network members, residents and visitors to our watershed attended Lakefest this year, held August 24, at Cayuga Lake State Park. We are greatly encouraged as more and more folks attend the celebration each year, taking time to learn a little more about our water



resources, getting to know the organizations and individuals working to protect our beautiful watershed, and just having some fun. Of course, the weather helped tremendously; we

couldn't have ordered a better day at the Park.

As always, musician and puppeteer-extraordinaire, Tom Knight, kept everyone laughing with his show, which features a brand new watershed song. Picnic fixings were generously provided,



Tom Knight entertains kids of all ages.

once again, by Wells College. Along with the many organizations who traveled to the north end of the lake with displays and information, we would also like to thank Captain Dennis Montgomery for his determined effort to make our floating classroom, the M/V Haendel, available for tours. With less than four feet of water at the dock, Dennis had quite a job getting the boat in—but we're glad

he made it. Lakefest 2003 also heralded the beginning of what we expect to become a long-standing tradition, as the first David Morehouse Awards for long-term commitment to the health and maintenance of the watershed were bestowed upon Sylvia Hurlbut and Patterson Farms. We're already looking forward to next year's Lakefest, and hope to see you there. 🐦



Canadian band Classic Folk, introduced by Mary Catt, provided this year's picnic accompaniment.



Future watershed stewards examine trout fry, courtesy of Ken Osika of DEC's Fish Hatchery in Bath New York.

Loons Over Ithaca!

continued from cover

according to organizer Bob Meade.

Cayuga Lake is recognized by Audubon New York as an "Important Bird Area", supporting high concentrations of water birds, and a high diversity of species. The Loon Watch affords participants an opportunity to view Red-throated Loons, Black Scoter, White-winged Scoter, Brant and Long-tailed ducks in migration, as well as more common species. The Loon Watch operates from mid-October to early December, with the peak Common Loon counts normally occurring in early to mid-November. This is not, however, your typical loon watching experience, as the loons fly quite high overhead, at speeds approaching 60 mph. Binoculars are a must. The best mornings tend to follow a cold front, with winds coming from the north, so dress warmly. Everyone is invited to participate, and as Bob

notes, "experience the mystery of the sea bird that evolved to breed in solitary fresh-water lakes."

For additional information on this year's Loon Watch, contact the Cornell Ornithology Lab, at (607) 254-2473. *Portions on this article were adapted from material presented in the Winter 2003 Audubon Advocate.* 🐦



Watershed Monitoring the Subject of Discussion

Sponsored by the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization, Cornell University, and the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network, the second Cayuga Lake Watershed Monitoring conference was held on October 14, at Wells College in Aurora. This well attended event allowed researchers and other monitors to update each other on progress since last year's monitoring conference. Discussions addressed the identification of data gaps (what don't we know about the lake) and how monitoring results can best be used to inform the public and instruct watershed management decisions. Look for highlights from the conference in our winter edition. 🐦



The Network wishes to extend its thanks to the Federal House Bed & Breakfast in Lansing, NY, for the donation of our new file cabinet. Thank You!

Hurlbut and Patterson Farms Honored *continued from page 8*

the IO and to champion local water quality issues, such as pushing for action on a number of contaminated wells in the Ledyard area.

Patterson Farms in the Towns of Aurelius and Springport were recognized for their innovation and outreach to other agricultural producers concerning farm practices that protect water quality. In a watershed where the single largest land use is agriculture, farm practices can have a dramatic impact on water quality. Patterson Farms are proactive in protecting and improving environmental quality and committed to leaving the land and water better than they found it. They are concerned not only about what they do on their own property but also how they affect their downstream neighbors.

For the last 8 years they have been innovators in manure management, trying out and adopting new technologies, sharing their experience with other farmers, and working with Cornell University researcher Peter Wright, who disseminates the

information widely. They have hosted farm tours for other agricultural producers, municipal officials, master compost volunteers, school groups and the general public.

Bob Ingraham of Cayuga County Soil and Water Conservation noted, "They are progressive, always paying attention and trying to do what's right for the environment, even though it can be expensive." Farm practices that protect the water quality can place a burden on a sector that historically has had a small profit margin. Since agriculture and its support industries are cornerstones of the local economy it is important that this large land-use be one of the many players in protecting our water resources. The Patterson Farms not only do their part, but they also are a model that clearly shows protecting the environment goes hand-in-hand with being a successful business. 🐦

Nominations for the David Morehouse Award are accepted annually by the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network.

Hurlbut and Patterson Farms Honored for Their Stewardship

By Sharon Anderson, Watershed Steward

Sylvia Hurlbut and Patterson Farms, both of Cayuga County, NY, were honored as the first recipients of the David Morehouse Memorial Award, presented at Lakefest 2003. The award recognizes leadership and commitment to protect the Cayuga Lake Watershed in honor of the late David Morehouse, a Town of Ledyard resident who dedicated many years of his life to improving water quality. Morehouse was a founding member of the two organizations that co-sponsored the award, the Cayuga Lake Watershed Network and the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization.

Sylvia Hurlbut was recognized for her sustained commitment to protecting the watershed and her effective leadership. Hurlbut organized the watershed's 50 municipalities into the Cayuga Lake Watershed Intermunicipal Organization (IO), which created two guiding documents. The *Cayuga Lake Watershed Preliminary Characterization* detailed what is known about this area and the *Cayuga Lake Watershed Restoration and Protection Plan* set forth strategies and established priorities for protecting the watershed. She was instrumental in acquiring funding to support that process and implement some of the strategies.

During her tenure as Chair, Hurlbut supervised a number of consultants, kept the IO functioning



Claire Morehouse (second from right) with award recipients during the ceremony that honored her late husband David Morehouse.

effectively, and managed the funding very well. She was never afraid to tend to the little details and the hands-on work, either – running effective meetings that were fun to attend, telephoning town halls around the watershed to build support, and going to any event in the watershed that related to the IO's work. She bartered her years of service in the community for the IO's work involving dozens of contacts, friends, family and colleagues in fundraisers, celebrations, and donations.

After stepping down as Chair and as Ledyard Town Supervisor at the end of 2001, she has continued to act as the Town of Ledyard representative to

continued on page 7

The Mission... The Cayuga Lake Watershed Network seeks to protect and improve the ecological health, economic vitality and overall beauty of the watershed through education, communication and leadership.



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- Education
- Communication
- Leadership