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Hudson/Mohawk Group



July/August 2005 Vol. 29 No 4 "Aspens" by Ansel Adams in This is the American Earth

What Is A Bioblitz?

by John VanDeloo

A bioblitz is a tool for biodiversity exploration, education and investigation. It is an event that organizes the natural history talents of the top scientists and naturalists living within urban and suburban centers in an effort to document the biodiversity present at our own back door. The Hudson-Mohawk Group will co-sponsor a bioblitz to help raise public awareness of biodiversity and its value by inviting the public, students and yourself to join us in the Woodlawn Preserve.

The scientists will identify and record as many species as possible during the 24 hour period, from noon on August 26th until noon on August 27th. They will work individually or in small groups, often with volunteers, usually working in a 2 - 6 hour shift. Species lists for various taxonomic groups will be created that can be used for management and conservation purposes. With the help of the New York State Museum a base camp will be set up to coordinate the inventory efforts. Services and supplies to be provided by the NYS Museum include maps, inventory sheets, species lists, identification keys, field guides, microscopes, collection supplies, electricity and bathroom facilities. Plans include expanded media coverage for this unique event.

Felt by many to be the most biodiverse area in the Pine Bush, the Woodlawn Preserve is known to contain over 500 species of plants and many animals, reptiles, insect and amphibian species. You can be a part of this exciting event. See the Outings column on page 2 for more information.

Concerned About Mercury? Get Tested!

by Janet Given-Chen

Chances are you have elevated levels of mercury in your body, even if you don't eat a lot of fish or live downwind from a power plant.

Power plants are the largest uncontrolled source of mercury by far, responsible for approximately 30% of this country's emissions. When coal is burned at power plants, it releases mercury into our atmosphere. This mercury falls to earth in rain, running into our lakes, rivers and streams. Bacteria in the water transform this mercury into toxic methyl-mercury. When fish consume these bacteria, they become contaminated. Fish that eat other contaminated fish end up with even higher levels of toxic mercury in their flesh. Humans can be contaminated with this toxin by eating the contaminated fish.

It is known that children who are born to women with increased mercury levels face an increased risk of cognitive and developmental damage. Research reported in 2004 by the EPA concluded that unborn children have much higher levels of mercury in their blood than their mothers do. In March of 2004 the FDA and the EPA issued a joint warning to pregnant women, women who may become pregnant, and nursing mothers against eating certain kinds of fish that may contain harmful mercury. In the US, 45 states and territories have fish consumption warnings because of unsafe levels of mercury in at least some of their waters.

Not only women and children face a greater risk of side effects. Middle-aged men have been found to be at a greater risk for coronary artery disease. Published by the American Heart Association in November of 2004, the findings show that men with the highest levels of mercury have a 60% increased risk of an acute coronary event and an almost 70% increased risk of cardiovascular death comparable with men with lower mercury levels.

Now there's an easy way to find out how high your mercury level is. The Sierra Club has teamed up with Greenpeace to offer a kit that lets you trade a small lock of hair for personal lab results. The goal is to make this the largest sampling for mercury testing ever taken. To get tested, visit the Sierra Club website at www.sierraclub.org/mercury. You can also write Greenpeace to request a kit. The address is Greenpeace, 702 H St NW, Suite 300, Washington DC 20001. Enclose a personal check for 25.00 and write "Mercury Test Kit" on the envelope and check. Participants receive a sampling kit in the mail which includes a questionnaire, instructions, and consent form. Results are confidential between the participant and EQI.

For more information on the mercury issue, you can also go to www.NYPIRG.org. There is an EPA interactive map for current fish advisories in your area at www.epa.gov/mercury. And if you really want to get your blood boiling, check out Robert F. Kennedy JR's article about mercury as a preservative in children's vaccines entitled **Deadly Immunity** in the June 30 - July 14 2005 Rolling Stone magazine. That report, along with more in-depth information is also available through www.salon.com. Another must read on the topic of injected mercury is the book by David Kirby entitled "Evidence of Harm".

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* Executive Committee Members

The Hudson-Mohawk Group Executive Committee meets the first Monday of every month. Members are encouraged to attend! Please call Susan Lawrence to confirm. This newsletter is published 5-6 times per year (or more) by the Hudson-Mohawk Group of the Sierra Club's Atlantic Chapter. Submit all letters, including name and phone number, to the editor to: Hudson-Mohawk Group, PO Box 8447, Albany, NY 12208-8447. We reserve the right to edit and keep all articles. Views expressed by the contributors may or may not be those of the Sierra Club or the Hudson-Mohawk Group. The subscription rate is \$5/5 issues; subscriptions for members are free.

Outings

Saturday, July 9 - Hoffman's Notch. We will spot cars at the North end, on Blue Ridge Rd. at Exit 29, and then hike about 9 miles from the southern end of the trail. We'll learn how the notch was formed and named. Call John at 370-4932 for information. **H,E**

Saturday, July 23rd - Woodlawn Preserve. Help us clean up while we discuss the biodiversity of this unique area. We will be focusing on general cleanup and some invasive species control in preparation for the Bioblitz (see page 1 and related item in this column). We'll meet at 9am at the Gifford Road entrance. Bring a wheelbarrow, garden cart, and work gloves. We'll be quitting by noon. Call John at 370-4932 with questions. **E,T**

Saturday, August 13 - Albany Pine Bush (Madison Ave Extension). 9am - 1pm. A six-mile hike along trails exploring the woodlands and flora of this unique environment; we will identify trees, shrubs, and wildflowers and discuss conservation issues and management in the Pine Bush along the way. Gentle grades. Call Ted at 765-7209 for more information. **H,C,E**

**Key - H: Hiking E: Education
C:Conservation T: Trail Work**

Important Note: All outing members will sign an "Assumption of Risk and Release of Liability" sheet prior to participation in the outings.

For Outing leadership opportunities contact Bill Koebbeman 399-5027



Sunday, August 14th - Blue Ledges on the Hudson. We will hike in but make sure you bring your bathing suit as this is a beautiful spot for a swim in the Hudson. We will learn about the history of this area as we enjoy the scenery of the Upper Hudson. Call John at 370-4932 for information. **H,E**

Friday, August 26th at noon through noon Saturday, August 27th - Bioblitz in the Woodlawn Preserve.

Come and help the biologists, botanists, entomologists and other scientists as they attempt to identify and inventory as many species from as many taxonomic groups as possible within a 24 hour period of time. This scientific race against time is co-sponsored by the Hudson-Mohawk Group and is as much fun as it is educational. The child naturalist within knows that crawling around in woods and fields looking for plants and animals is about as good as it gets. To volunteer, or for more information, call John at 370-4932. **E,C,H,T**

Key Volunteer Needs

We are especially seeking a few volunteers who are interested in special training and working with volunteers to develop public awareness and actions on environmental issues (contact Susan Lawrence). We also need volunteers to help with our many conservation projects (contact John VanDeloo, Pete Sheehan or Susan Lawrence), help with fundraising (contact Janet Given-Chen), or volunteer with public education 'tabling' at events such as fairs (contact Lucinda Schoenbeck at 434-47479 or lunaclair@yahoo.com). Finally, to have some impact on important local elections this fall, please contact our Political Chair, Steve Redler.
(See box this page for contact info).

Notes From The Chair by Susan Lawrence

Protecting Open Space

As our localities prepare comprehensive land use plans and associated zoning regulations, it is very important for them to include sophisticated and comprehensive open space planning. Preparing an Open Space Plan provides tools for the community to identify and protect important intact natural habitats and ecological communities. Conserving biodiversity is essential to protect natural species from invasive ones.

Developing a Lands of Conservation Interest Map can be a first step. Complete mapping of isolated wetlands in localities, developing local ordinances as well as enacting a State law to protect wetlands from development, and using zoning and land conservation to protect watersheds from the pollution of sprawl is essential. Local ordinances to protect stream beds and steep slopes are necessary as these areas are not protected by State or Federal law. Water and sewer plans and maps are important to limit where development could occur.

Localities need to appoint at a minimum a Citizen Advisory Committee on Conservation or ideally a Conservation Advisory Council to assist with this planning. This Advisory body would provide advice on ways to protect open space, such as purchase of development rights or conservation easements, and identify avenues to fund this protection.

As conservationists, we can make a difference in protecting critical natural resources in our own backyards by participating in local comprehensive planning and zoning. Critically identifying and analyzing ways to protect open space is essential to determine what really are the useful tools and how localities can use them.

For more reading on these issues, you can start with **Open Space For Tomorrow: A Capital District Sprawl and Open Space Strategy** Open Space Institute, 2005 (available on www.osiny.org) and **Local Open Space Planning Guide** NYS Department of Environmental Protection, 2004 (Reprint 2005). Articles and books by Randell Arendt identify ways innovative zoning can protect open space.

Why is the EPA undermining existing air pollution protections that would clean up mercury while at the same time warning women of child bearing age and children to limit their consumption of mercury laden fish?

Fish low in mercury and can be eaten by women of child-bearing years: Salmon (wild), Blue crab (mid-Atlantic), Croaker, Fish sticks, Flounder (summer), Haddock, Trout (farmed) and shrimp (note: shrimp fishing and farming practices have raised environmental concerns).

Fish that should not be eaten: Shark, Tuna (canned albacore and steaks), Swordfish, King mackerel, Tilefish, Sea bass, Marlin, Halibut, Pike, Walleye, White croaker and Largemouth bass.

Fish that should be avoided (eaten no more than once a month): Tuna (canned light), Mahi mahi, Cod, Pollock, Great Lakes salmon, Gulf Coast blue crab, Channel catfish (wild) and Lake whitefish.

source: Environmental Working Group

Summer Reading List

Here are some suggestions for a lazy summer afternoon on the beach, in a hammock, or in your backpack for a trailside break -

Lester R. Brown [Outgrowing the Earth: the Food Security Challenge in an Age of Falling Water Tables and Rising Temperatures.](#) New York, W.W. Norton & Co, 2004. 239 pages (an Earth Policy Institute Book).

Lester R. Brown [Plan B: Rescuing the Planet Under Stress and a Civilization in Trouble.](#) New York, W.W. Norton, 2003. 285 pages (Earth Policy Institute)

Bernd Heinrich [The Geese of Beaver Bog.](#) New York, Harper Collins, c2004. 279 pages.

Sarah James and Torbjorn Lahti. [The Natural Step for Communities: How Cities and Towns Can Change to Sustainable Practices.](#) Gabriola Island, British Columbian, New Society Publishers, c2004. 279 pages.

Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. [Crimes Against Nature: How George W. Bush and His Corporate Pals Are Plundering the Country and Hijacking Our Democracy.](#) New York, Harper Collins, c2004. 244 pages.

Jeffrey Langholz and Kelly Turner. [You Can Prevent Global Warming \(and Save Money!\): 51 Easy Ways.](#) Kansas City, Andrews McMeel, c2003. 370 pages.

Paul Roberts. [The End of Oil: On the Edge of a Perilous New World.](#) Boston, Houghton Mifflin, c2004. 389 pages.

James Gustave Speth. [Red Sky at Morning: America and the Crisis of the Global Environment: A Citizens Agenda for Action.](#) New Haven, Yale U. Press, c2004. 299 pages.

Mitchell Thomashow. [Bringing the Biosphere Home: Learning to Perceive Global Environmental Change.](#) Cambridge, MIT Press, c2002. 244 pages.

Happy Reading!

Upcoming Calendar of Events

July 25, Monday - ExCom and Conservation Committee Meeting
August 15th, Monday - Deadline for newsletter submission (September/October issue)
August 17, Wednesday - Conservation Committee Meeting
August 26 - 27 Bioblitz!
August 29, Monday - ExCom Mtg
September 21, Wednesday - Conservation Committee

Meetings are usually held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 21 Hackett Blvd., Albany, NY. Members are welcome and encouraged to attend. Please contact Susan Lawrence if you plan to attend in case of change of venue.

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