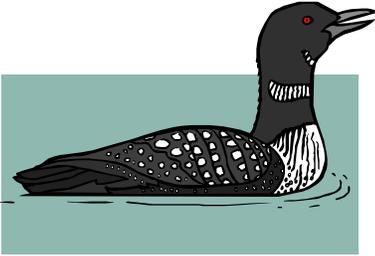


Newsletter IRLC Indian River Lakes Conservancy

SPRING/SUMMER 2007



The goal of the Indian River Lakes Conservancy is to preserve the natural character of the area, with a focus on protecting clean water, fish and wildlife, and the scenic vistas along the shores of the lakes and the Indian River and to educate ourselves and the community about the natural habitat in which we live.

Formed in 1998 to conserve critical lands in the Indian River Lakes Area of Northern New York, the IRLC is a non-profit land trust with 501(c) (3) tax exempt status operating in a manner consistent with the published standards of "Land Trust Alliance", a national organization.

CONSERVANCY UPDATE

This is a pivotal year for the land trust community. Changes in federal tax law (Pension Protection Act of 2006) have significantly expanded income tax and estate tax benefits for landowners who wish to preserve their farms or qualified family lands by gifting of conservation easements.

In a few weeks IRLC will move into brand new office space in a building on Stine Road in Redwood. The building was constructed for Margie and Sandy Hillback by Stan Parker of P and S Builders of Alexandria Bay. The Hillbacks were founding members of the Conservancy and Sandy serves on the board of directors. This will be a valuable resource to our organization, housing the IRLC's library/display room, offices and a meeting room. The cost of using the building will be donated by the Hillbacks. We will move into the space in early June and plan to hold this year's annual

Wine and Cheese Fundraiser at the facility on July 21 to celebrate the official grand opening. We hope we will see everyone at this event which represents a real milestone for the IRLC!

This year our primary effort will be identifying our service areas most important water and land resources and then develop an inventory of priority parcels for preservation. The work will include field biologist surveys and research of natural resource databases. If you own conservation worthy wetlands, waterfront or buffer areas that you would like us to look at please contact us soon to benefit from our review process and your potential tax benefits.

We are reaching out to local school districts to partner with us to use the Grand Lakes Reserve as an outdoor classroom. The Reserve will provide the opportunity for educators and students to interact as they explore nature and to raise awareness of the importance of forests and wetlands to the health of our community. It is a place where students can develop a sense of respect, wonder and caring for our natural environment. The Reserve is a special place for students of all ages, whether to hike one of our trails, search for animal tracks, see a turkey nest or check out plants, bugs and birds.

Trail clearing work will continue this summer on the Reserve. It is a great way to get outdoors and meet new and old friends. Come out and join us.

Conservation Tax Law Update

On August 17, 2006, H. R. 4, a bill concerned with pension plans, was signed into law. This bill contains provisions that significantly expands the federal tax incentive for conservation easement donations and

imposes several reforms to help prevent abuse of that incentive.

Here we summarize those changes and answer some frequently asked questions.

The new law:

- Raises the deduction a donor can take for donating a conservation easement from 30 percent of his or her income in any year to 50 percent.
- Allows qualifying farmers and ranchers to deduct up to 100 percent of their income;
- Extends the carry forward period for a donor to take the tax deductions for a voluntary conservation agreement from 5 to 15 years.

This is a powerful tool for allowing modest income donors to receive greater credit for donating a valuable conservation easement on property they own. The new legislation also includes reforms that affect the appraisal process for all donated property and tighten the rules for easements on historic buildings.

Frequently asked questions:

1. Can you give me an example of the difference the new change makes?

Under the previous rules, a land owner earning \$50,000 a year who donated a \$1 million conservation easement could take a \$15,000 deduction for the year of the deduction and for an additional 5 years – a total of \$90,000 in tax deductions.

The new rules allow the land owner to deduct \$25,000 for the year of the donation and then for an additional 15 years. That is \$400,000 in deductions. If the donor qualifies as a farmer he could take a maximum of \$800,000 in deductions for his \$1 million gift.

2. Do these changes apply to gifts of land?

This expanded incentive does not apply to gifts of land in fee. It only applies to gifts that qualify under IRC 170(h)(2), such as conservation easements. A landowner considering donating his land should consult with an attorney to determine whether he should consider changing the structure of his gift to take advantage of this new incentive.

3. What is the timeline for this expanded incentive?

The new law applies to all easements donated in 2006 and 2007. Conservation groups and others are working hard to make this change permanent, but as it stands it will expire at the end of 2007. A donor can continue to apply the formula, up to the 15 year carryover period, of the current provision.

4. What other restrictions apply?

Conservation easements are subject to the same restrictions as they were before. For example, easements must meet the "conservation purposes" test defined in the existing law; they cannot be donated as a "quid pro quo" agreement; and they must be donated to a qualified organization like IRLC.

If you are considering donating land or a conservation easement please contact us soon to discuss options as the deadline is fast approaching.

GRAND LAKE RESERVE Trail Clearing

Last summer over the course of four weekends, more than 18 people volunteered to help clear a hiking trail to Grass Lake and make way for a new parking area at the trail head on Burns Road. Through the gift of their labor, the Grand Lake Reserve now offers enhanced access to a beautiful stretch of mature woodland, impressive rock ledges and a dramatic overlook on the southwestern arm of Grass Lake.

This summer we would like to open another trail in the Grand Lake

Reserve leading to Grass Lake. This new trail will start from just north of the main Burns Road parking lot and feature even more dramatic landscape and the potential for several lofty vantage points. Look for the trailhead signs that will be posted at both parking areas.

Trail clearing days are set for Saturday morning on July 7 and August 25. We will gather at the main Burns Road parking lot at 8:30 AM, with a plan to work until noon, or as long as the spirit moves and our bodies agree to cooperate. Bring grubbing tools if you have them, good gloves, long pants, bug stuff, and plenty of liquid refreshment.

Those who joined us last year had a good time and the satisfaction of making a lasting contribution to the value of this very special property. We look forward to seeing you there. Any questions, please call Mark Scarlett at 315-324-5240 or e-mail him at mascanoe@cit-tele.com.

SUMMER ACTIVITIES

July 7 – 8:30 AM Trail Clearing
July 14 – 1:00 PM Annual Meeting
July 21 – 4:00 PM Wine & Cheese Fundraiser
\$20.00 per person--\$35.00/couple
Aug. 25 - 8:30 AM Trail Clearing

HUNTING PROGRAM

Contact Steve McDonald for information or to apply for a permit to participate. 482-1056

SCHOLARSHIPS

Our JCC scholarship winner this year is Katelynn Overton, a second year student who will be transferring to the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry in the fall 2007. She will be majoring in environmental studies at ESF. She is a hard worker and active in intercollegiate athletics (volleyball) as well as student government.

Christopher Baker is our high school scholarship winner from Indian River Central. He lives on Hyde Lake in the town of Theresa and his dad is Alan Baker from Hoover Road in

Theresa. Christopher majored in science while in high school and is going on to SUNY Potsdam where he will major in environmental science. While in high school, he competed in soccer, swimming, and track all four years.

MEMBERSHIPS

IT'S TIME TO RENEW YOUR MEMBERSHIP

We need your help to preserve our clean water, wildlife and beautiful wild places.

If you have not already done so, please send your check today!

Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) - Only the Bees Know

By Board Member, Dave Martin

"What's happening to the bees?" everyone is asking. The majority of bees in many hives are simply disappearing. It's as if they are flying off and getting lost or dying out there somewhere. With no dead bees to study, researchers are scrambling to find out what's going on.

Study groups have been formed all over the country. For good reason, the Foundation for the Preservation of Honey Bees assembled a group of experts in Florida recently to try to get a handle on the problem: Beekeeping is big business in the U.S. today.

Those who keep hives do much more than provide delicious honey for toast, cereal, and hot tea (how about warm honey over ice cream?). They play a major pollination role across the U.S. Honeybees pollinate 48% of peaches, 90% of blueberries and apples, and 100% of almonds. To a lesser extent, they pollinate 5% of soybeans and 16% of cotton. That is impact...and dependence.

What irritates some researchers is the play CCD is getting in the media. All kinds of experts are being quoted all over the globe and the story continues to take on a life of its own. The issue is being whipped into a frenzy like so many other "scares" that occasionally dominate the news.

It's enough to make everyone anxious, they say.

Remember the Africanized/killer bee scare? Gretchen and I were in South Africa in March and met several beekeepers who questioned the fears generated in the U.S. about "their" bees. They have learned to live with aggressive bees for centuries - to coexist rather than try to control. To harvest honey, and there is plenty of it in the wild, many search for nests rather than collect from what we know as hive supers (boxes). As any extended stay in another culture will teach you, there's always another point of view.

Past episodes of colony disappearances were gradual (1960s). But CCD is characterized by

a dramatic change in hive population over a couple of weeks, maybe even a couple of days. It culminates in a complete absence of adult bees with little or no build up of dead bees inside or in front of the hives. They are just gone. Capped brood is present but there is not enough workforce to maintain them. Only young adult bees and the queen are present. It's like Redwood or Alex Bay losing all of its adults and leaving only adolescents and one matriarch in charge. Can you picture the scene? Pirate's Weekend every day.

So far CCD has been reported in 24 states in the U.S. and as close to NY as Pennsylvania.

As a hobby beekeeper (I usually have 4 to 10 active hives), I have never experienced a sudden disappearance of all adult bees. Commercial beekeepers with hundreds and even thousands of hives seem to be the ones most affected. One operation reported losing 800 of 1400 hives. Another saw 400 colonies reduced to 10 in short order. Ted Elk, a local beekeeper who manages a few hundred hives in the Thousand Islands area and South Carolina, said he has had no sudden disappearances this year and a better than average overwintering die-off of 18%. Good news for him. Winter hive loss can be 30-40% in northern states. Those studying CCD say the causes can be many. They include a totally new disease, pesticides in crops, the result of throwing everything but the kitchen sink into a hive to fend off diseases, or something old - a mite infestation. New breeds of nicotine-based pesticides are getting a lot of attention. Beekeepers most affected by CCD, as reported by a Pennsylvania apiarist, have been located close to corn, cotton, soy beans, canola, sunflower, apples, vine crops and pumpkins. Honeybees may be the victim of insecticides that are meant for other insects.

Some say honeybees are asked to do too much in our expanding agricultural economy. They are being compromised and stressed out. Like people, what they may need is less time on task and more time preparing for retirement (working for their own subsistence). Most of us can relate to that.

CHARISMATIC BIRDS OF THE INDIAN RIVER LAKES

REGION Part 4

by Gerry Smith

The Belted Kingfisher is the only member of this interesting family of birds found throughout most of North America. It sometimes gets rattled by the presence of humans (sorry, I could not resist...see below) It's striking blue white and red (females only) plumage, distinctive loud raucous call and high visibility perches along waterways make it familiar to most visitors to the lakes. Kingfishers are often first detected by their loud rattle call as they are flushed from a lakeside tree or wire by a boat passing close to

their perch site. This call can be heard for considerable distances over water and makes locating the flying bird quite easy. This species habit of nesting in a burrow in eroded banks and even in sand piles at highway barns near water make them a conspicuous part of the scene from April through October.

The majority of Belted Kingfishers nesting in our region arrive from late March to mid April. As with many species of birds that winter primarily in eastern North America their arrival in spring is highly weather dependent. Since open water where they can hunt is crucial to kingfisher survival they must wait for streams and lakes to open up. A cold March and early April will slow migration while a warm last half of March will hurry migrants northward. Nesting pairs may arrive together or separately but once on nesting territories pair bonds may be renewed or developed. There is evidence that some pairs may stay together for years possibly life. The courtship and pair bonding of this species, as with many predatory birds, including many fish-eating species, revolves around provision of food. The male presents the female with fish during ritualized courtship on a regular basis. Since the male will be do most of the food providing for the female and young for 2-3 months, his skill at catching prey is critical to successful reproduction. Courtship feeding gives the female evidence of his skill as a provider. If food supplied is not adequate pair bonds may dissolve and she may seek another mate.

Assuming that all goes well in the courtship stage the pair will locate a suitable site for a nesting burrow. This is usually an eroding bluff a few feet high along a stream or lake; however, sites such as sand piles and quarries and other human created habitat can be used. The primary requirement is a place where a suitable nesting burrow can be dug that will house 3-7 eggs and the resultant young for a period of 8-10 weeks. The female lays and tends the eggs and small young while the male provides the food until the young are large and feathered enough to be left alone. As the young reach that point the female joins in hunting for the growing and demanding brood. The exact number of young raised in a given year is dependent on the food supply, largely fish smaller than 6-8 inches, that may be obtained. In good years large broods are raised with smaller broods in poor years.

One of the best times for human residents of the region to enjoy these wonderful birds is when the broods emerge from their burrows and join their parents. This can occur as early as late June through July to early August. The sight of several scruffy young with feathers out of place perched on trees, wires, posts etc. loudly begging for food from their parents is often quite comical and something human parents can relate to. Teaching these uncoordinated and unskilled young birds in a few short weeks to catch the

elusive and slippery prey upon which their future survival depends presents a daunting parental task. Spending some time watching a Belted Kingfisher family as the parents try to teach their young how to make their own living will entertain and amuse. Sit in a boat or onshore nearby and watch quietly from a distance that does not disturb their normal behavior and your time will be well spent.

As autumn comes the kingfisher family unit breaks up and each bird heads south on its own timetable. Migration in this species is a subtle affair. One day a kingfisher that has used the same tree as a hunting perch for weeks or months suddenly is gone. The majority of southbound migrants leave between mid-September and late October with a few lingering to mid-November. Individuals present after late November may be trying to winter, which in most years is a very poor decision. The majority of these birds do not survive although occasional individuals winter successfully farther south near the great lakes and in central New York. Successful wintering in the North Country is very rare. Once these birds are gone the kingfisher's rattle is quieted until the following spring.

To date the birds the have been covered in this series including Bald Eagle, Osprey, Common Loon, Great Blue Heron and Belted Kingfisher have much in common. They are closely tied to the aquatic food web of the Indian River Lakes region. This web in turn is closely tied to water quality, quantity and associated factors that maintain these systems. The uplands that surround the lakes provide for other needs of these species and protection and wise management of the land-based resources is critical to the long-term survival of these species and the enrichment of our lives that they provide. IRLC is playing a critical role in assuring their and our future locally.

Next time, close to home charismatic species: Eastern Phoebe.

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Thank You.

Know someone who might be interested in joining? Please give us their name and address

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