

# SHAWANGUNK WATCH

Summer 2007 Preserving Open Space in the Shawangunks Volume 12 # 1

*Friends of the Shawangunks & The Shawangunk Conservancy*

## Friends of the Shawangunks and The Shawangunk Conservancy Defined

Our two organizations, Friends of the Shawangunks and The Shawangunk Conservancy have a lot in common:

- ◆ Both are charitable organizations (501(c)(3)), meaning that contributions to both are tax deductible;
- ◆ They have the same officers;
- ◆ They have the same boards, and their board meetings are held simultaneously, leaving it to the secretary to sort out the minutes; and
- ◆ They have identical memberships; if you make a contribution to either you are a member of both.


They do differ in their missions, as indicated by their mission statements:

- ◆ Friends of the Shawangunks is dedicated to protecting the Shawangunk Mountains of New York from adverse environmental impacts.
- ◆ The Shawangunk Conservancy protects environmentally sensitive land in the Shawangunk Mountains of New York State.

We trace Friends' beginning to a 1963 bill in Congress proposing a skyline drive along the top of the Shawangunk Ridge. The resistance to this proposal killed the bill and led to a loose organization of individuals concerned about what might happen to the ridge. In the early years these individuals were most concerned about providing financial assistance and support to The Mohonk Trust (now the Mohonk Preserve). In 1979 Friends became a true advocacy organization in response to Marriott's proposal to construct a hotel/condominium complex at Lake Minnewaska. That plan too was defeated, and Friends has since continued to actively oppose other plans that would adversely affect the ridge, most recently the proposed Awosting Reserve development.



The Shawangunk Conservancy was formed in 1987, at a time when no other organization was actively trying to protect additional land in the Shawangunks, and it acquired several small parcels on the Rock Hill Ridge. Then Mohonk Preserve began to acquire more land, and Open Space Institute, under the urging of its legal consul and former Friends and Conservancy president, Bob Anderberg, became the major source of funding to protect the ridge. As a result of these efforts The Conservancy, with its limited resources, has taken on the role of assisting both organizations in their efforts. In 1992 The Conservancy contracted to buy a parcel that included a major part of the Near Trapps that included the col between the Near Trapps and the Bayards. The Mohonk Preserve eventually acquired this parcel with funding from The Access Fund. The Conservancy also assisted the Mohonk Preserve in another acquisition, and recently contributed to the purchase by OSI of a parcel adjacent to Minnewaska State Park Preserve.

Members may contribute to either or both organizations. If a check is made out to Friends, but the member indicates all or a portion should be used for land protection, The Conservancy gets the money. Unless a contribution is designated for land protection, Friends gets the money. Corporations will match contributions to either organization, except for IBM, which matches only contributions to The Conservancy. 

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# Citizen Groups Express Concerns to Port Authority About Stewart Development

On April 11, a broad spectrum of citizen groups presented a statement to Anthony Shorris, Executive Director of the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey expressing their concerns about the impact of the development of Stewart International Airport on the Mid-Hudson and Catskill Region.

Rather than see Stewart become a reliever airport for the major metropolitan airports, the group advocates that Stewart adhere to the description defined in the Airport Master Plan of 1993. The intent of this designation was to meet the needs of residents within a radius of one hour from Stewart and to prevent it from developing into an airport that would have severe negative impacts on the residents of this area. The group asserts that the projected target of three million passengers annually, in addition to expansion in cargo transports, would sabotage and contradict that plan.

With the return of Stewart to the public domain, the group is calling upon the PA to fully accept its responsibilities to the residents of this region by designing an airport that is compatible with its rural setting. It suggests that with wise planning and the implementation of specific abatement measures, Stewart has the opportunity to become a model airport designed with the future in mind.

♦To help create an airport that is environmentally compatible with the area it serves, the group offers the following recommendations:

♦Establish a public body, such as an advisory board or ad hoc committee of citizens, to work on the redesign of Stewart. The precedent for such a committee was set during the NYS Department of Transportation ownership of the airport in the mid 1990s with a citizens' working group representing area organizations.

♦Create a situation that will make Stewart commercially viable for passengers in the Mid Hudson and Catskill region, which should continue to be its service area. When this is accomplished, it will significantly reduce demands on the metropolitan airports, making it unnecessary to expand infrastructure to facilitate the use of Stewart by NYC residents.

♦Restrict flights over and within two miles of State parkland especially the Shawangunk Mountains, the Catskill Preserve, and the Basha Kill Wetlands Area, as well as historic communities at high elevations.

♦Direct air routes over areas which already have extensive ambient noise, such as major land transportation arteries. Single noise events create much greater impacts in rural areas of low ambient noise.

♦Keep cargo traffic at an absolute minimum, limited to that which only supports the needs of Mid Hudson/Catskill region shoppers and businesses.

♦Permit only the newest and quietest aircraft, such as those meeting Stage 3 and Stage 4 standards, to use the airport.

♦Establish a curfew restricting flights between 10 pm and 7 am., and use noise budgets, surcharges, and noise level limits to reduce intrusive overflight noise. The 1991 Noise Control and Capacity Act, which preempts this area of regulation, is clearly outdated in this era of serious environmental concerns.

♦Design approach/departure routings and profiles to avoid noise-sensitive areas and maintain the highest altitudes practicable. Rotate routings to spread the impacts among communities near the airport. Take maximum advantage of new technologies to design environmentally sensitive procedures.

♦Explore methods to reduce air pollution from planes and trucks in and around the airport. Northern Orange County is already designated as a non-attainment area for ozone pollution, and the airport should be working to reduce these levels rather than increase them.

The group observes that airports are not benign service facilities, but take a costly toll on the quality of life of those who are unfortunate to reside near them. The group strongly recommends that in the rush to expand facilities at Stewart, planners and airline executives include in their decision-making process both the sensitivity of the rare and fragile environment surrounding Stewart on all sides as well as the rights of those who have chosen to live in the relative peace and quiet of a cherished countryside. It claims that these are not considerations to be lightly sacrificed, but rather to be respected as the planning moves forward.

Representatives of the group state that it is essential for community involvement with the PA to begin at the earliest stages of Stewart's development. They have called upon their federal, state, and local legislators to support them in this effort and have forwarded to them a copy of the statement sent to Shorris.

The statement was co-signed by the following groups, headed by Ulsterites Fight Overflight Noise: Basha Kill Area Association, Cragmoor Association, Friends of the Shawangunks, Mohonk Preserve, Orange Environment, Stewart Park and Reserve Coalition (SPARC), Sierra Club-Ramapo Catskill Group, The Nature Conservancy - NY Chapter Shawangunk Ridge Program, Woodstock Overflight Focus Group.

The following letter was sent to Governor Spitzer on April 12:

*Dear Governor Spitzer:*

The acquisition of Stewart International Airport by the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PA) has been in the forefront of the news for the past few months. Articles describing plans to develop it as a reliever airport for passengers and cargo from Kennedy, LaGuardia, and Newark airports indicate that it is likely to become the fourth major metropolitan airport.

Although some of the economic development that will result from this expansion may have a positive impact on the region, letters to the editor and other commentaries indicate that there is widespread concern that it could also have a profound negative environmental impact.

In his keynote address at the Hudson Valley Regional Economic Summit at SUNY Ulster on March 20, Anthony Shorris, the newly appointed Executive Director of the PA, invited the public to share their concerns with his agency. We have accepted his offer and have presented him with the suggestions outlined in the attached letter.

We are asking the PA to restrict its development of Stewart to the needs of the residents of this region. We are confident that doing so will relieve the pressure at the metropolitan airports. The agency also needs to live up to its responsibilities to the residents of this region and create an airport that is compatible with its rural setting. To accomplish this, legislators, citizens, and environmental groups need to be involved in the planning process from the beginning.

It is for this reason that we request you to work as expeditiously as possible on behalf of your constituents to protect them from negative airport development that could drastically change this region forever. Ensuring the abatement measures outlined in the letter to Mr. Shorris could help to prevent this from happening.

We would like to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss an agenda that would include, but not be limited to, the possibility of creating legislation to ensure these protections. We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

*Sincerely yours,*

Please see page 9 for the list of organizations signing this letter

## CITIZEN GROUPS APPLAUD SCHUMER'S ACTION ON STEWART AIRPORT



Residents of the Mid-Hudson/Catskill Region are applauding Senator Charles E. Schumer's call for the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey to give local residents and citizen groups a greater voice in the discussions over the future of Stewart Airport.

In a recent letter to PA Executive Director Anthony Shorris, Schumer stressed that the time was ripe for the PA to create a citizen's advisory board, allowing community members a place at the table to ensure that the airport's expansion is conducted in a smart and balanced manner. In doing so, "...we'll be able to strike the right balance of expanding the airport while preserving the region's quality of life," said Senator Schumer. He also stated that, "In establishing a citizen's advisory committee, the Port Authority will make sure the voices of residents and communities affected by Stewart are both heard and considered when discussing the airport's expansion."

Citizen groups view Sen. Schumer's request as a major step in expanding the dialogue on the development of Stewart to include those who fall under the shadow of the airport. They feel that if the input of residents is seriously considered from the earliest stages of the planning, then the chances are greater for creating a truly regional airport that is environmentally compatible with the area it serves in the Mid Hudson and Catskill Region.

Headed by Ulsterites Fight Overflight Noise, the other groups include Basha Kill Area Association, Cragmoor Association, Friends of the Shawangunks, Mohonk Preserve, Orange Environment, Stewart Park and Reserve Coalition (SPARC), Sierra Club—Ramapo Catskill Group, The Nature Conservancy—NY Chapter Shawangunk Ridge Program, and the Woodstock Overflight Focus Group.

Representatives of these groups are meeting with other federal, state, and local legislators requesting them to follow Sen. Schumer's lead by supporting their efforts to gain a seat at the table in the planning of Stewart's development. They feel that this expansion, more than any other proposals for this area, will have the most profound impact on the Mid-Hudson / Catskill Region over the next decade and well into the future. ☞

Articles on Stewart courtesy of Maureen Radl

## THE SOUTHERN SHAWANGUNKS Basha Kill Area Association

- ♦The BKAA does not own nor manage any property.
- ♦The Bashakill Wildlife Management Area (BWMA) is owned by the State of New York and managed by a state agency, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), which formulates all policy for the BWMA, not the BKAA.
- ♦The DEC pays town, school, county, and special district taxes on the BWMA. The 3,000 acre parcel is assessed at a low rate since it is open space/wetlands, not because the DEC is offered a special discount.
- ♦The BKAA is a BWMA Steward under the DEC Adopt-A-Natural Resource program. Our stewardship agreement specifies that the BKAA will: conduct an Annual Cleanup (April 21, 2007), perform monthly water testing at five sites, and implement educational activities.
- ♦The BKAA Mission Statement, which underscores our group's goals of "protecting the Basha Kill wetlands and surrounding area from ecological degradation, promoting education and respect for the environment in general and preserving the beauty of the area," provides the focus for the organization's efforts.

Though the BKAA is an environmental organization, rather than an economic development corporation, we contribute to the local economy by encouraging our educational program participants to utilize Wurtsboro area businesses, by touting the BWMA and nearby resources on our website [www.thebashakill.org](http://www.thebashakill.org) and in our official brochure, as well as in the soon to be published Field Guide to the Basha Kill Wetlands, by partnering with the Sullivan County Visitors Association, and by "spreading the word" at pertinent regional venues.

The BKAA is not anti-growth. In fact, during his tenure, Supervisor Penna has requested and received our input on development siting.

BKAA members monitor most municipal board meetings and in the process, constantly ask questions, challenge faulty processes and inform residents of projects that may negatively impact their neighborhoods. Nevertheless, the great majority of subdivision applications that are annually reviewed by the Planning Board proceed without any objections from the BKAA.

In recent years, the BKAA has actually opposed only five enterprises: the Yukiguni Maitake mushroom plant, casinos; Shawanga Lodge (an enormous endeavor once slated for the Shawangunk Ridge off of Exit 114 - Route 17); gravel mining /fly-in homes at the Wurtsboro Airport; and the New York Regional Interconnect (NYRI) power line.

The BKAA has filed three lawsuits in thirty-five years. One dealt with approval of the 2001 Town Master Plan and the other two are against Yukiguni. Mamakating's costs are being assumed by the developer.

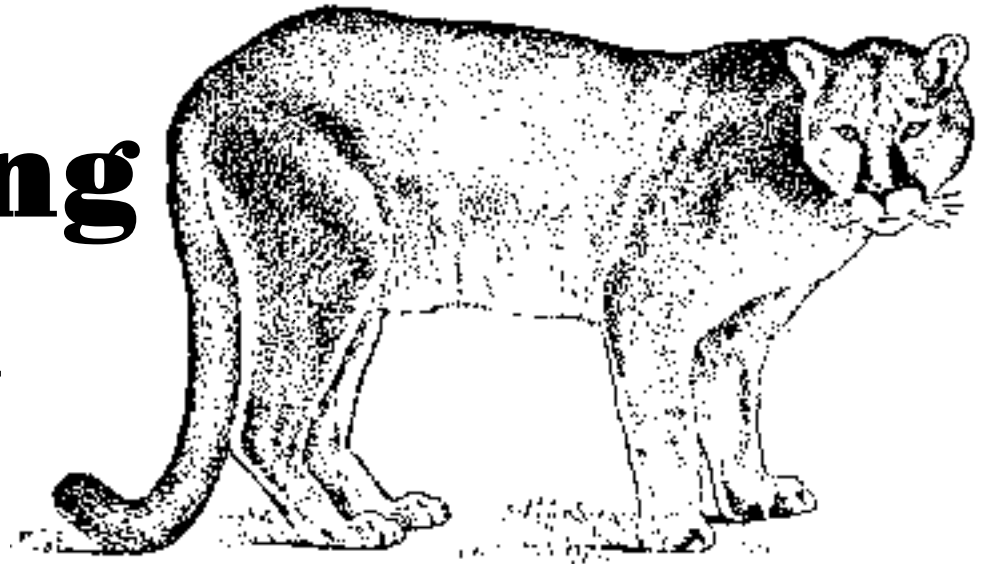
Two hundred fifty BKAA members reside in Mamakating. Nine out of ten BKAA Board members live in the Town. It is not surprising, however, that our membership encompasses a broad geographic area, since the BWMA is a State designated valuable asset, not just a local gem.

Only the BKAA President or Board designee speaks for the organization. Whenever other BKAA members talk, they are expressing personal views/opinions.

Most importantly, the BKAA membership is comprised of your friends, neighbors, co-workers. We frequent your shops, engage in mutually enjoyable special events, and belong to your organizations. We are active volunteers who, like you, are endeavoring to improve quality of life in our communities. We are the faces and the real people behind the BKAA name.

# Chasing Tail

by Christopher Spatz



Last year in *Shawangunk Watch*, I made the case — based on sightings I'd collected over the course of six years, supported by nearly a century of documented local reports — that mountain lions were not only surviving in the region, but that their presence was being denied by the wildlife officials who ought to be protecting them. 10,000 remote camera hours and 600 hours on the ground looking for sign later, bolstered by the latest confirmations and research updated at the 3rd Midwestern-Eastern Puma Conference, it's time to issue a *mea culpa*. Likely, ain't no cougars roaming the ridge.

How's that, Spatz? A year of reading, a year of following up reports from Woodstock to Watchung, NJ, a year of greenhorn research sending out evidence and pestering the experts at the Eastern Cougar Foundation (ECF), and I've got nothing but a couple of bratwurst-sized scat awaiting DNA analysis. As Dr. Jay Tischendorf, a biologist/veterinarian with the ECF and a breathtakingly reasoned voice in the cacophony around the eastern cougar controversy insists: if mountain lions are on the ridge, it shouldn't be hard to find plenty of sign supporting that pair of unconfirmed poo. So far, this amateur has found none.

Here's the big picture. As the ECF's Kerry Gyekis illustrated in his talk for the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership's lecture series back in January, within the last decade, cougars dispersing out of South Dakota's Black Hills began turning up in Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, Missouri, Arkansas, and Oklahoma, pretty much before anyone even knew they were there. With sightings barely recorded, cougar sign appeared, pictures of cats clicked on random remote cameras, and most objectively, roadkilled cougars were hauled in to Midwestern wildlife agencies.

The eastern kill-line, as it is called, is the Illinois/Kentucky side of the Mississippi River (Michigan's cougar saga is far too Gordian to disentangle here). Fire-breathing eastern cougar skeptics like to argue that where they live, the big cats meet moving vehicles with absurd frequency. A juvenile male radio-collared in the Black Hills traveled 660 miles before getting picked off in Oklahoma...by a train. Eleven of the hundred or so beleaguered panthers surviving in southern Florida died on the roads last year; nine so far in '07. Roadkill, sadly, is the supreme indicator of resident cougars. None have been confirmed in a state bordering the Atlantic coast north of Florida.

As if the absence of roadkill isn't enough, there are now thousands of private remote wildlife cameras scanning the lands, whose pictures of anything interesting or untoward race across Internet hunting and wildlife forums. Not one has captured a picture of a cougar east of the Mississippi, as they have in Nebraska, Missouri and Arkansas, and throughout the West. Official eastern camera studies, too, are coming up empty.

My little rēniōtē camera project begun in December down at High Point State Park, NJ, where both park visitors and park rangers reported sightings, has found deer, bear, deer, turkey, golden retrievers, and deer. A fisher camera study by a Montclair University grad student in the adjacent Stokes State Forest found fisher, bobcat, and coyote, but no cougars. New Jersey Fish & Wildlife, who approved both camera studies, and is doing more than any other state agency on the eastern seaboard to follow-up cougar reports, has found nothing.

The ECF has published the results of two seasons of studies with twenty cameras in the mountains of West Virginia, and another season expanded to include southern Pennsylvania and Kentucky. No cougars. The New York State Museum and the NYSDEC, with three universities, completed a comprehensive carnivore study in '06 with cameras and track-traps at 54 sites in the Adirondacks. They collected and analyzed over 300 scats. No cougars. Bottom line: researchers looking for mountain lions in the eastern US can't find any.

In eastern Canada, about a dozen confirmations exist (evidence certified by a State, Provincial, or Federal wildlife agency). The closest recent confirmations to New York are from '04 along the Niagara Peninsula, from '01 in Cornwall, Ontario across the New York border, and one in Quebec just north of New Hampshire, where a reported lactating female met a truck in '02.

East of the Mississippi, between Maine and Georgia, there are only a handful of confirmations in the past fifteen years; none since 2000. A deer-kill from 1993 in the Adirondack's Keene Valley showed all the signs of a classic cougar kill — the lethal neck-bite, the body cavity opened at the ribs, and debris scraped over the carcass. A scrawny kitten shot in Saratoga County in 1997 was tracked by the NYSDEC back to a local owner; concluding all the recent evidence from New York. Which begs the question: with thousands of cougar reports and millions of hunters (some notoriously confusing livestock with deer), shouldn't there be more, many more, than this single hunting incident involving a cougar in the East in forty years?

So what to make of our many local sightings? After six months of not finding sign from that hot-bed of cougar sighting activity, northern New Jersey (don't snicker, they have more black bears per square mile than we do), I began running an ad in January in the *Blue Stone* and *Ulster County Presses* — courtesy of the publisher, Lori Childers — seeking local reports and evidence. I'm getting sent pictures of bobcats, video of housecats, and finding plenty of canine tracks. Chagrined, I'm learning what biologists and wildlife agency reps continue to tout. People, indeed, mistake the difference between bobcats and cougars, fishers and cougars, dogs and cougars, even housecats and cougars. What's remarkable is what isn't coming in: clear cougar evidence.

Accomplished naturalists can make mistakes. The pictures of tracks thought to be a large cat taken in '03 by Mohonk Preserve researchers were sent to the ECF for a welcomed peer-review. Across the board, the ECF's discouraging conclusion: bear cub.

And as much as I wanted to believe that uber-stealthy remnant natives had survived the 19th century slaughter, we'll never be able to prove it.

Dr. Melanie Culver's 1999 DNA study on the eleven North American subspecies found that they are all genetically one. The federally endangered eastern cougar, listed in 1973 before the advent of genetic testing, never existed!

The US Fish & Wildlife Service is conducting a review of the status of this endangered apparition. Based on Culver's research, they'll probably have little choice but to de-list the subspecies, erasing federally mandated protections for any cougar that eventually makes it here. DNA results continue to show a mix of both North and Latin American genes, supporting the notion that what is in the East are cougars (or their progeny) released or escaped from the exotic pet trade. What eastern state or responsible advocacy group wants to endorse what is, in effect, an unsanctioned reintroduction of feral alpha cats?

Despite plenty of precedents for restoring species abundant elsewhere but extirpated from their former range—like Heinz Meng's captive-bred peregrines—recovering cougars remains problematic for eastern wildlife agencies, where protected corridors, State and Federal forests and parks abut increasingly suburbanized landscapes. The question lurks: when they arrive, will we have them?

If the Midwestern migration is any indication, if cougars are breeding in eastern Canada, we'll soon be getting Northeastern confirmations along the Canadian border. With Federal delisting apparently imminent, cougar advocates like the ECF are focusing on the regions and states that won't relocate, put in zoos, or destroy surviving feral (provided they behave themselves) and naturally dispersing cats, promoting preemptive recovery and management strategies.

Bucking hard the bureaucratic denial theme, the most encouraging thing I've found in this year of cougar conundrums is that there are professionals within both private and state wildlife agencies—in New Jersey, in the Gunks, and in New York State—who want them here.

Ultimately, the academics of origin don't matter. We need cougars, checking the East's superabundant deer-herds harrowing the forest understory, sharing with those sly coyotes (Shhh: genetically, they're half wolf) the role of alpha predator. And we need them, of course, for the whiff of wild they breathe into our modern, homogenized souls.

How best to accommodate cougars safely before they arrive in the East is the critical work that needs to be done. With the Species of Special Concern status protecting rare wildlife returning to the Shawangunks, the Biodiversity Partnership has in place a blanket recovery protocol; all we need is the phantom cat to find its way back home to the ridge. 🐾

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*Christopher Spatz was invited in May to report on the Kittatinny/Shawangunk Ridge cougar search at the 3rd Midwestern-Eastern Puma Conference in Peterborough, Ontario. You can support recovery efforts by donating to the Eastern Cougar Foundation, [easterncougar.org](http://easterncougar.org), whose website provides a wealth of cougar information, including conference summaries. For cougar confirmations, click on the Big Picture map at [cougar.net](http://cougar.net), the Cougar Network's website (not updated since the conference).*

## New Minnewaska Manager

The Palisades Interstate Park Commission has appointed Eric Humphrey as acting manager at Minnewaska State Park Preserve. The appointment is a refreshing story of “local boy makes good.” Eric was born in Montgomery, attended Valley Central High School, worked summers at Minnewaska while attending SUNY Plattsburgh, and full time after graduation. Since then his career followed a steady path upward, first at Minnewaska, then Sterling Forest, and three different park manager positions in Harriman State Park. He has always maintained his home in the area, and now lives with his wife in Walker Valley at the base of the Sam's Point Preserve. Eric has enjoyed hiking and biking at Minnewaska for years and has always been drawn to the ridge.

Returning to Minnewaska was always a goal of his. With the addition of the Awoosting Reserve and a large portion of the Sam's Point Preserve, he returns to a park 40% larger than the one he left. Eric is very aware that the job presents him with plenty of challenges and opportunities. Foremost is securing the resources required to manage the increased responsibilities of the new parcels and the updating of the master plan. Eric has already been able to add some new positions. The historic carriage road network on the ridge will require a substantial investment of time, money, and hard work to restore and maintain for years to come. Minnewaska and the Mohonk Preserve have a shared network of carriageways, and will be working together to secure funding for a joint restoration project.

Eric wants to improve the visitor experience by providing restrooms and a visitor center at Lake Minnewaska. The Park Preserve headquarters may be moved back to the top of the mountain now that electric power has been restored. The roof of the Phillips house is being repaired, and he sees this building as a possible headquarters/visitor center. In his early days at Minnewaska, Eric was responsible for the grooming of ski trails and he would like to improve the maintenance and grooming of the ski trail system. He hopes that there will be interest in a “Friends of Minnewaska” group that can provide assistance and possible funding for the park preserve.

Eric has a strong devotion to the flagship park of the Palisades Region of New York State Parks, and is very excited to be in his current capacity where he can make a difference. Eric is eager to improve the visitor experience, and he looks forward to a long tenure at Minnewaska.

# Taking and Making Census of Birds: Trends and Observations of a Naturalist

by Shanan Smiley

In 1925 E. R. Squibb, a teacher in the Mohonk School, encouraged one of his students, A. Keith Smiley, Jr., to learn to identify Mohonk birds. They started a list of arrival dates, so as to know when to expect each species. In 1931, after graduation from college, Keith's older brother Daniel Smiley took over responsibility for maintaining the list. Many other individuals contributed observations as the years went on.

In 1955, as an activity of the Records Committee of the John Burroughs Natural History Society, Daniel compiled a list of spring arrival dates at Mohonk 1925 to 1954. The following list of 32 species was chosen by Dan because of the consistency of records, from the total list of 57 species for which more or less regular spring arrival dates had been kept:



Significantly, Turkey Vultures and Song Sparrows have become year round residents in the last decade, and the Robin may perhaps be following this trend, seeing a year round presence intermittently in the past two decades. This may be related to climate change, and of course changes in cover and food supply. The first winter Robins were observed throughout the season (1989-1990), they were frequently observed feeding on the abundant supply of fruit left in Apple orchards and pumice dumped from cider production, and Multiflora Rose hips. Robins and Turkey Vultures are also regular winter visitors to the Mohonk Compost operation, southwest of Chapel Farm,

established in 1992.

When considering the average arrival dates of those birds reaching Mohonk in the month of **March**, it is apparent that there is a strong trend toward an earlier average first sighting date. Both the Fox Sparrow and the Phoebe have a trend of arriving at least 7 days earlier.

In March 1987 Daniel Smiley and Research Assistant, Anna Forster wrote a research report summarizing 60 years of spring arrival dates (1925-1984). Because of a suspicion that there had been a trend toward earlier arrivals, the dates were summarized by ten year periods. Since Dan's death in 1989, Mohonk Preserve staff and volunteers have continued to record arrival dates of these same 32 species. In 2005, I updated the report by adding the last two decades of spring arrival dates (1985-2004), now totaling 80 years of bird arrival dates.

To analyze trends, average arrival dates by decade were graphed and a linear trendline (linear regression line) applied for each migratory species. The species were then grouped as **Earlier** (7 or more days earlier), **Same** (less than 7 days variation), or **Later** (7 or more days later). The averages show there has been a trend towards earlier arrival in a few species (shown in bold on list above), a trend toward later arrival in one species (shown underlined on list above), but *overall* there has been no trend in date of arrival for the majority of species over the 80 years. Twenty-two of the twenty-nine migratory species had average arrival dates that varied less than seven days and were therefore considered to have the same average arrival dates. A regression analysis of dates by each year, rather than decade averages was also explored. There was no significant difference in trends.

Overall, this is not true of the birds first frequenting the woods and fields in **April**, which species, although showing some variation in average arrival dates, show a deal of consistency over the eighty years studied. There is a trend toward earlier arrival, for the Flicker, Chipping Sparrow and the Towhee. The trend of the remaining seven species arriving in April were considered to be arriving in the same time frame as they have the last 80 years.

The **May** arriving species demonstrated a surprising regularity. Fourteen of the seventeen species were determined to have no changing trend for arrival date. This may be explained by fewer environmental stressors. The temperature is more constant in May than March or April, which are months that still may have snow, or highly variable

temperatures. The weather tends to be less dynamic, and so are the trends of the arrival dates. Demonstrating this consistency are birds like the Black-throated Green Warbler and Chimney Swift, whose average arrival dates has been virtually constant for the past 80 years!

The two exceptions to the consistency in the average arrival dates of the species arriving in May were the Whip-poor-will and the Scarlet Tanager. The Scarlet Tanager was the only species whose overall trend was arriving a week later. The average arrival dates for the last decade was May 29, which ranges anywhere from 9 to 21 days later than the previous 7 decades. The locations of the observations were examined to see if it could have been a factor. There was no notable difference in location or elevation with date of arrival.

On the other end of the spectrum, the Whip-poor-will's trend was an earlier arrival by twelve days. The Whip-poor-will is no longer observed on Mohonk summit lands. The last observation near Mohonk Lake was in 1980. The last observation in the Mohonk vicinity was at Spring Farm in 1984. The only observations for the last 20 years were in the Clove. The elevation and terrain can account for earlier arrival dates by approximately one week in the nearby valleys compared to Lake Mohonk. However, the Whip-poor-will is arriving twelve days earlier, so the change in range and observation location does not completely explain the trend. There may be a change in climate and/or habitat that can explain this trend.

In addition to the Whip-poor-will, the Redstart and Brown Thrasher were rarely seen in the Mohonk vicinity in the past 20 years.

What changes have occurred over the 80 years that could explain the trends? Several things have changed since Dan's time:

**CLIMATE CHANGE:** Over the last 110 years of weather record, the average annual temperature has increased. The average annual temperature for 2006 was 3.6°F above the 110-year average. Also, six of the top ten warmest years were in the last decade! In some cases, this translates to earlier bloom dates and insect emergence, which in turn can support an earlier bird arrival.

**LANDSCAPE CHANGE:** There has also been some drastic landscape changes due to forest maturation. In 1912 and 1913, just before Dan's regular bird records began, was the loss of the American Chestnut, the dominant tree species, in Mohonk forest areas. This made a big impression on him and the resulting changes had a major effect on many species, including birds.

Since the 1950s, no cord wood has been cut, and the Trust did not engage in logging. Naturally the forest responded and is a considerably different habitat than in Dan's day. The forest has naturally matured and the canopy is now much more dense.

Many of the fields from Dan's day are now forested. Aerial photographs were compared for the amount of open space (fields) within a two mile radius of Mohonk Lake from 1948-1950, and comparing it with photographs taken in 1994. This demonstrates the major habitat change over the 46 years. There was a 45% loss of fields within the two mile radius, and no significant change in fields within a half-mile radius from the north end of Mohonk Lake. Some species' preferred haunts are not the same places they were 50 years ago.

The understory composition and density has also changed as a result of heavy deer browse. The White-tailed Deer population dramatically increased in the 1940s and 1950s, and by 1970 browse lines were widespread.

Are these changes negative? Dan definitely thought that it was a negative change. He was saddened by his experience of once being able to hear a dozen bird songs in the morning chorus, which eventually changed to only four. I believe what he was seeing was the natural change that happens with a drastic change in canopy cover, and therefore changes in the understory.

Regarding climate change, some "southern" species are now extending their range northward (as mentioned in the last *Shawangunk Watch* climate change article). More species seem to be staying year-round. This winter, which was exceptionally warm in December and January, we saw species hanging around that usually migrate: Chipping Sparrow, Black Vulture, Robin, Bluebird, and White-throated Sparrow. Both the Black Vulture and the Robin have been seen year-round for several years now. Will they become the new year-round residents? Will the Sparrows and the Bluebirds do the same, or was it just a fluke year?

Thanks to Dan's passion for recording natural history, we have a **wealth** of information at our fingertips. He recorded everything he observed "whether he knew why or not. It just felt like the right thing to do!" as he said in an interview. He didn't know what portion of the



data would prove valuable in the future, or what questions would be asked that his data could shed light on. He conducted his baseline surveys consistently, and we continue to do the same today. What an honor it is to follow in his footsteps!

What changes have **you** seen over the years? Spend time outside and enjoy your beautiful surroundings! Share this with the little ones in your life. The more they experience the wonders of nature, the more they will appreciate it, and the more likely they will become naturalists, stewards, or advocates for nature.

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*Shanan Smiley has her Bachelor of Science degree from Montana State University. She moved to New York three years ago and began volunteering at the Daniel Smiley Research Center. She is now a research/curatorial assistant at the DSRC.*

## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

*Editor's Note: Much Ado About Nothing is author Marc B. Fried's response to an article in the last issue of Shawangunk Watch*

"Fifty years ago, SHONG-gum was the pronunciation in almost universal use among natives of Ulster County's Wallkill Valley, and anyone rendering the name "Sha-WAN-gunk" would have been pegged as an uninformed outsider" . . . Marc B. Fried

Thus begins Christopher Spatz's conspiracy theory, in an article in the last issue of *Shawangunk Watch*. Note that I said "Ulster County's Wallkill Valley." To counter the quoted statement, Spatz cites his father, aunt Flora and "the Spatz clan," all of whom hail from Orange County, and Alf Evers, from Woodstock, not exactly in the Wallkill Valley. Evers acknowledged that in his youth he'd commonly heard both pronunciations (SHONG-gum and Sha-WAN-gunk)—though Spatz apparently did not inquire of Evers where (Woodstock or the Wallkill Valley) the respective pronunciations were most commonly heard. And some Mountain House workers and berrypickers who grew up in the Clove and the Rondout Valley—more about this later.

As to the "several centuries of false pretense," the grand conspiracy to misinform the public by claiming, mistakenly, that SHONG-gum was the true Lenape pronunciation: Spatz cites a single New Paltz school teacher from ca. 1920 and an ill-informed, though actually rather cautious, remark printed on the NY-NJ Trail Conference/Mohonk Preserve hikers' map. These are straw men: Why he worries that anyone would consider either of these two sources as being authoritative on matters of history and etymology escapes me. (Another straw man is the fact that "Shongum" never appears in the deed record. The answer is that nearly everyone knows that's not the way the name is to be spelled, especially in legal documents, however it may be pronounced.

Spatz also cites mid-19<sup>th</sup> century local historian Rev. Charles Scott, who indeed asserted that Shongum was "the original mode of native utterance." But I quoted Scott at length in my book *Shawangunk Place-Names* and critically analyzed his statements. Spatz's conclusion, that Scott was mistaken, is merely the same conclusion I published a while back, in my book.

I established once and for all in *Place-Names* that "SHONG-gum" is not an authentic Lenape pronunciation, but rather, an early and long-established shortening of the name. Why belabor the point and reinvent the wheel? Spatz goes on to reference ethnologist David Oestreicher on the matter, forgetting to mention who it was that stimulated the latter's interest and won his collaborative scholarship in Shawangunk region Lenape etymology in the first place (it's all there in my book).

The point that the article overlooks is this: The name did not originate as the name of the mountain range, it did not originate among the berrypickers appearing in the Nature Conservancy's film, it originated, rather, in the 1680s as the name for a stretch of fertile lowland along what soon came to be called the Shawangunk Kill, from about the site of the 1663 Indian fort north to within a few miles of the confluence with the Wallkill, in what is now the townships of Shawangunk and Gardiner. As settlement was made along this stream in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, the name came to refer as well to the settlement, the precinct (set aside from New Paltz by ca 1710) and the township. Use of the name "Shawangunk Mountains" in the Rochester MSS references the mountain ridge in the context of its proximity to the valley, settlement and municipal entity bearing the name. To this day, if you say you live in Shawangunk or are traveling to or coming from Shawangunk, you are using the name in virtually its purest and most original meaning: the locality that is geographically and historically centered around the lower valley of the Shawangunk Kill. And it is among natives of this locality that the pronunciation SHONG-gum was in almost universal use when I grew up here as a child (I said "Ulster County's Wallkill Valley," but perhaps I should have been more precise, since I can't say for sure how the name was most often pronounced in New Paltz and points north to Rosendale.)

I doubt any of these natives were being "trendy." I doubt any of them "tread[ed] loafered" along the hiking trails of the Shawangunk ridge—they were too busy milking cows or trying to get the hay in before it rained. And I doubt any of them knew or cared about Rev. Scott's etymological pretensions of nearly 100 years earlier. I suspect even many of the "historians, librarians and teachers" Spatz complains about were simply conveying the pronunciation that they understood to be in use for ages by the majority of Wallkill/Shawangunk Valley natives, rather than making claims about authentic Lenape pronunciation. In fact, I can't remember ever being told by anyone that "Shongum" was the true Lenape pronunciation! I'll acknowledge that Mr. Spatz's experience may well be different from my own: In a letter he has written to me since publication of his article, he asserts that he hears all the time from people, even Preserve, Mountain House and State Park employees, that "Shongum" is authentic Lenape pronunciation. These folks should apprise themselves of the modern scholarship relating to the matter and act accordingly. This brings up the issue of whether it is even desirable to choose one's pronunciation of the name based on original Lenape. Where would it end? One could take each of the eleven Indian place-names covered in my book and go around attempting to pronounce them as closely as possible to original Lenape (Munsee), from "Wuh-wur-ES-ing (Wawarsing) to "Maxkwung" (Mohonk) to "Neep-EN-uchk" (Napanoch), and quickly become a laughing stock! As I wrote in reply to Mr. Spatz, since native Lenape speakers are, alas, no longer part of our local population, the next best thing, in my view, is to honor the pronunciations that have evolved in the local communities where the names originated.

As for the berrypickers I met and visited with in the 1970s and '80s, most of whom came from the Rondout-Sandburg Valley, the majority of them rarely used either SHONG-gum or Sha-WAN-gunk for the mountain. It was simply "the mountain" or "the huckleberry mountains," or more often, they simply referred to places on the mountain (the 2-Mile Post, 4-Mile Post, Sam's Point, etc.) rather than perceiving the ridge objectively as a named geographical unit. This relates to the more experiential and economic role the mountain played in their lives and those of their ancestors, as opposed to the more visual role of the ridge as experienced by those in the southeastern valley. I stated in my book that in the Rondout Valley, Sha-WAN-gunk "was quite common, but it must be remembered that the name did not originate on that side of the mountain."

I would not presume to "browbeat" anyone into using the pronunciation "Shongum," especially anyone who has grown up in the region pronouncing it differently. And no one should browbeat Mr. Spatz, with "scathing piety" or any other kind of piety. But if many people who did not grow up here pronounce it "Sha-WAN-gunk," it is simply because that's the way they've seen it in print, and if their minds are still open, I generally suggest they consider the way the name has long been most commonly pronounced among natives in the locality where the name originated.

Finally, regarding our rock climbers and "The Gunks": In the tongue-in-cheek context of Scott's 1861 use of the term "vulgarism," and with reference to this diminutive's acoustic awfulness, I referred in my book to "The Gunks" as "a vulgarism if ever there was one!"—The name does, after all, bring to mind something one might discover upon cleaning out a long-neglected sink trap. I have never referred to the climbers as "vulgarians," and if they indeed "brought international respect" to "this runt of the mountaineering litter," as Spatz chooses to characterize the ridge, it is safe to say there are both negative and positive sides to that.

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Marc B. Fried is author of five books about Ulster County and the Shawangunk region.

# The Perils of Peregrines



*John Thompson, naturalist at the Daniel Smiley Research Center of the Mohonk Preserve recently sent this note (at right) to the team of people who spent hours observing the peregrines this spring, in hopes that all three nest sites would produce new members of the peregrine population. He began his letter with the quote below.*

Oh, somewhere in this favored land the sun is shining bright,  
The band is playing somewhere, and somewhere hearts are light,  
And somewhere men are laughing, and little children shout;  
But there is no joy in Mudville mighty Casey has struck out.

*By Ernest Lawrence Thayer  
San Francisco Examiner - June 3, 1888*

*Hú,*

Despite hearing chicks and observing both adults at the Bonticou East eyrie on June 5, no peregrines were observed on subsequent visits on 6/12 and 6/18. Apparently, the nest has failed. Considering that we started with three nests at the beginning of the season, the first time since 1953 that the Shawangunks have supported three territorial peregrine falcon pairs, this season has been especially disappointing. Chicks were heard in both the Trapps and Bonticou East eyries. Chicks were suspected in the Millbrook Mountain eyrie on May 9 and 16, but on May 22 there were none?

A reconnaissance of the Millbrook Mountain eyrie by Joe Bridges on 6/10 recovered pellets and small eggshell fragments, but no evidence of predation. We plan to open the closure of the Oblique Twique Area climbing area in the Trapps after a recon is finished there. On May 27 chicks were heard on the ledge in that area, but by June 7 it appeared the area was abandoned.

Thanks to all peregrine-watchers who participated and helped to document our peregrines! We hope you will continue to do periodic observations, especially through the winter months as it appears that our peregrines may not be migrating.

*John*

## The Most Beautiful Map

*by Thomas Nozkowski*

To my mind, the most beautiful map of any area of the Shawangunks, was the great bird's-eye view map of the Lake Minnewaska estate. Reprinted for many years, in several different configurations, it was last distributed to hotel guests at the end of their 100th Season. Today a new edition, dedicated to Lucille Phillips, is available once again.

The map unfolds to 6 x 24 inches and represents a mid-air view of the Shawangunk Ridge. We are looking northwest from a height of, perhaps, 3000 feet. The view extends from Dickie Bar in the north to Mud Pond, here called Haseco Lake, in the south. The talus under the Trapps and Millbrook forms the lower edge of the map and the top reaches to Stony Kill Falls. The exact center of the map is located at the top end of the Palmaghatt Ravine, where the Hamilton Point and Millbrook carriage roads divide.

Around the edge of the map are a selection of thirty-eight postage-stamp-size photographs of sights and scenes around the Minnewaska property. Dim fragments of a lost world of gazebos and hayrides are interwoven with some of the remaining natural wonders of Minnewaska: Battlement Terrace, The Crevices, Millbrook, and so on.

Bird's-eye view maps are notoriously hard to create, and to work properly as a guide they demand a very careful mixture of accuracy and creative cheating. After all, you don't want to lose every trail or carriage road that dips behind the far side of a hill! The creator of the Minnewaska map was Harry A. Chandler of New York City. He did a beautiful job that remains as useful today as when it was first created. Dating the map is something of a problem. The earliest of three dates on this reprint is 1958 but internal evidence would suggest a time much earlier. The style of clothing worn in the border photographs would suggest a date closer to 1940. The map part alone could be even earlier. The heyday of bird's-eye view maps was the last half of the 19th century, where they are often associated with land speculation and real estate development.

Shortly after the state took possession of the Lake and the last parcels held by the Philips family, I set out to look for as many of these old trails as I could find using this map. I found fragments of almost everything but nothing really useful or continuous. Beginnings and ends of

trails were especially obscure and I would guess that many of them were purposefully obscured as the maintenance of the hotels and grounds slackened off in the final years.

Still, the logic of many of these trails is quite apparent. Superior to the trail system at Minnewaska today, carriage roads and walking trails existed in parallel, as part of the effort to keep wheeled traffic away from pedestrians. The very interesting and beautiful Shirley Path, connecting Castle Point to the Palmaghatt Ravine, is surely necessary once again as the state incorporates the Awosting Reserve property into Minnewaska State Park.

The reprint edition of the Minnewaska bird's-eye view map is available from the Lake Minnewaska Historical Society website. You can reach it through the Links page of the Friends website [www.shawangunks.org](http://www.shawangunks.org) or directly at [www.lakeminnewaska.org](http://www.lakeminnewaska.org). Go to their bookstore, where you can order copies of the map. The first copy is \$5. and additional ones are \$2.50. 📧

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*Governor Spitzer letter.....continued from page 2*

The following organizations signed the letter to Governor Spitzer about concerns with the new Stewart Airport proposal:

### **Ulsterites Fight Overflight Noise**

Maureen Radl, Co Chair  
([maureenrad@aol.com](mailto:maureenrad@aol.com))  
Susan Staples, Co Chair  
Pat Peters  
Karl Drake  
Hank Bartosik

### **Stewart Park And Reserve Coalition (SPARC)**

Sandra Kissam, President  
**Mohonk Preserve**  
Glenn Hoagland, Executive Director  
**Cragmoor Association**  
Jim McKenney, President  
Joy Weber, Vice President

### **Ramapo Catskill Group of the Sierra Club**

Gene Vidal, Chair

### **Basha Kill Area Association**

Paula Medley, President

### **Woodstock Overflight Focus Group**

Euphrosyne Bloom  
Martin Keith

### **Friends of the Shawangunks**

H. Neil Zimmerman, President

### **Orange Environment**

Michael Edelstein, President

### **The Nature Conservancy, Eastern New York Chapter**

Cara Lee, Director,  
Shawangunk Ridge Program

# Friends Goes Online

## www.Shawangunks.org

Check out Friends' new website at [www.Shawangunks.org](http://www.Shawangunks.org) It should be launched by the time you are reading this newsletter. It has a back issue of our newsletter *Shawangunk Watch*, links to dozens of Shawangunk sites, and more than 80 photos showing natural features of the ridge. The site also provides an easy way to join Friends, contact us, or send a donation using a credit card.



FRIENDS of the SHAWANGUNKS  
Preserving Open Space Since 1963

**Friends of the Shawangunks, Inc.** is a not-for-profit organization working to preserve open space in the Shawangunks.

**The Shawangunk Conservancy, Inc.** is a not-for-profit land conservancy.  
Friends of the Shawangunks  
P.O. Box 270  
Accord, NY 12404

e-mail: [info@shawangunks.org](mailto:info@shawangunks.org)

## PLEASE CONSIDER A YEAR END CONTRIBUTION

There is still work to be done protecting Open Space



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Design and production:  
Annie O'Neill,

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