

Migration...It's not just for the birds

By Eric Lind



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Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary

MANY FOLKS ARE THINKING about birds this time of year. Migrating birds of every color will pour through our region and beyond, seeking their appropriate nesting habitats. But another group of animals is also on the move through the Hudson Valley... the fish. It happens quietly, underwater, and when everyone's attention is diverted treward searching for colorful songbirds.

Most people probably know of the heroic travels of salmon and shad. But each Spring, the Hudson River's little tributaries teem with fish with a desire to reproduce no less profound than more famous (and better-named) wildlife. Their trips are short, in some cases less than a mile, and many survive and return to the river with only worn fins and a couple of bruises. These modest migrations of suckers, shiners and perch are an annual reminder of the undeniable link between the river and its tributaries.

Named for their feeding method and an overall creamy color, white suckers show up when the water temperature approaches 50 degrees and the black and white warblers are still three weeks in coming. The males, with fins tinted orange and bodies flushed black and rosy-gold, gather in small groups and are pleasing to watch as they mill around in pools formed by fallen trees. A female will join them, then drift away with one or two escorts. They thrash with startling energy in the gravel of the streambed as the eggs are released and fertilized. This whole fascinating ritual can be watched by a quiet observer from a streamside seat.

The scientific name of the spottail

shiner, *Notropis hudsonius*, bears out its abundance in the Hudson River. Under 6 inches long and silvery, spottails are difficult to see as they reflect the colors around them. They assemble in large schools and sometimes follow around white suckers, feeding on their freshly laid eggs. At night, as newly arrived and exhausted blue-gray gnatcatchers sleep in the branches above, the shiners move into the riffles to spawn, releasing millions of their own glittering, pinhead-sized eggs.

Tiger-striped with brassy flanks, yellow perch really should have a better name. Their presence is given away by huge spiraling egg masses, seemingly too big to fit inside their eight to ten inch bodies. The gooey eggs get hung up on branches that hold them in the cool stream waters, but if they drift too far downstream they can be literally hung out to dry at low tide. Sometimes yellow perch can be seen motionless on the streambed, perhaps recovering from the rigors of spawning.

Some of the fish eggs are perfectly transparent and one can study the developing fish under a microscope in the Constitution Marsh Audubon Center. Within each tiny sphere a fragile embryo develops, at first nothing more than a tail and a yolk. Soon, a tiny heart can be seen fluttering behind two eyes. And outside, only inches below a crooning Louisiana waterthrush, a million more are beating in the cool stream waters.

For more information about Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary call (845) 265-2601 or visit <http://ny.audubon.org>.

Constitution Marsh Sanctuary Featured on PBS



AUDUBON NEW YORK

Constitution Marsh Audubon Center and Sanctuary

CONSTITUTION MARSH AUDUBON CENTER and Sanctuary was highlighted on public television's documentary "America's First River, Bill Moyers on the Hudson" that aired April 23 and 24. The four-hour program encompassed the rich history and current environmental challenges facing the Hudson Valley. To order the two video set call 1-800-336-1917.

Audubon New York Welcomes Andrew Mackie, and Glenn Phillips

Staff Report

ANDREW MACKIE is a new education manager at Audubon New York, developing Audubon's Centers and programs in Upstate New York. Mackie started his environmental career at Constitution Marsh Sanctuary in Garrison, New York where he worked for three years. In 1994, Mackie accepted a position as assistant sanctuary director at Audubon's Corkscrew Swamp Sanctuary in Naples, Florida. While in Florida Mackie was responsible for expanding the Sanctuary volunteer program, managing the visitor program for 100,000 people a year, developing the education programs and creating the new 10,000 square foot Blair Audubon Center. Mackie was also president of the Collier



KRISTINA W. NICHOLS

Andrew Mackie

County Audubon Society. Mackie served on the board of directors for the Naples Chapter of the Florida Native Plant Society and the Society of Ethical Ecotourism of Southwest Florida.

Glenn Phillips joins the Audubon team as the education director for the Prospect Park Audubon Center. After graduating from Harvard with a degree in plant ecology, Phillips went on to work in the education department at the Brooklyn Botanic Garden opening the first discovery center in an American botanic garden and developing programs for pre-school audiences. Later, at The New York Botanical Garden, Phillips was part of the team that created the Everett Children's Adventure Garden — a seven-acre indoor/outdoor hands-on museum about plants and the environment for children. Most recently, Phillips managed professional development programs for teachers at Columbia University's Center for Environmental Research and Conservation.



AUDUBON NEW YORK

Glenn Phillips poses with a Prospect Park Boathouse exhibit.