

Building a Culture of Conservation, One School at a Time

By Pete Salmansohn

IN A WONDERFUL EXAMPLE of partnership between an Audubon Center and a local school, students in seven different grades from the nearby Garrison Union Free School are now visiting Constitution Marsh on a regular and planned basis. Recent days have seen excited fifth graders racing to a streamside identify fish, and second graders tuning in to the wide variety of bird sounds coming from the forest.

"We're now in our third year," says a pleased Program Director Connie Mayer. "We created the program as a response from Garrison's teachers who wanted more hands-on science lessons, out in the field. And this was in addition to our already successful school outreach visits."

In 2001, start-up funding was supplied by the Hudson River Fisheries Trust, a private organization administered by local resident and former Riverkeeper John

Cronin. Since then the Garrison Children's Fund, a parent-run association, has stepped in and supported it with both finances and an active physical presence. "We now have a large and very enthusiastic group of parent chaperones," says Sanctuary Director Eric Lind. "They help out with canoeing and supervision. It's a great way to engage the wider school community."

Each grade has its own topics of study so students experience something new each visit. This building block approach culminates in later grades with explorations like bird banding, beach seining in the Hudson River, and advanced analysis of the different invertebrates found in a Hudson River tributary. "Not only do the kids really look forward to coming here each Spring," says Connie Mayer, "but they can tell me with great detail and emotion exactly what they did the year before!"

Buffalo Audubon Society and Audubon New York Sign Historic Document

By Chuck Remington

IN MARCH, 2003, a memorandum of understanding was signed by Elmer Marien, President of the Buffalo Audubon Society, John Flicker, President of the National Audubon Society, and David J. Miller, Executive Director of Audubon New York, heralding the first-of-its-kind agreement to incorporate an existing chapter-run Center formally into Audubon's Centers network.

The Beaver Meadow center is owned and operated by the Buffalo Audubon Society and serves over 30,000 people annually. For over 30 years, it has provided environmental education programs and connections to nature for residents in western New York and beyond.

In 1997-2000, the Buffalo Audubon Society undertook a capital campaign to raise \$750,000 to nearly triple the size of the existing facility, in order to serve more people and provide an even better visitor experience. In 2000, the building was completed and after operating full-time through the expansion process, re-dedicated to the cause of education and conservation. It now boasts two classrooms, a Children's Discovery Room, an expansive multipurpose room and nature art gallery, expanded office space, a nature library, bird banding room, kitchen facilities, and new exhibits.

Since the inception of Audubon New York's Centers' Education network, Beaver Meadow staff have enthusiastically partaken in workshops, resource sharing and program quality enhancements. Education staff at both organizations have worked closely together on numerous projects, including the long term strategic planning for the chapter—the second largest in New York State. Currently, Buffalo Audubon staff from Beaver Meadow are sub-contracted by Audubon New York to assist in implementation of education programs at the fledgling Audubon Center at Knox Farm State Park. In addition, the Buffalo Audubon Society will be represented on Audubon New York's stewardship board for Knox Farm Audubon Center.

"The Buffalo Audubon Society has fully embraced the 2020 vision and has consistently worked with the state office to further our mutual goals. The Beaver Meadow staff has always supported and been involved with our informal education network for Centers in New York State," commented David J. Miller. "We are pleased that Beaver Meadow Audubon Center, a chapter-operated center with a long track record and high profile in its community, is now formally included in Audubon's Centers Network. They will receive increased support from Audubon at a national level, yet retain oversight of their operations. It's a win-win situation."

The memorandum of understanding was first discussed 18 months ago at the



View from the Beaver Meadow Audubon Center, now formally included in National Audubon's and Audubon New York's network of Centers.

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suggestion of Tamar Chotzen, Vice-President of Audubon's Centers & Education Division. Since that time staff and board members of Buffalo Audubon, Audubon New York and National Audubon have been working together to finalize the agreement. It states in the agreement that any future Audubon Center undertaken by the Buffalo Audubon Society would be subject to the negotiation of a separate Memorandum of Understanding.

"People like Buffalo Audubon Executive Director Bill McKeever, Beaver Meadow Center's Bill Michalek and members of the BAS board have brought important skills and experience to the education network in New York," said Chuck Remington, National Audubon Society's Director of Field Support, Audubon Centers and Education. "Now, that expertise will be broadcast nation-wide through the Audubon Centers network. In return, Beaver Meadow will receive more of our staff attention and time than before. I'm happy that in my new position at the national level, I will still have the pleasure of working with them."

"It has been an important part of our long-term strategic position to support the national 2020 Vision, implement it on a chapter level to the greatest extent possible, and work closely with the national organization," said McKeever. "We're delighted to be collaborating with our colleagues at Audubon Centers nationwide."