

Park Perceptions 2009

“A town is saved, not more by the righteous men in it than by the woods and swamps that surround it.” Henry David Thoreau in “Walking”

Jan. 5 Harriman SP: John and I were thrilled to see 13 wild turkeys along Lake Welch Drive. We went back the next day and saw the same flock again. They seemed quite relaxed and gave us a chance to admire their beautiful plumage. Doris Metraux

Observations and reflections on Natural History by members of the Palisades Interstate Park League of Naturalists. Selected, compiled and edited by Carol Weiss and Marsha Meyer.

*Palisades Interstate Park Commission
Bear Mountain, New York
10911-0427*



Ruffed Grouse

Jan. 9 Harriman SP: A winter weekday in the Park is usually quiet; add an ice storm the day before and an inch of snow in the morning and you have it to yourself. That is how the Sebago fisherman's parking lot was - quiet and empty except for the three cars of myself and friends ready to go hiking in the frosted landscape. As we prepared for the hike I saw an uncommon bird in an uncommon place: A ruffed grouse walking across the snowy parking lot!!! In changing camera lenses I lost sight of it, but easily followed its tracks in the perfect snow. The grouse walked into the barberry bushes along the lot and eventually flapped up to a ten-foot high perch to feed on the red multiflora rose hips. I would have stayed observing till dark but my friends wanted to hike; so, as they approached, they scared the bird out into the open and then back into the impenetrable barberry thickets. Frustrated at first, I then recalled gratefully: If not for my friends, I wouldn't have been here to see and photograph this magnificently plumaged bird. We shared the rarity. In the vicinity were fresh fox, coyote and rabbit tracks. No wonder the ruffed grouse has declined. Tom Cunningham [Photo by Tom]

Jan. 11 Harriman SP: I watched three carnivorous tufted titmice compete to monopolize the best feeding spot on a frozen deer carcass as I stood motionless amidst the icy pine bows with my camera in hand. One titmouse flew towards me, landing on a branch, then on my shoulder and finally resting for 30 seconds atop my camouflage hooded head. Makes one really feel a part of nature, in an Alfred Hitchcock kind of way. Tom Cunningham

Jan. 16 Stony Point Battlefield: I have been seeing several immature and adult eagles here on a regular basis. They like to perch on the north side of the battlefield, below the museum in the cut-through where the cannon faces the river. One



immature that I had in the scope last evening about 4 o'clock had quite a bit of lighter feathers on his underside. He was sitting in that tall pine with the shattered top just to the front right of the blind. I was hoping to see if I could catch a leg band - I was close enough to read it, but he had his feathers covering all but the talons. Also, two immature eagles were grappling out over the point this morning. One was flying almost upside down and they were trying to - use their talons? lock their feet together? A third immature was flying along with them about 50 feet away. Great action, wish Alan were there with his camera. Julia Warger [Photo by Jim Previdi]

Feb. 11 Tallman Mountain SP:

Heard peepers in Tallman, just lovely! Marsha Meyer

Feb. 16 Rockland Lake SP: Near the wooden bridge over the fledgling Hackensack Creek I meet two snow geese (*Chen caerulescens*). One is a white adult. The other, apparently an immature, is neatly patterned in shades of gray. It appears 20% smaller than the white bird, so perhaps it is the "Lesser" snow goose. The Ornithologists' Union currently lists two subspecies of snow goose: the nominate "Lesser" *Chen caerulescens caerulescens* and the "Greater" *Chen caerulescens atlanticus*. "Bull's Birds of New York State", 1998, says "... evidently the

difference is one of measurements." The name *Caerulescens* refers to the "bluish" nominate phase or morph of the snow goose. Our Hudson River Flyway snows are mainly the "Greater" subspecies in which the blue morph is very rare. The "Lesser" birds prefer the blue uniforms and commute mainly over the prairies and the Mississippi Flyway. Interestingly, Roger Peterson, whose earlier Field guides went into numerous subspecies, changed his mind and later remarked (regarding subspecies), "The distinctions are seldom apparent and should not concern the field observer." Near the snow geese, my first killdeer of the year. Gene Brown



{Photo by Alan Wells}

Feb. 20 Bear Mountain SP:

While walking out of the Trailside Museum, Irene Guidice and I saw a white-winged crossbill eating a pine cone under a pine tree. Ron Conzo [Photo by Ron]



Feb. 22 Rockland Lake SP: Around 11 AM I started down the steep and winding road at Rockland Landing. The temperature had reached above freezing and on the road itself, the winds were light and warm. There were few birds - I really wasn't expecting much but planned to walk south to see if the peregrine falcons had set up housekeeping this year. On my way, at the quarry site near the ranger's house, I watched a pair of ravens as they flew about and discussed where to put the 2009 nest. There were several different vocalizations - the usual croak, a higher pitched drawn-out croak, a two note call, and an rapid call. What were they saying? They landed several times on a shelf that had a small tree. Once there they were out of sight and I was sure I'd found the nest site until one of the ravens flew in, landed, picked up a stick from the shelf, carried it higher on the cliff, and dropped it, vocalizing continually. Did he - or she - disapprove of that particular shelf as a nest site, or just that particular stick?

The Rockland Landing light had just one cormorant, but he had the white slash mark on the flank so he was surely a great cormorant.

Near last year's nest, a single peregrine falcon sat high on the southeast facing cliff at the 1/2 mile mark. (That's marked from Nyack Beach - closed for the winter.) I watched for a while and then focused on 50 or so pine siskins moving back and forth in the royal paulownia, birch, and beech trees at the base of the quarried wall. When I turned to retrace my steps, a second peregrine flew in and landed on one of the well-marked trees higher up on the rock wall.

As I walked up the hill, the ravens were still disputing about the nest site - but I found a good-sized flock of goldfinches, 30 or more, and then some siskins joined them, as many as 80. I've never seen as many siskins as I have in the last month!

Other birds on today's walk were 8 robins, 2 bald eagles, 3 white-breasted nuthatches, several song sparrows, and crows, blue jays, mourning doves, chickadees, titmice, and gulls. Carol Weiss

Feb. 27 Rockland Lake SP: Thanks for the note on the Rockland Landing ravens. I'm watching them and they can't seem to agree on where to put the nest. Maybe the female is being very particular. But they seem to agree on the general area. Gene Brown

"I once had a sparrow alight upon my shoulder for a moment, while I was hoeing in a village garden, and I felt that I was more distinguished by that circumstance than I should have been by any epaulet I could have worn." HD Thoreau, naturalist and writer (Quoted in *The Birdwatcher's Companion*)

Feb. 26 Harriman SP: Spent much of the day looking for saw-whet owls with Trudy Battaly and Drew Panko. No owls were found but near Lake Nawahunta, I tapped just below a hole in a pine tree and out popped one flying squirrel and up popped another into the opening. Later, when I tapped again, Trudy had her camera ready and shot a very short video.



In the afternoon, just south of the Anthony Wayne Recreation Area, there was a sign of Spring: a sprig of watercress in a tiny streamlet. Carol Weiss {Photo by Trudy Battaly}

Mar. 7 Harriman SP: A relatively warm day with bright sunlight, becoming overcast mid-afternoon. We headed east over the Arden Road via the main path that starts midway in the parking lot. The track was mushy but free of snow - not so the old Arden Road. Thanks to the shade of trees along the way, the road was still icy, with footing a tad tricky owing to the melted water on top of the ice. But once past the Stahahe Brook bridge, the road was sun-drenched and dry. We continued south past Good Roads Monument and the Nurian Trail bridge over the Thruway until the descending road bordered by conifers became slushy, at which point we turned back. The highlight of the walk was finding clusters of fresh tree ears (*Auricularia auricularia*) on some dead limbs in the sunny area where the road curves up from Stahahe Brook. Also called brown ear fungus, this type usually doesn't appear so early in the year. But the preceding couple of days had been warm and, as pointed out in the "Peterson Field Guide to Mushrooms," the fruiting occurs from spring to fall and in the Rocky Mountains is often found near melting snowbanks. Lincoff, on the other hand, gives the season as May-June and September-December. Pat and Ray Clyne

Mar. 8 Tallman Mountain SP: A soft rain at 7:15 PM, about 50 degrees. Peepers calling lightly from the pond near the parking lot. There was a wood frog on the bike path. As we approached the cut-off path to the ponds the call of wood frogs from Pond Three reached our ears. The light rain became a little heavier and the "salamander habitat" came alive. Ken observed 5 spotted salamanders emerging at once from a hole at the base of a dead tree, making a total of 9 spotted salamanders heading to the ponds, nice! In addition there was a redback salamander, a leadback salamander and a slimy salamander. A translucent newt was emerging from the leaf litter as well. In Pond One, the largest in the park, a tadpole (green or bullfrog) was seen. While walking back to the parking lot a dozen spring peepers and one spotted salamander were observed. Maud Lindsay, Ken McNichol, Marsha Meyer {Photo by Carol Weiss}



April 5 Harriman SP: In the deserted hamlet of Sandyfields I meet a colorful fox sparrow. The rich chestnut of its tail extends well up into its back and the wing primaries are a glowing coppery tint. If a "foxy finch" is startled while scratching (with both feet at once) among dead leaves, it will fly up onto an exposed branch for a good lookout, as this one does. Nearby, litter circles the boulder commemorating the Sandyfields citizens and their school. The scene is not pleasant; I pick up a few bottles and cans. Later, I relax in the little pine grove where the Long Path crosses Beaver Pond Brook. I meet many other hikers, and we assemble at St. John's Church-in-the-Wilderness for the traditional hikers' service and extraordinary buffet in the old barn: hiking gear, maps, trails, wrong turns - and a bright fox sparrow. Gene Brown

April 13 Nyack Beach SP: Six feet from my left shoulder a four-inch ruby-crowned kinglet raises its red flag and sings a long, intricate sentence, worthy of the Adirondacks. Just beyond, a wide blanket of Dutchman's breeches is in full, healthy bloom. Gene Brown

May 20 Harriman SP: I mourn the loss of the tiers of hemlock that once overshadowed the dunning Trail along Pine Swamp. There are few birds today and the only warbler is a single yellowthroat. Discouraged, I tramp around to the inviting tall pines and sit on a log overlooking a smaller, secret, part of the swamp. It is very quiet - until a blue headed vireo suddenly sings close over my head. The clear simple notes are very satisfying. My long hike is a happy success. Gene Brown

Blue-headed Vireo
Drawn by Gene Brown



May 29 Arachnoleptic fit (n.): The frantic dance performed just after you've accidentally walked through a spider web. The person who leads a group into a spider web is known as the "Web Master". Tom Cunningham

Fine definitions - and very appropriate for last evening when Marsha, Ken, and I walked into the Tallman Ponds - first in line always breaks the spider webs. We had a toad, green frogs, one gray tree frog calling, and four slimy salamanders - three more than we usually see. Carol Weiss

May 30 Harriman SP: A beautiful sunny day in the 70's, and it was interesting to see the difference in the wild flowers growing on the sunny side of the trail east of Seven Lakes Drive - buttercups and wild geranium - with the darker, more wooded section of the Menomine/Nawahunta Fire Road - mainly cinquefoil. Along the fire road, the mountain laurel was just starting to

bloom, whereas the deerberry, (*Vaccinium stamineum*), was in its prime. Not so the fungi which was scarce, mainly a couple of platterful mushrooms, (*Tricholomopsis platyphilla*); an oak-loving colybia, (*Collybia dryophiliao*, and numerous small clumps of a delicate slime mold, probably (*Physarum virescens*), with tiny blue-gray tops.

Although lichen is abundant on rocks throughout the park, the Nawahunta Fire Road would be a great place for a lichen field trip, with boulders exhibiting many kinds, including target lichen, (*Rhizocarpon concentricum*), with its concentric rows of black fruit on a gray crust, and a flat bottom lichen, (*Lecidea platycarpa*). Pat and Ray Clyne

June 4 Harriman SP: Carol, I just wanted to let you know that your tip on the wood turtles at the old golf course at the end of Parker Cabin Hollow has really paid off! We have almost twenty wood turtles in that field and stream, and are working out there each night this month to try to protect some nests. Matt Shook

June 8 Harriman SP: On the Silloway Count I walk on the Arden-Surebridge Trail near the Elk Pen. A chipmunk crosses my path. I am surprised by an odd fluttering on the ground. Another chipmunk, a moth, a drifting oak leaf? The scene is better described by Thoreau on June 7, 1853: "The ovenbird runs from her covered nest so close to the ground, like a mouse, that I can't get a clear view of her. She does not fly at all. Is it to attract me, or partly to protect herself?" I sit on a rock, undecided between trying to find the nest or politely leaving the scene to the worried bird. A pileated woodpecker whacks against a tall, shredded pole of

a skeletal hemlock. Close by, a pair of wood thrushes explore the woods floor. The thrushes move into a sunny patch and the male's crown gleams in rich, reddish brown. Gene Brown

June 17 Harriman SP: A single barn swallow follows me along the Appalachian Trail on Fingerboard Mountain. It may be snatching insects stirred up as I brush the grass. A bright prairie warbler swerves several times in my face. Is there a female and nest in the ferns of blueberries? I do not trespass. Where the trail dips toward Greenwood Mine I enter the dense mountain laurel swamp where I once found a black-throated blue warbler nest and eggs. Today there is a single male "blue" chasing a black-and-white warbler. P. M. Silloway, on June 18, 1918, found the first black-throated blue nest recorded in the Park - generally considered a more northerly breeder. I eat lunch at the edge where habitats of the prairie warbler and the black-throated-blue mingle. Overhead, the rufous tail of a crested flycatcher is beautifully backlit by a high, dim sun. Gene Brown

July 2 It's been a dry season at **Tallman Mountain**, even though it's a wet year. Ken, Marsha, and Carol have made our evening treks sporadically. So we went for ice cream first, and then to Lamont to check out a gray and white fungus growing on a large tree near Marsha's lab. Then to Tallman. There were many green frogs on the trails, many gray tree frogs calling lustily, and a large congregation of bullfrogs in the middle of the largest pond, having a noisy, prolonged conversation. There were so many Indian pipes shooting up that it looked like an invasion, but only one slimy salamander. Then Marsha found a very interesting fungus - a gray and brown cup. But what was it? The next day, Ken hit the

Internet and discovered its identity: *Galiella rufa*.

Scientific name: *Galiella rufa* (Schweinitz) Nannfeldt and Korf

Derivation of name: *Ruf-* means "reddish."

Synonyms: *Bulgaria rufa* Schweinitz

Common name(s): Hairy rubber cup

Phylum: Ascomycota

Order: Pezizales

Family: Sarcosomataceae

Occurrence on wood

substrate: Saprobic; small groups or clusters on branches and buried deciduous wood; spring through summer.

Dimensions: Up to 3-4 cm wide and high, shallowly cup-shaped when mature.

Sterile outer surface: Blackish-brown; densely hairy.

Fertile inner surface: Reddish to reddish-brown to orange-brown to tan; smooth.

Edibility: Not edible.

Comments: The inner flesh is thick and gelatinous, giving the fungus a rubbery feel.

This may be a new species for the park. Ken McNichol, Marsha Meyer, and Carol Weiss

July 3 Harriman SP: Above the massive granite dome of the Whaleback on the Ramapo-Dunderberg Trail, an American kestrel is stationed on the top perch of a bare tree. Three cedar waxwings and a bluebird drift constantly back and forth. Near the trail, pink corydalis and blue toadflax grow among the rocks. At the wide expanse of Bowling Rocks thirty or more barn swallows circle low, dart among erratic boulders and probe water-filled north-south

cracks scratched out by the claws of the glacier. Do these swallows nest in camp structures or do they favor rock ledges? They seem to reject the hollow tree-trunks, damaged by fire, that the tree swallow prefer. At Little Long Pond two bicyclists stop to admire "Those beautiful flowers", perhaps never before having seen white water lilies. Gene Brown



Water Lily, Little Long Pond
(Photo by Carol Weiss)

July 6 Nyack Beach SP: Precisely at the 3/4 mile marker on the bike path, I hear a thud just behind me. Twenty feet away, exactly where I have just past, is a cube-shaped chunk of Hook Mountain, ten or twelve inches on each side. Gene Brown

"Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains."

Henry David Thoreau in "Where I Lived, and What I Lived For"

July 13 Harriman SP: While walking down from the Jackie Jones Fire Tower at 2:10 PM, I saw a black bear sow with three cubs! They walked over a ridge where only about 5% of the blueberries were ripe and the raspberries are still a couple of weeks away from eating. I also saw 2 fawns in the area. The ridge is located across Rte. 210 from the Beaver Pond Campground where the following day staff said they had no reports of bear. Good news for both the bears and campers! Two summers ago a black bear triggered a camera trap set over a road kill fawn located below the same ridge.

I walk the hill to the fire tower regularly and was glad to see that someone had repaired fencing enclosing the stairwell; I assume it was likely due to Ranger Tim Sullivan, who has been an advocate for saving the Fire Tower - the tower maybe the only one still functioning in Harriman/ Bear Mountain SP. In 1972 I received an official tower visitation card after a tour. The 60-foot tower is dwarfed by the 340-foot tall microwave tower located about 250 yards away. There is still a functioning operational Fire Tower in Sterling Forest SP. During my first visit there Mr. Spiers, the Tower staff member, took me to the top where we spotted a small fire and called it in! If you have never been to the top of the Jackie Jones Fire Tower, the 360 degree view is well worth it. Tom Cunningham

July 30 Nyack Beach SP: I saw a beautiful 2-foot copperhead on the trail right next to the parking lot. It was at dusk when there were hundreds on fireflies, with families and kids watching them. One mom was saying to her boys, "Oh look, a snake!" I asked her to show me. Fortunately she was unfazed that it was a pit viper inches from us! It slithered up the hill. I have only seen them at Lamont though I have heard they are at The Hook. Didn't expect to see one so close to trail and parking lot! Sarah Johnson

August 1 Harriman SP: From Route 106 to Parker Cabin Hollow Trail had abundant rain in past weeks. Small tributary streams were full, even the largest stream crossing with its usual dry stepping stones was flooded, so we reversed course and headed back to our car. But all was not lost. An abundance of fungi - 33 species - was found for the day. Two were "NEW TO MASTER LIST" of Bear Mt. - Harriman State Parks - Shiny Black Earth Tongues (*Geoglossum difforme*) and Brown Cup (*Peziza sylvestris*). Pat and Ray Clyne

August 24 Highland Lakes SP: A short walk produced a fine specimen of a cup-shaped mushroom called White-egg Bird's-nest (*Crucibulum laeve*). Ray Clyne

August 30 Nyack Beach SP: A sunny, warm day and many people were walking along the shore path. Interestingly, Japanese Honeysuckle (*Lonicera japonica*) was still blooming among the boulders on the water side, while Black swallowwort (*Cynanchum nigrum*) was thick on the opposite side of the path. So were the many Royal Paulownia (*Paulonia tomentosa*) trees, reaching east from their footing among the quarry rubble and cliff face, heavily laden with their distinctive seed capsules. Although not in abundance, there were clusters of purplish Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*) adding a bright note to the scene. Alas, no mushrooms were seen. Pat and Frank Clyne



Herb Robert

Drawn by Gene Brown

Sept. 20 Harriman SP: Titled "Shroom Hunting We Will Go Across From Lake Sebago," this field trip was led by Ken McNichol, Alan Wells, and ourselves. And what a trip it was! As usual, we didn't go very far, but thanks to many eyes, we found a good variety, including two 'shrooms that are new to our Master List, Stinky Squid (*Pseudocolus fusiformis*) and Pretzel Slime (*Hermitrichia serpula*). Although the season for Pretzel Slime is usually June to August, this specimen was fresh and easily identified because of its distinctive shape. Among other things noticed were a Spring Peeper (*Hylacrucifer*), a Slimy salamander (*Plethodon glutinosus*), and some Rattlesnake Weed (*Hieracium venosum*). Pat and Ray Clyne

Oct. 9 Harriman SP: It has been a very successful turtle season, and as hatching season comes to an end I thought I'd share our success with the volunteers, who have made it all possible. As you can see in the pictures I've attached, we captured wood, box and snapper hatchlings with our silt fence design, along with many other creatures including frogs (green and pickerel), American toads, a black racer, a hognose snake, juvenile box turtles (2 one-year-olds!) and jumping field mice. Some of the wood hatchlings and one clutch of box hatchlings were found emerged under their protected nests, but the rest were funneled into the traps. Most of the wood turtles (20 of them) were taken to Trailside to live in the brand new headstarting exhibit where they will be raised for 2-3 years and then returned to their natural habitat. Altogether we found about 23 wood hatchlings, 9 box hatchlings, and around 60 snapper hatchlings, if not more.

Now the turtles are slowing down (they kept me in very good shape this summer!) and will be entering their hibernacula soon- the box turtles to their holes in the soil under the leaf litter, the woods to well hidden spots under river banks, and spottedts to their shallow highbush blueberry root tunnels.

I thank you for all of your help and will be sure to send you the final results from this season when I get the data entered. I am sad to say my internship ends fairly soon, at the end of November, but I have high hopes of staying in this area to work on my thesis and assist in other projects. So, thank you all for your wisdom, patience and company out in the field! I'll probably see you as a fellow volunteer on the turtle project next year. Marnie Miller-Keas, SCA Biodiversity Intern {Photos by Marnie}



Oct. 12 Sterling Forest SP: From Route 17 to the Sapphire Trailhead opposite the Harriman Train Station, then along the trail to a place where an old washed-out road veers downhill to meet the old road that parallels Rt. 17, and back to our car. Among other mushrooms, we found Fringed Tubaria (*Tubaria furfuracea*), some as we ascended the hill, but even more on the old washed-out road. Another species new to the Master List! We also found a slimy salamander (*Plethodon glutinosus*) under a rotten log with lots of Fringed Tubaria growing on it. Pat and Ray Clyne

Oct. 21 Harriman SP: I found ants or termites and lady bugs (perhaps the non-native species) hatching. Lady bugs by the thousands were swarming along a cliffside; later I saw migrating fall warblers eating some of the bugs. Tom Cunningham

Nov. 2 Hook Mountain SP: Fantastic!! A rough-legged hawk at Hook was seen by Carol Weiss and John, the photographer! Very, very neat! The only RL that I have seen in migration was at Mt. Peter, many many years ago. The Hook Hawk Watch has recorded RL in 12 years, with the last being 1991. So this is our first in 18 years. A great day! The northern goshawk, also seen today, makes #4 for the year. We had only 1 last year. Trudy Battaly

Nov. 3 Harriman SP: As I hike from the Anthony Wayne Recreation area, my first birds on the Wayne Trail are a fox sparrow, a cardinal, and a catbird in the same bush, surrounded by whitethroats. Over the overgrown pasture next to the Long Mountain circle, 40 or more robins drift in circles as if not sure of their travel plans. A single, brilliant purple finch sits atop a bare sapling. At the Queensboro Circle maintenance area I happen to turn around. A black bear stands on the service road. A bear is larger when seen from a trail than when seen from a car . . . What do bears think of invasive humans?

I stop on the bridge where the 1779 trail crosses the Turkey Hill Lake outlet. No place I've ever seen is more beautiful. With thermos and sandwich at Queensboro Lake I watch a tight formation of 14 wood ducks, passing three times. Display Board #5: *The March of the Light Infantry, 1779* needs washing. I dip my all-purpose kerchief in a convenient streamlet and clean the exhibit - my scout's good turn for the day. Just beyond, at the 1777W trail intersection, another display has been cleaned recently. Several organizations worked together creating these Revolutionary Trails and Jack Focht, Bear Mountain League of Naturalists founder, played an important role. Gene Brown

Nov. 19 Bear Mountain SP: The Trailside Zoo acquired a young female pileated woodpecker this summer; it was in grave condition, unable to fly or hold onto a perch. An x-ray revealed that most of its bones were broken and healed incorrectly. It is now November and the bird is flying well within its long aviary despite its drooping wing. It is rare to see one so close. Tom Cunningham

History, Nature by PIP

By Frank Leonard, Staff Writer, Rockland County Journal News

This article, found at the Nyack Library, is undated and incomplete. I took great liberties in reproducing it here, rearranging most of the paragraphs. Carol Weiss

History and the great maw of nature blend in the Palisades Interstate Park System. Natural attractions are so varied and vast that ten million visitors have walked the trails and stopped at the Bear Mt. Trailside Museum over the years. Buses annually bring thousands of school children. Prior notification is required and a bus fee must be paid, but visitors have eight hours - from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. - to glory in the park's wonders. Besides the animal and bird life, there is a museum on the site of Fort Clinton, captured by the British in 1777. Part of the Hudson River chain that prevented British men-of-war from sailing north is displayed. There is also an Indian collection. Books, drawings and other objects related to the late Daniel Beard of Suffern - naturalist, writer and founder of Boy Scouting of America - are also on exhibit. The north end of the trailside museum has several thousands of bound volumes and papers on archaeology and history.

More than 60 trees and shrubs are labeled along the nature trails leading through Bear Mountain Park to the trailside museum. Cool and quiet paths are lined with flowering dogwood, mountain laurel, American chestnut, white oak, red maple and weeping willow. There are ferns and moss to blot out the sky, and a scent of honeysuckle, lilac and peach. Mingled with them is the fragrance of Scotch pine and forsythia. The famous black bear are in a large enclosure in the same area.

PALISADES INTERSTATE PARK LEAGUE OF NATURALISTS

The park system is a delight for the birdwatcher. The park has them all, including the yellow-bellied sapsucker, a spring and fall transient. Rare and exotic birds have been observed - the golden eagle, snowy egret, sooty tern, redheaded woodpecker, snowy owl and the blue goose. There are hundreds of broad-winged hawks in the vast park system. The park commission protects these (raptors that) prey on rats and mice.

Wildlife abounds in the woods and waters of the Palisades Interstate Park system. There is the wildcat - also known as the bobcat or bay lynx - who ranges from southern Canada to Mexico. Males grow almost 3 1/2 feet long, stand almost two feet at the shoulder and have a tail of 4 to 6 inches long. Some have weighted in at 40 pounds, although the average is 15 to 20 pounds. A "loner," the wildcat usually pairs in mid-winter, then returns to constant hunting the rest of the year. "You don't see the wildcat, but he's here," says John P. Orth, assistant park superintendent. A specimen is housed at the Trailside Zoo and at least once a year a kinfolk is sighted in the deep park system forest.

Also in the 50,000 woodland acres - protected against the lusts of hunters and poachers - are other rarities, the hoary bat, smoky shrew and otter. Fairly common are the small Eastern flying squirrel, muskrat, raccoon and southeastern mink, as are red and gray foxes. Canadian porcupine often are observed. Beaver inhabit most of the park's larger ponds and lakes. And white-tailed deer are in such abundance that motorists are advised to use caution even on the more-traveled park roads.

Rainbow and brook trout are in the lakes. So are carp, goldfish, American eel, blue-gilled sunfish, Northern rock bass and smallmouth bass. Of the amphibians, there is a rare Jefferson salamander along the park's southern boundary. There are bullfrogs, the Eastern gray tree frog, Northern cricket frog, green frog and the Northern spring peeper. Hikers are cautioned against the timber rattlesnake and the Northern copperhead.

Another park creature is the American eel which, scientists have found, migrates every spring from the inland lakes to the open sea and to spawning ground southwest of Bermuda. Eels lay their eggs in the autumn and the adults die. The larvae then return through the ocean to fresh water, reaching local shores in April.

Then there is poison ivy: "Leaflets three, let it be; berries white, hide from sight." Picnickers in the park system are quick to follow the admonition. Curiously, poison ivy can be transported by smoke from burning brush - or from a campfire.

A thank you to everyone who contributed to the 2009 Park Perceptions - The Thoreau Edition: Trudy Battaly, Gene Brown; Pat, Frank and Ray Clyne; Ron Conzo and Irene Guidice, Tom Cunningham, Sarah Johnson, Maud Lindsay, Ken McNichol, Doris Metraux and John Deans, Marsha Meyer, Marnie Miller-Keas, Jim Previdi, Matt Shook, Julia Warger, Carol Weiss, and Alan Wells. Gene Brown offered the first HD Thoreau quote - and others followed.

Please send Park Perceptions - drawings, sightings, photographs, poetry, observations, or even random thoughts - for 2010 to

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or to

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"The hawk is aerial brother of the wave which he sails over and surveys, those his perfect air-inflated wings answering to the elemental unfledged pinions of the sea." Henry David Thoreau in "The Bean Field"