

Columbia Land Conservancy joins Audubon in education

By Judy Anderson

Columbia Land Conservancy, a local land trust serving Columbia County, and the National Audubon Society of New York State have begun a program to give children an opportunity to investigate wetland ecology in partnership with the Hillsdale Park Recreation Commission. This past summer, children were able to explore, in a hands-on learning experience, the plants and animals of the Rheinstrom Hill Wildlife Sanctuary's beautiful, and ecologically diverse, wetland.

This coming summer, as a continuation of this program, National Audubon and the Columbia Land Conservancy will hold a series of programs at the Rheinstrom Hill Wildlife Sanctuary, allowing children and their families to experience the beauty and ecology of the sanctuary's woodlands, meadows and wetland.

Audubon's education director Chuck Remington

and Fran Martino, the Columbia Land Conservancy's environmental educator, are working together to establish an educational partnership with the Taconic Hills Central School District in Hillsdale to develop a customized, highly-interactive, science-based, educational experience for elementary school-aged children. Using the Rheinstrom Hill Sanctuary as the primary classroom, the program will be designed to focus on science, natural history and ecology as interpreted in the field, where children can develop a love for science, the natural environment and the skills necessary for inquisitive learning.

"The teachers at Taconic Hills Central School District responded with great enthusiasm about the possibility of establishing this program," said Ms. Martino. "They are excited about having an outdoor classroom such as Rheinstrom Hill practically in their own backyard. The children can be easily transported to the very resources they are studying: wildlife habitat, water resources, geology, ecology, natural

history and chemistry."

National Audubon is delighted to be working with the Columbia Land Conservancy, one of New York state's top land trusts, to provide environmental education opportunities for children throughout the region. The Columbia Land Conservancy is also working with a number of local children's organizations to allow children to experience firsthand the wonders of nature at local conservation areas and state parks.

Audubon and the Columbia Land Conservancy have a history of working together. In 1997, the Columbia Land Conservancy raised \$248,000 on behalf of the Town of Hillsdale and the Hillsdale Park and Recreation Commission to purchase and protect a 108-acre parcel that contains a beautiful wetland and supports meadows and woodlands. Upon the completion of this acquisition, the Conservancy donated the property to Audubon to become part of the Rheinstrom Hill Wildlife Sanctuary. This type of land protection effort is not new to the Conservancy. In the organization's 13-year history, it has helped private landowners, municipalities and conservation organizations protect more than 12,500 acres of Columbia County's farmland, wildlife habitat and rural open space.

National Audubon believes these types of partnerships are critical in laying the foundation for local communities to gain greater understanding of, and appreciation for, the importance of their natural resources. Public conservation areas such as the Rheinstrom Wildlife Sanctuary allow for children and their families to enjoy, and identify with, the wonder of birds and other plant and animal species in their natural habitat. Audubon is working with other land trust across New York state to do similar conservation and education work.

Judy Anderson is the executive director of the Columbia Land Conservancy.



Rheinstrom Hill Wildlife Sanctuary

The headquarters for the Rheinstrom Hill Wildlife Sanctuary has undergone a major renovation, inside and out, to prepare for expanded education and science programs at this 1,000-acre wildlife haven in Columbia County.

Montezuma NWR, SUNY ESF and Audubon...

Staff Report

Discussions are underway to bring together major players for conservation and environmental education in the middle of New York state. Staff members from National Audubon's Wildlife Refuge Campaign and Audubon state offices have been working together to identify funding for a program that brings together a National Wildlife Refuge, a local university and Audubon education staff. The purpose is to create "place-based" education activities on site at the refuges. The pilot program is called BEST—Birds Educating Students and Teachers. It is slated to run in four states across the United States.

The intent of BEST is to bring together experts in education, conservation biology and citizen science. They will focus their expertise on education projects that will not only inform and inspire participants, but will also produce scientific data through bird monitoring and inventory activities.

All three of the partners in New York have a history of working together informally for the good of the environment. The Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge is part of an

Important Bird Area that hosts at least a dozen state-listed species and thousands of individuals of more than 25 species of waterfowl and shorebirds. The NWR, in cooperation with other groups, is currently building a new environmental education center for the wetlands complex, which is continuing to acquire and restore land from willing sellers. The Audubon state office has been involved in Montezuma's annual MuckRace and local chapter members from Old Erie, Onondaga and Owasco Audubon Societies participate in Montezuma projects.

SUNY's College of Environmental Science and Forestry (ESF) is renowned for its prowess in the environmental field. Since 1912, ESF has attracted worldwide clientele of industrial, governmental, professional and scientific groups. The Office of Research Programs at ESF helps coordinate the efforts of the faculty to maintain its vigor and relevancy to the world's most important environmental issues. The National Audubon Society of New York State has partnered with ESF on research projects ranging from



NYS DEC

Gov. Pataki and local school children watch a bird banding demonstration at Montezuma Wetlands Complex.

ice storm damage in the Adirondacks to sustainable forestry practices.

Besides providing financial resources to the partners, the benefits of the BEST program will include:

- giving ESF students experience in environmental education program development;
- providing scientists with valuable data about bird populations at an IBA site;
- enhancing Montezuma's impressive education and conservation efforts;
- offering local elementary school students unique and rewarding activities; and
- creating a template for education and center partnerships across the nation.

Education Committee gets new chairwoman

Staff Report

The Education Committee of the Audubon Council of New York State has appointed Alice DelBosco from Huntington Audubon Society as chair. Alice's experience in and dedication to education stems from her work as a classroom teacher and librarian in Long Island elementary schools. Alice has been a voice for environmental education and conservation on the Audubon Council of New York State and as an active member of the Advisory Board of the Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary. She also maintains a keen understanding of education reform in our state.

"Alice has a rich history of leadership in education and conservation," said Chuck Remington, director of education for the National Audubon Society of New York State. "We look forward to working with Alice and members of committee to establish new partnerships with teachers and implement our statewide Education Plan."



Alice DelBosco