



# Friends of the Great Swamp



FrOGS

PO Box 373, Pawling, NY 12564

Phone: (845) 855-1917

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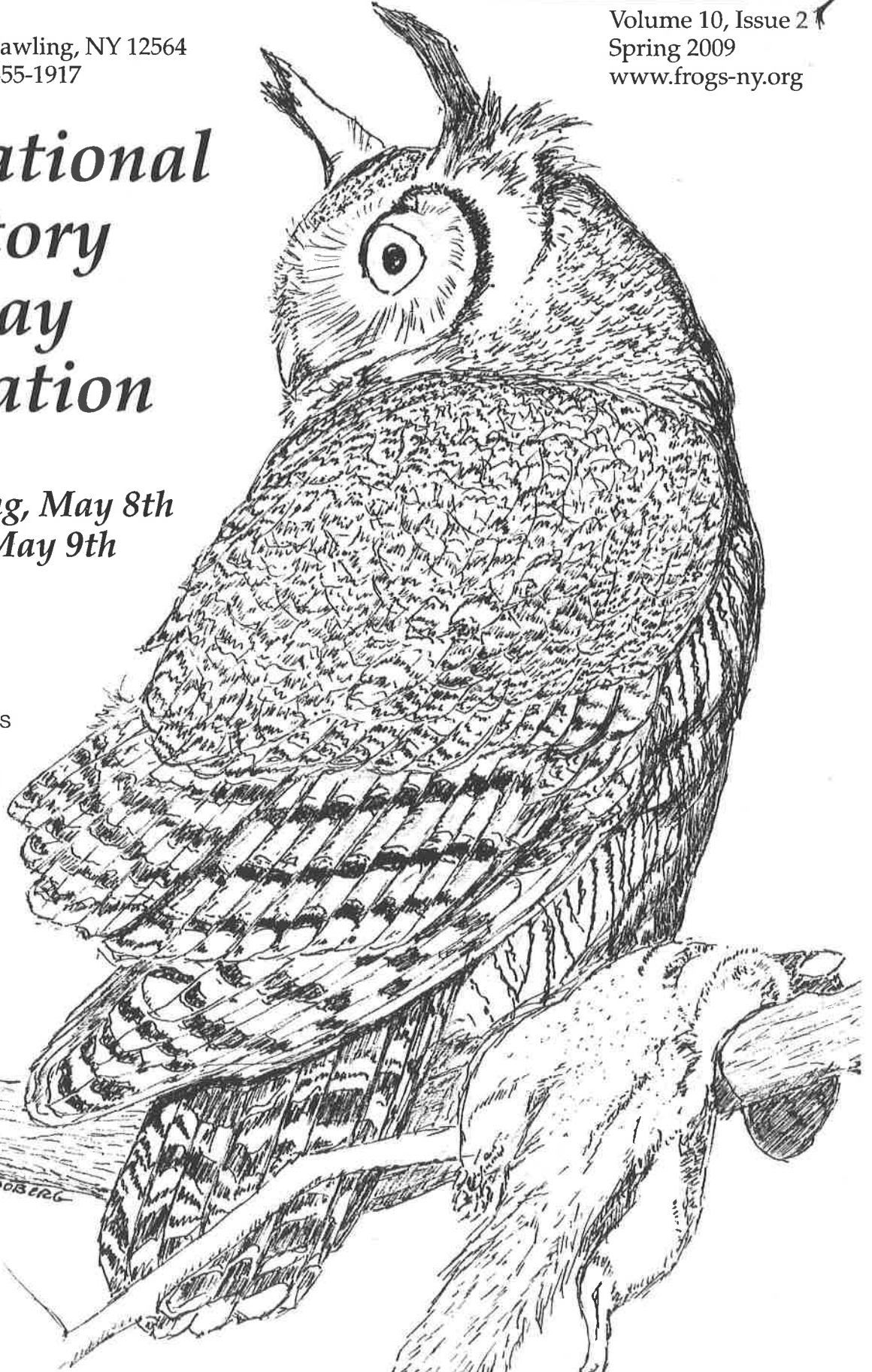
[www.frogs-ny.org](http://www.frogs-ny.org)

## *International Migratory Bird Day Celebration*

*Friday Evening, May 8th  
& Saturday, May 9th*

### **ACTIVITIES**

- Live owls
- Expert led bird walks
- Bird masks
- Bird myths and bird songs with the "pow wow" drum
- Migration game
- Nest making
- Family bird walk
- Bird banding
- Moon walk



J. KELLEY-MOBERG

Illustration by Judy Kelley-Moberg

# International Migratory Bird Day Celebration

## May 8th & May 9th

by Judy Kelley-Moberg

Every year migrating birds deal with predators, lack of food, weather, city lights, windows and any number of potential catastrophes before they reach their destination. The percentage of those that don't make it is alarming. Flyways that offer protection and abundant food sources are critical to the migrant's survival. The Great Swamp is an important migratory flyway that provides both food and shelter.



Earlier this spring Rick Saracelli saw enormous flocks of red winged blackbirds, cowbirds, and grackles flowing like giant insect swarms up through the Great Swamp. Many birds migrate in large flocks that wheel and flow across the sky making it difficult for hawks to pick off individuals. The large number of birds in the flock searching for food makes it easier to locate scattered food sources. When these noisy flocks roost in a tree it appears to sprout a full bloom of bird foliage. In April when the shad bush blooms and insects (gnats) are abundant the warblers begin to move through the swamp and birders are in their glory. This is the best time to identify the many varieties of warblers in their summer plumage among the sprouting leaves.

The indigenous peoples and agricultural societies were very aware of the comings and goings of migratory birds as heralds of the seasonal year. Native peoples knew the habits of the birds and their strengths and weaknesses. Many myths, songs and stories feature birds and their unique characteristics. The theme of International Bird Day this year is "Birds in Culture".

To celebrate the arrival of our feathered migrants on their journey to their breeding grounds FrOGS and the Putnam County Land Trust have a weekend of programs for the whole family and amateur birders as well as experts. Participating in the weekend events are The Waterman Bird Club, the Putnam County Soil and Water District, The Oblong Land Trust, and the Environmental Science Department at Purchase College.



### FRIDAY, MAY 8th

#### Owls, Master Hunters of the Night

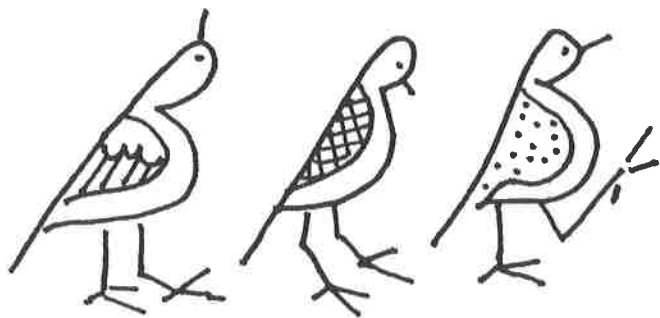
From 7 to 9 pm at the Thomas Center of Christ Church. Take Route 22 to the traffic light at Pawling, Quaker Hill Road to Church Street, Christ Church is near its intersection with Old Quaker Hill Road.

Jim Eyring, enthusiastic educator, falconer, and head of Pace University Environmental Center will begin the evening by introducing us to some of his live owl friends and tell us about their marvelous adaptations as hunters. Mark Weckel, preserve manager of Mianus River Gorge Sanctuary will explain his citizen scientist owl-monitoring project. Weather permitting the evening will end with an owl walk on the church grounds.

### SATURDAY, MAY 9th

#### 7 AM – Expert Led Bird Walks at "Hot" Spots in the Great Swamp

1. Barbara Butler of the Waterman Bird Club will lead a bird walk on the new Oblong Land Trust, Slocum/Mostachetti Preserve in Wingdale. The preserve sits on a low marble ridge that supports cedar groves, open field areas, wetlands and hardwood forest. This varied habitat is attractive to birds, butterflies and unique plants. Birders will meet at 7 am in the north end of the Star Diner parking lot located at the light where Pleasant Ridge Rd. crosses Route 22 in Wingdale. To reserve please call (845) 677-9025.

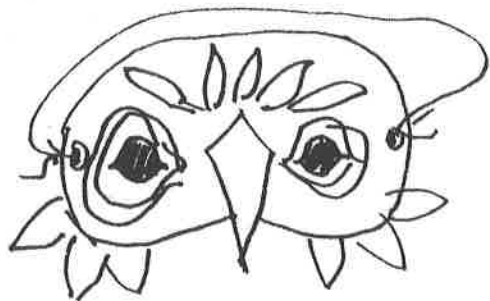


2. Beth Herr of The Putnam County Land Trust and Billy Wallace will lead a warbler walk through the Clough Preserve in Patterson. Many species of warblers prefer the cool pines and swampy waters of this beautiful preserve. Spring wildflowers abound along this trail that leads hikers out to Ice Pond. Birders meet at 7 am at the Brewster High School parking lot near the athletic track. Take Route 312 in Brewster to Farm to Market Road then to the light and Foggintown Road. Call to reserve at (845) 228-5635

### **2 PM to 4:00 PM – Family Programs at the Patterson Library Community Room**

Located on Route 311 between Route 22 and the train tracks.

### **2:00 to 2:30 – Crafts – Migration Game – Myths – Bird Mask Making**



1. Make a Bird's Nest- from available natural materials
2. Native American bird myths
3. Making and decorating simple paper bird masks
4. The Migration Game, will you be a survivor?

### **2:30 to 3:00 – Indian Bird Songs and Dancing to the Drum**

George Michaud and Bill DiBenedetto dressed in Native American garb, will play

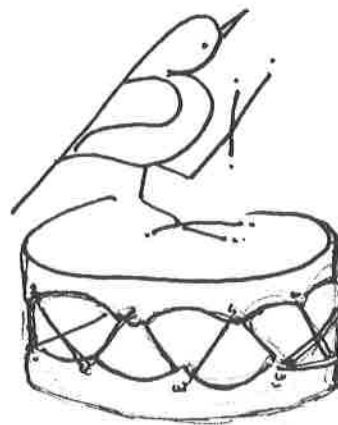
Indian bird songs on the big "Pow Wow" drum. The "bird-masked" children and anyone who would like to participate will have a chance to dance to the sound of the drum.

### **3:00 to 4:00 – An Introduction to Birding and a Field Walk**

For beginning birders and their families. Learn a little about binoculars and bird guides at the library before the group car pools to the Patterson Recreation Center. From there they will go on a guided (easy) field-walk down the forest edge to the Croton River. Some "lender" field glasses will be available and all will get a checklist of birds in the Great Swamp. Learn the best places to look for birds and tips about using behavior, song and field marks for bird identification. There will be a chance to see some of our migrants up close since Dr. Utter will have his bird banding nets set up along the trail and explain why banding is important in tracking migration patterns.

### **3:00 to 3:30 – Repeat Crafts – Migration Game – Myths and Mask Making**

### **3:30 to 4:00 – Repeat Indian Bird Songs and Dancing to the Drum**



### **7 PM – "Flower Moon" Walk**

Led by naturalist Beth Herr. Gather at the pavilion at Green Chimney's canoe launch parking lot on Doansburg Road. Walk into an evening of birdsong and moonlight. As the moon rises over the floodplain, listen to the sounds of the Great Swamp as it settles in for the night. Wear boots, bring a flashlight and get ready for fun! Please register at (845) 228-5635.

# Come Along With Us On The Saturday Field Walk With Sue Morse

by Judy Kelley-Moberg

Both the morning and afternoon field walks were held on what used to be the camp at Sharparoon and the Chipawalla Rod and Gun club property. Jim Munsey the new owner graciously opened up his private property for the day. There were about 35 field walk participants from real estate salesmen to gardeners, landscapers, educators, artists, hunters and wildlife enthusiasts.



Once inside the gate we traveled along a dirt road through the old rod and gun club shooting range. A creosoted telephone pole in the middle of the field was our first stop. Sue explained that bear love to mark telephone poles since their claw marks are not only visible on a prominent object but they also release the creosote smell. Apparently fraying and splintering wood and bark helps hold the scent. Some old bleached bear hairs were still caught in the splinters on the pole.

The road traveled across a forested river flood plain of spicebush, black birch and red maple. Several coyote scats of twisted deer hair and bone fragments were deposited right in the grassy center of the road. Directly in front of a

bridge we found scat that was more cylindrical and broken into rounded segments or "tushy rolls" as Sue called them. Scrape marks in the dirt on either side of the scat confirmed it as the scat of a bobcat.

Piled on top of a grassy hummock along the stream edge was the scat of an otter filled with red fragments of crayfish shells. At the bottom of the stream nearby were packets of compacted woodchips left by beaver that defecate in the water. Beaver dams had flooded the road and were pulled out a day or two before our hike. This may be the reason we found a 14-year-old female spotted turtle floating upside down in the stream. She was alive but not moving and may have been washed out of her hibernation spot in the mud. Jim Utter rescued her and she seemed fine later when she had a chance to warm up. We caught a fleeting glimpse of a muskrat in the water and saw its scat displayed on a boulder near the stream. As we moved through the floodplain, wood ducks burst out of the water with loud flapping wings and wild alarm cries.



The trail rose into an uplands of hemlock, shagbark hickory and beech with an under story of ironwood and striped maple. Sue warned us about getting too near the raccoon scat because it contains harmful parasites. Sue made sure we checked a mowed field area before our return trip. An old apple tree with dried apples still hanging on its branches stood in the middle of the field. We were really excited when we discovered bear claw marks all over the trunk





# Calendar of Events

## May thru July 2009

Friends of the Great Swamp (FrOGS) and Putnam Land Trust (PCLT)

*For information on Putnam Land Trust Programs please call 845-225-5635.*

### MAY

**Friday, May 8th and Saturday, May 9th**  
**International Migratory Bird Day Celebration**  
International Migratory Bird Day Celebration. Events are being planned for all ages and interest levels. See story in this newsletter for full details.

**Saturday and Sunday, May 16 & 17 (FrOGS)**  
**2009 Spring Canoe Trip**  
\$20 adult members, \$11 child (6-14 years)  
\$24 adult non-members, \$15 child (6-14 years)  
(children must be 6 years or older)  
Call Evelyn at 845-877-6498 for reservations & details.

**Saturday, May 23rd**  
**All Day Waterway Safari**  
A special all day Ecological Safari in the Great Swamp (lunch included) led by wildlife ecologist Dr. Jim Utter, a great group event, \$100 a person. For information call Evelyn Charito at 845-877-6498

**Special Event!**

### JUNE

**Saturday and Sunday, June 6 & 14 (FrOGS)**  
**2009 Spring Canoe Trip**  
\$20 adult members, \$11 child (6-14 years)

\$24 adult non-members, \$15 child (6-14 years)  
(children must be 6 years or older)  
Call Evelyn at 845-877-6498 for reservations & details.

**Saturday, June 13th**  
**Beardsley Zoo**  
FrOGS hosts Beardsley Zoo's environmental youth program.

**Sunday, June 14th**  
**Grand Opening**  
Grand Opening of the Slocum-Mostachetti Preserve in Wingdale.

**Sunday, June 28**  
**Road Clean Up**  
Volunteers needed for road clean up, meet at Patterson Rec. Center at 10:00.

### JULY

**Saturday, July 11th**  
**Dutchess County's Watershed Awareness Month**  
July is Dutchess County's Watershed Awareness Month and FrOGS will be involved in a stream study activity for the public on July 11th in Pawling. Check FrOGS website.

## 2009 SPRING CANOE TRIP



**Saturday and Sunday:**  
**May 16 & 17 And June 6 & 14**  
**8:15am, 10:00am, 12:45pm and 2:45pm**



**Cost:** \$20 adult members      \$11 child (6-14 years)  
\$24 adult non-members      \$15 child (6-14 years)  
(children must be 6 years or older)

FrOGS Naturalists will guide you through this beautiful section of the Great Swamp, one of the largest wetlands in New York State, with the assistance of Green Chimney's licensed life-guardians. Join us at Green Chimney's beach off Doanesburg Road (formerly Putnam Lake Road). All level paddlers are welcome (rated moderately strenuous). We will provide, canoes, paddles, life jackets (bring your own if you wish).

We canoe rain or shine. Reservations are a must and space is limited, so, make your reservation early and join FrOGS as we visit and view this unique and complex eco-system which is also home to many species that visit or live there; you will likely get to meet some of them.

**UPDATE:** The May 17 slot has already been filled, so make your reservation soon for the remaining open dates.

**Call Evelyn at 845-877-6498 for reservations and details.**



# The Great Swamp All Day **WATERWAY SAFARI** On May 23

Join Dr. Jim Utter FrOGS chairman and professor of environmental science at SUNY Purchase on an all day trip through the Great Swamp, our own little "everglades of the north". Jim has been instrumental in preserving over 1000 acres of wetlands in the heart of the Great Swamp through the federal NAWCA Grant. The Great Swamp is his passion and his classroom. An expert birder and herpetologist he conducts studies on migratory birds and salamanders in the Great Swamp watershed. Jim is also dedicated to protecting populations of the endangered bog turtle and the rare globeflower.

He is an engaging guide and knows a tremendous amount of information about all the communities of plants and animals that call the Great Swamp home.

Participants will meet at Green Chimneys at 9 am and car pool up to launch at the Patterson Environmental Park. The canoeists will meander by Pine Island on their southward journey, passing under Route 22 and then stopping for lunch (included) before continuing

down the river to arrive at the Green Chimneys launch around 3-4 pm.

An all day trip in the Great Swamp is truly a unique experience. The sounds of civilization fade away as you glide through a maze of channels beneath the overhanging branches of giant silver maples. Green beds of water plants spread into the shadows on either side. Warblers, orioles, kingbirds, and kingfishers are in the trees and sandpipers and great blue heron wade in the shallows. Numerous beaver dams will have to be crossed and guard beaver may slap the water to warn you off. If you are very lucky you might see a family of curious otter fishing for dinner or a mink running along the bank. Bring your cameras and you won't be disappointed!

This is a great group experience for corporations or conservation organizations as well as individuals who really want a wildlife experience close to home. It is also an important FrOGS fundraiser and well worth the \$100 fee. Call Evelyn Chiarito at (845) 877-6498.

**Friends of the Great Swamp** is an organization dedicated to **Preserving the Great Swamp** through educational programs, scientific projects and special events and making all aware of this wonderful resource in our midst.

The generosity of our members and supporters extends FrOGS reach and effectiveness. Contributions support the efforts of the Education Committee, research and this newsletter.

Suggested Contributions: (All Contributions are tax deductible)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Supporter \$25 | <input type="checkbox"/> Contributor \$50   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Friend \$100   | <input type="checkbox"/> Patron \$250       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sponsor \$500  | <input type="checkbox"/> Benefactor \$1,000 |

Send your contribution to: **Friends of the Great Swamp**  
P.O. Box 373, Pawling, NY 12564

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Phone Day \_\_\_\_\_ Night \_\_\_\_\_  
E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

## WE NEED HELP

If you can lend a hand with any of the following, please check off the box and we will call you.

- |   |                                      |                                   |
|---|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spring Celebration     | <input type="checkbox"/> Canoe Trips | <input type="checkbox"/> Other    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Educational Activities | <input type="checkbox"/> Art Show    | <input type="checkbox"/> Mailings |



and the upper branches of the tree. Sue stressed the importance of maintaining open field areas and planting fruit trees to attract wildlife.



The sun warmed things up for the afternoon field walk. Coltsfoot (an early wildflower) opened their yellow dandelion-like flowers all along the roadbed and we saw wood frogs in every pool. The frogs were suspended in a spread-eagle position on the surface of the water and gelatinous egg masses were visible on submerged branches. Bobbie Summers, Sue Morse's associate was in her glory because of her interest in amphibians.

After walking along a section of moss-covered corduroy road (cedar logs laid side by side to cross a wetland) we took a side trail up through a draw that contained a wide seep. Seep areas usually don't freeze in the winter and are attractive to amphibians. Bobbie and Dr. Utter found salamanders under the rocks in the seep brook.

Moving up the draw we alarmed a young garter snake sunning itself in the leaves. Sue was hoping to find sign where the draw pinched off and at the intersection of game trails on top of the ridge. There were deer rubs and scrapes there as well as coyote scat but no sign of bear or bobcat. The return trail dropped down the ridge to the mowed fields along the river and a frog chorus accompanied us on our walk back to the gate.

The field walk was a real learning experience with Sue Morse as our guide. Many thanks to Lauri Taylor and Bobbie Summers who assisted as trail guides throughout the day and to Edie Keasbey our weekend hostess. We plan a follow up with information for those who were interested in the six day "Keeping Track" training program. Call Judy Kelley-Moberg (845) 878-7740.

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## "A Walk on the Wild Side" Evening Program a Great Success

Close to 100 people attended Sue Morse's Friday evening power point presentation at the Patterson Library co-sponsored by our partners The Putnam County Land Trust.

Susan's photos of lynx in the snow, mountain lions, moose in the mist and bobcats brought oohs and aahs from the audience. The crowd favorite was a very wet and bedraggled looking black bear cub standing with arms braced wide in a tree crotch.

Sue brought lots of laughs with her running commentary about animal behavior and the language of scent marks, sex, and scat. Someone in the audience wanted to know what she thought about mountain lion sightings in Putnam. Sue said that moose and wolves are extending their habitats and although she wouldn't rule out a stray mountain lion wandering through Putnam she doubts there is a resident population—yet.

The central message of her presentation was about identifying key habitat for wildlife

through the use of trained citizen scientists. Committed volunteers who use tracking and scientific data collection over a period of time to determine the presence of mammal species like bear, bobcat, fisher, otter and mink. These predators require large, interconnected, bio-diverse, territories, and their consistent presence indicates that the habitat can support all the native mammal species. This information could help communities make informed decisions about land preservation and development.

The evening ended with a coyote and wolf serenade between Sue and the youngsters in the front row and appreciative applause from the audience.

Thanks to Putnam County Soil and Water District for helping advertise the event, the Patterson Library, Laurie Lewis for set up, and to John Gilliland for the sound system.

# Possums Aplenty

by Edie Keasbey

**D**idelphis virginiana, or the Virginia opossum, have been plentiful this winter. Usually nocturnal, this winter's cold spells brought them out during the day in search of food. I found my 'possum perched on my grape arbor trying to reach the birds' suet. Grabbing my camera, I took three pictures, each one closer until we were nose to nose. Not really ugly but not overly cute he/she never moved so I had a good chance to look her over. With her pink nose, pink feet with pink claws and a pink edge over the top of her ears...well she had to be a female (but what do I know). Going back in the house, I got a large hand full of dry cat food and left it on the ground below her perch. Her nose was soon wriggling and down the pole she came and cleaned up the offering.



Believe me, this creature is no ordinary or dull-witted animal; they can trace their family back to the time of the dinosaurs, and they are also the oldest members of the mammal family. Fossils from 70 million years ago show practically no changes. They are literally living fossils. The Algonquian Indian called them "apasum" meaning white animal. Their outer fur is silver tipped. About the size of large house cats, they are the only North American marsupial, relatives of the kangaroo, wombats and bandicoots. Possums have a fifth toe, much like a thumb, especially on the hind foot with no claws. They also have a prehensile tail they can use for gripping limbs.

Possums slowly waddle about, eating everything others do not want. They have a mouthful of 50 small teeth with large canines and small

incisors. Bugs, rats, mice, birds, snakes, slugs, snails, beetles, grasshoppers, fruit particularly persimmons, grapes and apples, human garbage, carrion and road kill make up their varied diet. Their largest predators are humans in cars. They are not long lived, usually surviving if lucky for one to two years. They are a solitary animal, usually staying in an area if plenty of food, water and shelter are nearby. The other day my neighbor opened her hen house door to be confronted by three possums, snuggled in the deep straw enjoying the chickens' grain, but leaving the eggs and hens alone.

Possums have a robust immune system. They are eight times less likely to carry rabies, and are partially or totally immune to the bites of rattlesnakes, cottonmouths, copperheads and other pit vipers. The copperhead is a favored food of the possum. This possum anti-lethal factor is a potent antidote for animal, plant and bacterial toxins. With their large and varied diet, the possum will keep your property cleaned of most things we humans do not want around our homes. They have earned the title of "Sanitation Engineer". In spite of their smaller brain ratio to body size they are known to be smarter than dogs, and more like a pig, the smartest of the farm animals.

Possums are known for "playing possum" when threatened or hurt. They curl up, bare their teeth, releasing foaming saliva and a fluid flows from their anal glands that stinks! This is not voluntary it is an unconscious act. Most animals do not like to eat dead or sick foul-smelling prey; they prefer to hunt and kill their prey alive. After some moments or even after hours, the possum will wake up and waddle off. When possums sense danger, they will also growl loudly. When looking for a mate, they make a "clicking smack" sound and the female will often answer back with the same "clicking smack" sound.

Possums have a reproductive system that is somewhat different than most mammals. Their Latin name "Didelphis" means double-wombed. Because they are a marsupial they have a placenta as well as a marsupium, their pouch, hence double wombs. The male possum's penis is bifurcated and the female's vagina is bifurcated meaning divided into two parts. The male's



spermatozoa also travel in pairs until just before contact with an egg when they split. All of this increases motility and chances of fertilization.

After a relatively short gestation period of 12 to 14 days, up to 20 tiny fetuses are born. It is said that ten of these tiny baby possums can fit on a teaspoon. These tiny blind young climb all the way to the pouch where they attach to one of the 13 teats available. Between the long trip to the pouch and more babies than teats, many do not survive. The babies who do find a teat attach and stay there for about 46 days. Their eyes open at around 55 to 70 days. When they become too large for the pouch, the young crawl out and climb

on their Mom's back. They are weaned by three months and go off on their own by 4½ to 5 months.

They were often hunted for food, especially in the south. Early copies of Rombauer's "The Joy of Cooking" had recipes for possum pie. During the Great Depression, they were a source of food for millions of hungry people.

So the next time you see this animal waddle across your lawn, I hope you will look upon a possum as a very interesting friend you wouldn't mind living nearby. I know I will.

Material taken from numerous sources on the Internet.  
The National Opossum Society may be found at [www.opossum.org](http://www.opossum.org).

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## Winter Hike to Pine Island 2009

This year the weather cooperated giving us a secure ice path to Pine Island. In fact the ice had been so good it was covered with the criss-crossed tracks of cross-country skiers skating up and down the river. Over 50 people (some on snowshoes) as well as a photographer and a reporter from the Reporter Dispatch met Rick Saracelli and me at the Patterson Recreation Center. We trailed down the flood plain and up over the rocky back of Pine Island. Hikers spotted the one pine tree amidst the Hemlocks and heard the story of the "Hawk's Rest" cabin before descending the steep north slope of the island. Only one youngster and one adult got wet feet on our return trip when they managed



to find a thin spot in the ice near the beaver dam. Pine Island still retains its sense of isolation and mystery, one of the wild places that need our protection to keep it a special place for both people and wildlife.

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### OBLONG LAND CONSERVANCY NEWS

The Oblong Land Conservancy is Pawling's local land trust and is active in the southeast part of Dutchess County. They are FrOGS' partners in land preservation. Their mission is to conserve and steward the community's natural assets for the benefit of today's and future generations. [info@oblongland.org](mailto:info@oblongland.org).

The Conservancy is pleased to announce the addition of three new board members. Jay Erickson is a life-long environmentalist who brings his expertise in technology and the Internet. Dorian Winslow raises women's awareness of what they can do to make a difference in their communities and the environment. Constance DuHamel pro-

motes public-private partnerships, preservation, and fundraising projects as a member of local conservation organizations and co-founder of the Coalition for the Responsible Growth of Dover.

**Sunday, June 14th is the Grand Opening of the Slocum-Mostachetti Preserve**, located off Pleasant Ridge Road in Wingdale. For details see website or call (845) 855-5993.

**Three guided walks are planned between 1:00 and 4: pm.**

1. Dr. Jim Utter (FrOGS) will point out the unique features of the preserve
2. A bird walk led by the Waterman Bird Club
3. Butterfly expert Billy Wallace will lead the butterfly walk