You Can Use That for What?

Date: Wednesday, January 23, 2013
7:00 p.m. refreshments, 7:30 p.m. program
Presenter: Mary Harrington, Master Gardener
and Chair of the Beverly E. Smith
Butterfly & Hummingbird Garden
Location: Lenoir Nature Preserve

This program will be a virtual tour
of the more commonly seen plants in
Westchester. So many of the plants that
we call weeds are often quite useful.

Mary will highlight some of the more commonly seen plants,
grasses, and shrubs, focusing on their historical, edible, and medicinal
uses. Many of these plants serve as hosts to a variety of
wildlife as well and become important
pollinators and food sources.

Come and learn!
Let It Be
Hands-off approach is best for forest recovery after a major storm.

After a hurricane flattens a forest, people often swoop in to collect the downed trees and clean up the mess. But a new study soon to be published in the *Ecology* journal suggests that nature should just be left alone. Given enough time, trees will regenerate on their own — and human interference could make it easier for invasive species to move in.

“The most environmentally sound thing to do is to leave the forest right where it is,” says study coauthor David Foster, an ecologist at Harvard University’s Harvard Forest in Petersham, Massachusetts.

A strong storm can rip three-quarters of a forest’s trees out of the ground. Landowners or managers will often harvest and sell the logs to recoup the forest’s economic value, quell concerns about fire risk, or simply restore order. “There is a general tendency to want to do something,” says Foster. “Underlying a lot of this is the perception that nature needs help.”

To find out how a forest would fare without human intervention, researchers simulated a hurricane in a section of Harvard Forest in 1990. The team used a winch and cable to pull down 276 trees, which damaged another 325 trees when they fell. The researchers then monitored the site for the next two decades, noting changes such as sprouting, sapling growth, and shifts in species composition.

Within the first three years, about half of the trees died, the team reports in *Ecology*. But the forest soon began to mend. Fallen trees that might have been presumed dead sprouted and regrew. With many of the larger trees gone, seedlings and saplings shot up.

Surprisingly, the trees that dominated the forest before the hurricane simulation weren’t replaced by other species. Forty-two percent of the tree area was covered by oaks that hadn’t been pulled down, and new trees grew mainly from seedlings or saplings that had already been present before the “disaster.” New species of shrubs and herbs moved into the site, but only about a quarter of them lasted until 2010. The study suggests that forests in the northeastern U.S. are incredibly resilient to this type of disturbance, says Foster. And cleaning up trees could actually hurt the process of recovery by increasing erosion and giving invasive species an opportunity to colonize the site.

Green Fire: Aldo Leopold and a Land Ethic For Our Time

Movie Night at Lenoir (weather permitting) will take place on Wednesday, February 27, 2013 at 7:00 PM (popcorn and soft drinks will be served).

*Green Fire* explores the life and legacy of famed conservationist, Aldo Leopold, and the many ways his land ethic philosophy lives on in the work of people and organizations all over the country today.

This film shares highlights from Leopold’s life and extraordinary career, explaining how he shaped conservation and the modern environmental movement.

Learn how Leopold’s vision of a community that cares about people and land ties modern conservation stories together, and offers inspiration and insight for the future.

See this movie’s trailer at [youtu.be/IGIK24N7apQ](https://youtu.be/IGIK24N7apQ)

— LYNN SHAW

Mark Your Calendar!
Wednesday, March 27 at 7 p.m.
Creatures of Light:
Nature’s Bioluminescence

[www.conservationmagazine.org/2012/12/let-it-be/](http://www.conservationmagazine.org/2012/12/let-it-be/)
The Hebrew Bible records an internecine war between Gileadites and Ephraimites. Even though both groups were descended from the tribe of Manasseh, they spoke different dialects. When the besieged Ephraimites attempted to cross the Jordan, controlled by their enemies, “... the men of Gilead would ask him, ‘Are you an Ephraimite?’; if he said ‘No,’ they would say to him, ‘Then say shibboleth’; but he would say ‘sibboleth,’ not being able to pronounce it correctly. Thereupon they would seize him and slay him ...” (Jud. 12:6).

Although the Hebrew word “shibboleth” is usually translated as “stream”, it has come to mean a test word or password—something we use constantly in our technological society. Now a report in the November 20, 2012 issue of Current Biology says that even birds use it.

A team of scientists headed by Sonia Kleindorfer, Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia, looked at the host-parasite relationship between the Australian superb fairy-wren (Malurus cyaneus) and its brood parasite, Horsfield’s cuckoo (Chalcites basalis). Typically the cuckoo lays a single egg in the fairy-wren’s nest, and if undetected, the larger cuckoo hatchling ejects the host’s eggs, leaving the parents to feed a chick that is not their own.

As in all such ongoing biological arms races, each side periodically develops a new strategy or weapon that must be countered by the other, and Kleindorfer et al. have discovered the latest defense used by the fairy-wren host to ward off the parasite. Female wrens teach their young a shibboleth while they are still in the egg, and later they only feed hatchlings that utter the correct password when begging for food.

While making audiovisual recordings of fairy-wren mothers at their nests, the scientists discovered that the females were making a previously undescribed vocalization they termed the “incubation call”. Each female of the 15 nests studied sang a unique note within the call. Females made this call every few minutes to their unhatched eggs during the last 4–5 days of the ~15 day incubation period. They also taught the call to their mate and any brood helpers. Upon hatching, the females stopped calling and only fed chicks that repeated the unique note when they begged for food.

Cross-fostering experiments in which newly laid egg clutches were switched among nests showed that the hatchlings’ begging calls closely resembled the incubation call of their foster mothers and not their genetic mothers, proving that the passwords were learned and not inherited.

This prenatal learning scheme adopted by the superb fairy-wren allows parents and helpers to discriminate between their chicks and those of the Horsfield cuckoo. Cuckoo eggs hatch after only 12 days of incubation, while fairy-wren eggs require 15 days. Since female fairy-wrens begin making the incubation call on the 10th day, the cuckoo embryo doesn’t have time enough to learn the “password”. Upon hatching, the cuckoo chick tries to match its begging call to the host species. But after two days of not hearing the right call fairy-wren parents abandon the nest and begin making a new one. By doing this they avoid investing ~50 days feeding the cuckoo chick and have a chance to raise their own brood.

Since the password used by fairy-wrens is different for each nest, cuckoos cannot just learn a single key note and should have a hard time surmounting this latest defensive strategy. But as the arms race between these two species continues, it may be that fast-learning cuckoo embryos will counteract the latest fairy-wren weapon and one day will be able to say “shibboleth”.

— SAUL SCHEINBACH

Saul Scheinbach’s ScienceWatch articles from January 1999 to January 2013 are available online at www.hras.org
12th Annual “Seasons at Lenoir” Art & Photography Exhibit

Once again, it’s time to decide on works you would like to submit for the March 2013 exhibit. As always, artwork in any media as well as photographs are welcome.

Exhibitors should keep in mind that works must be inspired by the Lenoir Preserve. There are so many possible subjects — Lenoir wildlife, gardens, trees, structures, volunteers, staff, and visitors involved in activities or just enjoying the serenity — to name a few. A “Kids’ Corner” will display the creations of children involved in our education programs.

To have your works included, or if you have any questions, please e-mail Lynn Shaw at Lynnbshaw@gmail.com before Monday, February 25th (put “Seasons at Lenoir” in the subject area).

Dates to Remember (Please make note of these dates. There is no February newsletter, so there will be no further reminders):

- Saturday, March 2nd, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. Bring works ready for hanging to Lenoir
- Saturday, March 9th, 11:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. Opening Reception
- Saturday, April 6th, 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Pick up works

During the “Seasons at Lenoir” exhibit, the gallery will be open to visitors on Tuesdays through Saturdays from 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Project FeederWatch at the Lenoir Nature Center

Our annual Project FeederWatch at the Lenoir Nature Center continues through April 6, 2013. We have seen some interesting sights this year, like a scrawny little coyote running right past the feeders as well as a Cooper’s Hawk eating a Titmouse, not far from the feeders. To think we’re in Yonkers -- a large city!

We hope you’ll join us when you can. We always need help trying to count the birds, especially the flitting little Chickadees. Remember to bring your binoculars if you have them. The dates and leaders for the remaining sessions are as follows:

- Saturday, January 12 — Fran Greenberg
- Sunday, January 13 — Hilary and Alan Soiefer
- Saturday, January 26 — Sandra Wright
- Sunday, January 27 — Carol Lange and Omar Neyra
- Saturday, February 9 — Paul Oehrlein
- Sunday, February 10 — Fran Greenberg
- Saturday, February 23 — to be decided
- Sunday, February 24 — Mary Harrington
- Saturday, March 9 — to be decided
- Sunday, March 10 — Jackie Bruskin
- Saturday, March 23 — to be decided
- Sunday, March 24 — Judi Veder and Saul Scheinbach
- Friday, April 5 — May Guglielmo
- Saturday, April 6 — to be decided

To find out the exact times, or if you want to be on the "exact time email list," contact Carol Lange at 914-668-5101 or Carollange@aol.com.
Upcoming Field Trips

MICHAELO BOCHNIK

Outdoor activities such as birding and hiking with a group are a wonderful way to share your interests with like-minded people to learn more about nature, and to enjoy many preserves and natural areas.

Hudson River Audubon Society field trips are free. Non-members and newcomers are welcomed.

Bring binoculars and field guides if you have them. Some are available for loan for those who need them. Dress appropriately for the weather. For more information contact Michael Bochnik at (914) 237-9331 or bochnikm@cs.com.

• SATURDAY, JANUARY 26, 2013
OWL PROWL AT PELHAM BAY PARK

Meet at Pelham Bay Park, Orchard Beach parking lot, Bronx at 8:00 a.m. (northeast corner, or far left as you enter the large parking lot).

Pelham Bay Park offers you the best chance to see up to four or more species of owls. Great Horned owls may be nesting and both Saw-whet and Long-eared Owls may be hiding in the pines. Barn and Barred Owls are occasionally found as well. The park holds many half-hardies in winter such as Brown Thrasher, Gray Catbird, and Hermit Thrush. Fox Sparrows are usually found easily in the woods.

Views of the Sound should yield a variety of ducks, loon and grebes — and maybe a seal or two.

• SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 9, 2013
TEATOWN’S HUDSON RIVER EAGLEFEST 2013 AT CROTON POINT PARK

Meet at Pelham Bay Park, Orchard Beach parking lot, Bronx at 8:00 a.m. (northeast corner, or far left as you enter the large parking lot).

Pelham Bay Park offers you the best chance to see up to four or more species of owls. Great Horned owls may be nesting and both Saw-whet and Long-eared Owls may be hiding in the pines. Barn and Barred Owls are occasionally found as well. The park holds many half-hardies in winter such as Brown Thrasher, Gray Catbird, and Hermit Thrush. Fox Sparrows are usually found easily in the woods.

Views of the Sound should yield a variety of ducks, loon and grebes — and maybe a seal or two.

Children’s Programs at Lenoir Nature Center

Both programs will be conducted by HRAS Education Chair, Walter Chadwick.

Feathers & Flight
Saturday, January 12, 2013 at 11:00 a.m.
Feathers do more than help a bird fly. Come and learn what else birds use them for. Learn about the other adaptations that help birds fly.
A craft will follow the program.
Ages five to ten years.
For information, please call 914-968-5851

Owls
Saturday, February 16 at 11:00 a.m.
Learn what makes an owl an owl. Special adaptations allow owls to hunt at night. Come and give a hoot as we investigate the world of owls.
See what owls eat by dissecting your own owl pellet.
Ages five to ten years. Preregistration required. Limit of twelve children. For information and registration, please call 914-968-5851
Join The Hudson River Audubon Society of Westchester!

Every membership supports Audubon’s vital efforts to protect birds, other wildlife and natural habitats. Membership includes a subscription to Audubon magazine and affiliation with National Audubon. As a member, you will also receive our chapter newsletter, The Rivertown Naturalist, and an open invitation to all our guest lectures, field trips and events.

SIGN ME UP AS A NEW MEMBER.

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