

# Montezuma Audubon Center Project Moves Ahead

By Richard Haley

THE PROJECT to create the Montezuma Audubon Center is moving ahead. As of this writing, all of the details of a Memorandum of Understanding between Audubon New York and the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) have been agreed upon, and the document will be signed before the end of the 2003. Design of the Center building that DEC will construct is in final stages, with construction scheduled to begin in 2004. Once the Center building is completed, it will be operated by Audubon New York. All

the partner organizations will have a presence at the Center.

The building will be the physical centerpiece of a cooperative project that involves Audubon, DEC, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service, and The Friends of the Montezuma Wetlands Complex. The Center will be located on land owned by the DEC, in the town of Savannah. It will be a focal point for education in the 36,000 acre Montezuma Wetlands Complex. Montezuma is a vital migration stop for birds moving along the Eastern Flyway. Over one million

ducks and geese stop at the Complex every year during migration. It is home to several protected species, and in 2003 was the site of the first documented breeding of Sandhill Cranes in New York. Almost a dozen federally or state-listed bird species breed in the Complex, including Black Terns, Cerulean Warblers, Sedge Wrens and Bald Eagles. It should come as no surprise that it is an Important Bird Area.

Construction on another project on the site has already started. The Friends of the Montezuma Wildlife Complex have raised funds to create a wildlife

observation platform that will allow visitors to look over the reclaimed wetlands at the Center location. Construction has already begun on this accessible structure, and it will be finished by the end of 2003.

Planning for exhibits, both indoor and outdoor, will begin this winter as well, supported by a grant made possible by State Senator Michael Nozzolio. The expected opening of the Center will be in 2005. More details will be forthcoming in future Advocates.

## Beauty and The Beast

By Pete Salmansohn

WHEN YOU THINK of an eel, what words come to mind? Perhaps "slimy," "yucky," "interesting" or "tasty." But what about another Hudson River creature, the bald eagle? How would you describe it? Maybe the words "beautiful," "majestic," "awesome" or "cool" would be ones you'd use.

These two New York State critters elicit very different emotional responses in people, and that's one reason why here at Constitution Marsh we've decided to create an entirely new school program exploring their lives and their migratory journeys. Eagles and eels conveniently fall into that broad and incorrect wildlife stereotype of beauty versus ugliness, and yet there is so much more below the surface.

Our one-hour program, entitled "Eagles and Eels: Migrants of the Hudson," brings an engaging variety of activities and perspectives into upper-elementary classrooms, and includes a portable fish tank containing a magnificent adult eel. Students are thrilled at the sight of it and have an opportunity to ask questions, study, and sketch this unusual fish. They also get to play a board game that dramatically portrays the remarkable migration tiny young eels undergo in making their way up to the Hudson River from their birthplace in the Sargasso Sea.

The study of eagles always bring excitement to a classroom, and students engage in a short discussion, play a similar and equally exciting migration hazard game, and chart the migration routes of six different birds as they make their way north from wintering grounds in the Hudson Valley to nesting areas in several Canadian provinces and the Adirondacks. They use actual data

## at Constitution Marsh

collected by New York State biologists from birds that have telemetry transmitters attached to them.

"I'm very pleased we now have this exciting new outreach program to offer in our local schools that combines geography and biology," says center director Eric Lind, "and I wouldn't be surprised if our eel not only becomes a local celebrity, but changes peoples minds about how interesting these wild animals really are."



American eel, *Anguilla rostrata*.



Bald Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucocephalus*.