Shawangunk WATCH

Friends of the Shawangunks and The Shawangunk Conservancy

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Shawangunk Red Trillium

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PRESERVING OPEN SPACE IN THE SHAWANGUNKS SINCE 1963

PHOTOGRAPH: RENEE ZERNITSKY

Arriving at Blossom-Time

by Roger Roloff and Barbara Petersen

A PERENNIALLY ENGAGING WAY to appreciate the Shawangunks is to find and study their wildflowers. This might begin by late March while you're driving to the Mohonk Preserve's Spring Farm trailhead on Mountain Rest Road from New Paltz. Along the descent toward High Falls, the roadside could have noticeable stretches of dandelion look-alikes called Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*), whose yellow blossoms seemingly aren't fazed by road salt but do need the slushy meltwater shoved their way by snowplows. This non-native plant's common name is suggested by its hoof-shaped leaf, appearing after the flower blooms. A few coltsfoot blossoms may also be at the edge of Spring Farm's trailhead parking.

SHADBLOW • PHOTO: JEAN LERNER

Perhaps fifty paces into the woods just above Slingerland Pavilion on the Table Rocks Trail, a few round-lobed Hepatica plants (nowadays *Anemone americana*) are usually blooming by mid-April. The five to twelve petal-like sepals range from white to blue, lavender, and (rarely) purple, a personal favorite. The thick and deeply-lobed green leaves resemble the club on a playing card of that suit and appear after the blossoms. But the previous year's leaves, browned by winter, are often there as well.

Farther along the Table Rocks Trail's downslope side, blossoms of spicebush—light green at first, then truly yellow—begin decorating the woods by mid-April, too. Like Hepatica, *Lindera benzoin*, whose speckled bark stands out in sunshine, is a native; it favors stream banks and damp woods to put down roots in. Leaves appear after flowers, and when rubbed together emit citronella's odor—worth using if you forgot bug spray. Ditto for bruised spicebush twigs' fragrance.

About the same time and nearer a stream trickling across the Table Rocks Trail just ahead, a few scattered Bloodroot flowers may be in bloom, but only for a few days. With a bright yellow center and eight to twelve white petals, *Sanguinaria canadensis* resembles a fried egg; its "blood" does indeed come from roots, and a snapped stem reveals orange-red juice, useful as a dye. After noon the flowers gradually fold up, enclosed by a deeply lobed basal leaf. Larger patches of Bloodroot live on the trail around the Mohonk Preserve's Duck Pond and are worth the hike.

Two other flowers deserve a side trip—in their case to West Trapps trailhead. The first, Trailing Arbutus (*Epigaea repens*), is also usually blooming by mid-April along Overcliff Road. Its small white or pink tubular flowers flare into five lobes at the tips of stems creeping along the ground or atop moist boulders. The blossoms' sweet, spicy scent—worth every sneeze—reminds us of wild jasmine.

The second flower, usually blooming on understory trees downslope of Overcliff Road by about April 20, is Shadbush, Serviceberry, or Juneberry (*Amelanchier spp.*). Its white blossoms are certainly eye-catching at this season, when woods otherwise look as barren and leafless as in winter. By late June—if birds haven't made off with the fruit—the same trees' deep purple berries are ripe and very tasty, either fresh or baked in a pie.

Returning to the Table Rocks Trail but jumping ahead to early May, we recommend groups of Red Trilliums near that stream trickle by Bloodroot. *Trillium erectum*'s three broad leaves and maroon or reddish-brown petals are unmistakable. Also notable is the foul odor, if you get close enough; another common name for *Trillium erectum* is Stinking Benjamin.

HEPATICA • PHOTO: BARBARA PETERSEN

Nearby on a shale bank on the Cedar Drive Loop are three rock-climbing wildflowers usually in bloom by the end of April. One of these, Early Saxifrage (*Saxifraga virginiensis*), whose genus name means "rock-breaker," does just that to its shale habitat over time—and without using fancy climbing gear like its human counterpart! Tenacious Saxifrage roots, holding on for dear life, can produce bevies of small white flowers.

Similarly but more colorfully, native Wild Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*) clings to its rocky clefts and dangles "red and yellow upward-spurred petals" (aptly says the *Audubon Field Guide to Wildflowers* in its 2001 revision). Any nearby human gawkers will probably take photos of this striking beauty.

The third rock-dweller, Pussytoes, spreads runners on the shale to expand its colonies of basal leaves and upright stems with small, white, fuzzy flower heads suggesting a cat's paw. Expert botanists have their hands full distinguishing the many *Antennaria* species from one another; we dwell instead on the lovely fact of their unique blossoms.

Returning to the Table Rocks Trail and following it nearly to Clearwater Road, you'll come to a grove of mostly mature hardwoods. Just inside it, snuggling up to a maple trunk (left), are Hepaticas with variegated leaves—worth noting on the short way to nearby Rue Anemone blossoms (*Thalictrum thalictroides*), whose petal-like sepals and slender stems stir with the slightest breeze. These delicate white (or sometimes light-pink) flowers always catch our eyes, hungry for their appearance after a half-year of winter.

RUE • PHOTO: RENEE ZERNITSKY

Turning east (right) onto Clearwater Road, we will likely find two of the loveliest flowers waiting for us; the first of these, Spring Beauty (*Claytonia virginica*), might well be carpeting either side of the double stone row leading toward Ayres swamp, from mid-April onward. Small white or pinkish flowers have dark pink stripes on the five petals and can really bedeck the open woods' floor, to the delight of onlookers and pollinators. Just ahead, the many speckled leaves of Trout Lilies (*Erythronium americanum*) may surprise us with a few emerging blossoms, with the bright yellow insides and bronzy outsides of their petals curving back like those of their cousins, Turk's Cap Lilies.

With mind's eyes riveted on these signature early spring wildflowers, we pause in this selection of what the season offers in the Shawangunks. But we'll tantalize you with the names of several flowers awaiting their turns in the spotlight of a future installment: Bishop's Cap, Quaker Ladies, Bastard Toadflax, Moccasin Flower, Gaywings, Windflowers, and Dutchman's-Breeches. Meanwhile, hoping to see you as we go wildflowering this spring, we'll be doting as usual on the wealth of shapes and colors, for these old beauties of the Earth have well and truly smitten us.

Roger and Barbara are long time members of FRIENDS. They conducted spring wildflower walks at the Mohonk Preserve from 2000-2015.

TROUT LILY • PHOTO: RENEE ZERNITSKY

Barred owls in Flight Building

The Making of a Wild Bird Rehabilitator

by Annie Mardiney

I've always preferred to be outside rambling in the woods and mountains, or at home surrounded by animals...dogs, parrots, chickens, but especially, wild birds. I've kept my life list of wild birds since I was a child. As a child, when my family would take us to a park, my main mission was to look for owl pellets under pine trees and collect feathers. Decades later, I spend most of my after-work time either rehabbing wild birds, conducting education programs with my 18 unreleasable raptors, or birding.

Annie with Sky, a red tailed hawk for education purposes

After years of informally helping concerned people with their injured or orphaned wild birds, I became a NYS and Federally licensed wildlife and wild bird rehabilitator. Subsequently, I founded the WIld Bird Rehabilitation and Education Center in Rosendale in 2005. I usually take in around 300 wild birds annually, and successfully release 60-65% back to the wild. I receive hundreds and hundreds of phone calls that don't always end up with a bird in hand, but often resolve a dicey bird situation.

My reasons for doing wild bird rehabilitation are to ease the pain or suffering of injured or orphaned wildlife, and to release them back to the wild. I fill a very, very tiny niche, and am happy to be able to help anyone concerned about a wild bird.

Each year I present about 75 public and private live raptor programs. I talk a bit about each species I bring, and how that particular bird became an education bird instead of being set free. I go over common reasons wild birds become injured or orphaned, unnecessary human intervention, and ways we can prevent further damage to native wild birds. Nearly all wild birds are protected by the Federal Migratory Bird Act, but very few people know this.

My goals for education programs are to give people the rare opportunity to see some amazing live raptors, up close and personal. I believe that first-hand experience will ignite a spark of life-long interest in wildlife and wild places. Looking into a hawk's eyes, seeing the intricate patterns in a barn owl's feathers, hearing the story of how each of my raptors ended up in my hands, can be enough to encourage people to protect these creatures. I am particularly focused on bringing my raptors to small groups of young people, the ones who I hope will be inspired to protect natural environments and wildlife when they grow up.

Some tips: keep cats inside 24/7; make your windows songbird proof; stop using pesticides, insecticides, lead ammunition; take up wildlife photography and birding. I hope people will then do whatever they can to protect wild life and the environments they require to survive.

Some of the more memorable bird stories from this year include:

- The release of a red-shouldered hawk and a broad-winged hawk that had to winter over with me. They arrived in late in the fall of 2016, and needed months to recover from their injuries. Release was perfect, and such a relief after so many months of care.
- Release of a red-tailed hawk (RTH) from Sullivan County, who had the misfortune of flying too close to the County landfill faculty, which has one methane-flame burning 24/7. This RTH burned all of her primaries on one wing, many on the other, and burned off the tips of her tail feathers. With the help of an awesome veterinarian, we replaced new primaries from donors onto both wings, so that she could continue to fly and heal over the winter in my RTH flight building. Release wasn't a sure thing, until she finally molted in late winter 2017. Her release was well worth all the time and effort that went into her care.
- The rescue of four barred owl nestlings from Dutchess County. Two had badly infected hocks (back of their legs), and the other two were on death's door, apparently orphaned. All four were released several months later.
- A fledgling male peregrine falcon from the nest under the Mid-Hudson Bridge. "Meng" unfortunately flew up and into traffic on the bridge, hitting a box truck square-on, suffering head trauma and probable internal bleeding. After a week of medications, hand-feeding, and supportive care, he was looking much better, until one evening when he had cluster grand mal seizures and collapsed. I checked for breathing and a heartbeat, heard nothing, and went to bed crying. Next morning, expecting to find him dead on the bottom of his crate, I opened his door to find him standing and glaring at me! Although both eyes now appear perfect, he can only see out of one, so he is unreleasable. While I wait for permission to keep him as an education bird, I am working with him on my glove, with simple commands, and small circle creance flying. And I am having a new mew built especially for him.

Great blue heron with minor wing injury, eventually released

Editor's Note: Annie is a former FOS Board member. We are in great awe of her work, especially since wildlife rehabilitation is completely voluntary, and receives no state or federal financial support. To support Annie's efforts, or to inquire about her live raptor program: visit her Facebook page Wild Mountain Birds, email to amardiney@gmail.com; call 845-943-8098; or write to: Wild Mountain Birds, PO Box 65, Rosendale, NY 12472.

A version of this article was first published in the Basha Kill Area Association Newsletter *The Guardian*.

Funds Needed for The Clove

By Jean Lerner

The view from Cope's Lookout on the edge of Mohonk Preserve is of an almost unbroken wooded and rocky landscape, deep into the Clove and across to the cliffs of Ronde Barre and beyond. Below, Clove Valley Road can be traced out, with it's mostly unobtrusive houses. Much of this land is protected through outright ownership by Mohonk Preserve, Minnewaska State Park, The Open Space Institute, and private land easements. There is one jarring exception to the tranquil view, an ugly clearing (dubbed "The Gash") that was carved out a couple of years ago for a house that has not yet been built. FOS is committed to protecting as much land as possible in the Gunks to help prevent recurrences of development like The Gash. To that end, its land acquisition affiliate The Shawangunk Conservancy has recently been offered a five-acre parcel in the Clove that is adjacent to the Mohonk Preserve, just off Clove Valley Road and near to the Coxing Kill. For the hikers among you, it's a little downhill from the junction of the Undivided Lots Trail with the Old Minnewaska Trail. We're calling it the Clove Valley parcel. We want to raise the $12,000 purchase price plus legal costs before closing on the deal; the landowner is willing to wait a few months to give us time to appeal to our membership.

So, we need your help! Donations can be made using the form at the end of this newsletter (write "Clove Valley parcel" on the check or form). If donating with a credit card via www.shawangunks.org, we have no way of knowing your intentions, so please send a brief email to FOSandTSC@gmail.com as well indicating that your gift is for the "Clove Valley parcel" campaign.

Board Comings and Goings

In the few months since our last newsletter, we've welcomed two new board members and said goodbye to two others. We have outgoing board member Tom Nozkowski to thank for bringing our newsletter into the 21st century with the first full-color issue in December 2013. His articles about his favorite trails and his unique personal maps will be much missed. Susan Erny represented the southern Gunks for the past few years, and was a regular contributor to this newsletter. She promises to continue to keep us up-to-date on the multiple threats to the ridge in the Basha Kill area. Joe Raiola has been with us just a short time, but is already shaking things up by taking a hard look at our rather modest web presence. Anka Angrist brings rock climbing expertise along with skills in fundraising and writing. She's already working on fundraising for the Clove Valley parcel (see article elsewhere in this newsletter).

Here's a more detailed look at our just-arrived and just-departed board members, written by themselves and others.

Joe Raiola has been hiking in the Shawangunks, both on trails and off, for 40 years. He played a welcome role in the successful 2003 "Save The Ridge" campaign by performing his critically acclaimed one man show, "Almost Obscene," as a benefit for FOS at the Unison Arts Center in New Paltz. The years-long battle to protect the Shawangunk Ridge in Gardiner stopped the development of 2,500 acres of pristine wilderness that is now part of Minnewaska State Park. Joe has hiked over 1,600 miles of the Appalachian Trail and run many of North America's great rivers, including the Colorado through the Grand Canyon, the lower canyons of the Rio Grande, and the John Day in Oregon. For 33 years, through the end of 2017, he was an Editor at MAD Magazine.

Thomas Nozkowski *By Elaine LaFlamme*

We bid a fond farewell to Board Member Thomas Nozkowski, who resigned from the FOS and Conservancy Boards on January 1, 2018 after 20 incredible years of volunteer service. Tom embodies passion, wrapped in intellect, inside a roaming spirit, all of which he brought to bear in his work on the FOS and Conservancy Boards. As the Boards' vice president, Tom challenged us to look to the future while remaining solidly grounded in the history of the Shawangunks, its trails, their purpose and the importance of preserving this wild and wonderful place.

A renowned abstract painter whose works have been featured in more than 300 museum and gallery exhibitions worldwide, Tom taught us to see the Shawangunk landscape anew. As an editor of and contributor to the Shawangunk Watch, he shared with you — FOS members and readers — his deep and abiding love affair with the Ridge. Thank you Tom from the "souls" of our feet as we hike from Mine Hollow to Panther Rock following your hand drawn map (see *Shawangunk Watch*, Vol. 20 No. 2, August 2015).

Anka Angrist

I got my first expansive view of the Shawangunks dangling from a rope on the climb known as the Easy O. Later, on terra firma, I gained a closer and calmer impression. The year was 1962.

With friends, some of them founders of Friends of the Shawangunks and the Mohonk Trust (a precursor to the Mohonk Preserve) weekend pursuits other than rock climbing (hiking, cross-country skiing, canoeing) provided a welcome respite from New York City.

A lifelong natural history enthusiast, I was struck by the variety of ecosystems and abundance of unusual species present in the Gunks and was dismayed when I learned that the integrity of this rich environment was under attack.

The number of visitors to the Gunks as well as the greater Hudson Valley was growing exponentially. Then as now, commercial development, rather than preservation of the area, was sometimes the dominant objective.

I am grateful for the dedication and vision of the many individuals who have worked long and hard to preserve the natural treasures of the Hudson Valley. I want to help Friends and my fellow Board members to save for future generations this spectacular area I now call home.

Susan Erny

For 32 years, Susan has lived in Wurtsboro with her husband Steve, and their pets. Their home in the valley faces the majestic Shawangunks. Daily walks along Haven Road take them across the Basha Kill, affording a view of the Ridge as far north as Bear Hill. Prior to her term with the FOS/TSC board, Susan worked with the Basha Kill Area Association to maintain the pristine beauty of the area. It was a privilege to join FOS in their endeavor to protect and preserve the magnificent Shawangunk Mountains.

Notes from the Southern Shawangunks

By Susan Erny

Dragon Springs has sprung a leak. On Jan. 12 and 23 and again on Feb. 11 ochre-colored sediment flowed down a brook from the Dragon Springs Falun Gong compound atop the Ridge in Cuddebackville. The murky water emptied into a tributary of the Basha Kill and then into the Neversink River. A neighboring member of Deerpark Rural Alliance, the community watchdog, alerted the Department of Environmental Conservation. DEC inspected three times and found that DS had a lack of "erosion controls and a resulting water quality violation." DS could be liable for a civil penalty of $37,500 a day for each violation. DEC requires this situation to be remedied by Feb. 28, 2018. Look for the results in the next *Shawangunk Watch*.

Dragon Springs Water Pollution • photo by DRA

In other DS news the issue of the illegally constructed eighth story on the DS rehearsal building is in litigation with the town. DRA has questioned the safety of this structure because no fire company within 50 miles could extinguish a blaze in a building of that height. DS asserts that it has a private fire brigade. DRA asked town officials: 1. Does DS report its training, drills, and procedures to town officials? 2. Is DS complying with local and state requirements? 3. Does the town perform fire inspections? No answers yet.

When the DRA met with the Cuddebackville Fire Department the firemen conveyed their qualms. Without inspections they lack essential knowledge of DS building construction; of the DS facility's water and equipment; and the number of inhabitants. The fire department expressed concern for the safety of firemen responding to Dragon Springs. Who would be liable if lives were lost?

Yet another illegal construction at DS is a 2,000-foot long, 12-foot high enclosed walkway that DRA noticed in August and reported to the town. A building inspector checked it out five months later. The Town imposed a Stop Work Order. In litigation now, the walkway still stands.

A bridge was also built a year ago in defiance of town flood-control codes. In response to complaints, DS offered to solve the problem by raising the roadbed. The Zoning Board of Appeals approved the fix, but the work has not yet begun.

Finally, the town recently gave DS approval for construction of a four-foot-tall boundary security fence. DS was denied permission last year because the fence code limit was six feet--it was planning on eight feet. Concerned residents notified DEC of the newest DS fence because the environmental issues which were raised for the exterior fence last year, namely, wildlife habitat and stream disturbance, are still valid. DRA hopes the DEC will weigh in as it did on the original fence.

Susan is a former board member of Friends.

Shawangunk WATCH

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Friends of the Shawangunks, Inc. is a not-for-profit organization working to preserve open space in the Shawangunks. ***Mission statement:*** *Friends of the Shawangunks is dedicated to protecting the Shawangunk Mountains of New York from adverse environmental impacts.*

The Shawangunk Conservancy, Inc. is a not-for-profit land conservancy. ***Mission statement:*** *The Shawangunk Conservancy protects environmentally sensitive land in the Shawangunk Mountains of New York State.*

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The latest financial report of Friends of the Shawangunks and The Shawangunk Conservancy may be obtained by writing to the Office of the Attorney General, Charities Bureau, 120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271, or by writing to us at the above address.

2017 Annual Meeting: A Look Back

By Jean Lerner

This year's gathering was at Soyuzivka (pronounced Suzi-Q), a Ukrainian cultural center and resort at the foot of the Ridge. Our featured speaker, the tireless Bob Anderburg of the Open Space Institute, recounted recent land acquisitions on the Ridge, and outlined progress on the long term plan to create a continuous trail network from Port Jervis north to Kingston, with links to other networks. He also showed maps where our recent land acquisition a.k.a. "Alder Lane" fits into plans to expand the borders of the Minnewaska State Park. (See August 2017 *Shawangunk Watch* for map.)

After the meeting nearly everyone set off up the mountain to see the Alder Lane parcel. Soyuzivka keeps their trails nicely cleared and faintly blazed. About 20 minutes through the quiet fall woods brought us to Uncle Abe's cabin, which inspired many of us to speculate on what the area looked like when the cabin was in use. (See a photo in our December 2017 issue.) The woods are criss-crossed by the remnants of stone walls, old woods roads and trails. Were the stone walls property boundaries, cattle pastures, hay fields? Or just a place to put the stones hauled out of the soil to make room for crops? Whatever.

We then split up, some of us continuing to Little Stoneykill Falls, and the others returning back the way we came. The promised ten-minute detour to the Falls was a bit longer than advertised, but with a spectacular payoff view. The fact of the falls had to be taken on faith, since all that we could see from the top was a small trickle disappearing over the edge. Some of us took the opportunity to gather cranberries growing along the Kill.

As you know, we are not an organization that has a lot of group activities. The annual meeting is the only time when our membership regularly gets together. It's a chance to get briefed on the latest doings on the Ridge, get your questions answered, munch bagels, and take a hike together. We hope that you'll mark your calendars now for next year's meeting, which traditionally is the Sunday following Columbus Day weekend.

Photograph: John Hayes

JOIN US! Development threatens all parts of the Shawangunks. Join or renew your membership.

- ❑ Benefactor $250.
- ❑ Patron $100.
- ❑ Family $25.
- ❑ Individual $15.
- ❑ Other $____

❑ **I would like to make an additional contribution to The Shawangunk Conservancy for land acquisition.**

Amount $____

Please make checks payable to
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