

Newsletter IRLC

Indian River Lakes Conservancy

WINTER/SPRING 2009



Mark A. F. Baker Island Preserve

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 the Land Trust Alliance, a national organization.

CONSERVANCY UPDATE

In 2008 the IRLC and the local community lost two major contributors to conservation. In August, Henry Carse of Butterfield Lake and Hinesburg, Vermont passed away at age 90. Henry's legacy as a pioneering environmentalist and civic leader lives on in the Indian River Lakes Conservancy itself, whose formation he inspired with his gift of the Osprey Point Marsh on Butterfield Lake more than ten years ago, and in the Grand Lake Reserve, which was established in 2003 through his gift of more than 800 acres spanning Butterfield and Grass Lakes.

In November, Aaron Vogel, the Executive Director of the Thousand Islands Land Trust, died suddenly at age 39 from an apparent stroke and seizure. All of us who knew and worked with Aaron are saddened by the loss of someone so young and accomplished. He was an engaging friend and a dedicated, knowledgeable colleague who played an important leadership role in the land trust community at both the local and state level.

On a much brighter note, 2008 was an especially significant year for IRLC. We were given the unique opportunity to acquire a 53 acre island in Grass Lake that adjoins the Grand Lake Reserve, along with a 12.5 acre parcel of nearby Grass Lake waterfront. Together they add almost 1.5 miles to the nearly 3 miles of shoreline within the Reserve. This is an outstanding addition to an already exceptional natural resource, one that dramatically increases the stakes for our Conservancy to raise funds and properly steward the entire Grand Lake Reserve.

IRLC was able to close on the purchase of the Grass Lake parcels in December only because of the timely and generous action of several thoughtful and devoted friends of the Indian River Lakes. When the parcels first became available last winter, Elliott and Margie Hillback moved quickly to purchase them and secure them for IRLC. They then offered to sell them to IRLC for \$20,000 less than the \$125,000 they paid.

With extraordinary good fortune, IRLC was able to take advantage of their offer when Danida Friedman-Baker (Dani Baker) stepped forward at just the right time with the generous gift of a small rental house she owned in Clayton. IRLC then sold the house and was able to make a down payment of more than half the cost of the Grass Lake parcels. The Hillbacks offered to hold a mortgage on the balance on very generous terms, giving IRLC time to raise the needed funds. IRLC was able to close on the Grass Lake properties in December thanks to the generous donations received by these thoughtful and devoted friends of the Conservancy.

The exceptional environmental value of these Grass Lake properties was also recognized by the New York State DEC and the Land Trust Alliance through their award last year of \$12,000 from the New York State Conservation Partnership Program. The grant is being used to help with indirect costs associated with the purchase, including legal fees, surveying, and the development of an environmental assessment and stewardship plan.

Over the course of the next year IRLC will be reaching out to you and the many friends of the Indian River Lakes region to help raise the \$50,000 needed to pay the balance of the mortgage being held by the Hillbacks. We look forward to kicking off our fundraising effort this summer with the formal dedication of the Grass Lake island

as the *Marc A. F. Baker Island Preserve*, named in loving memory of Dani's son.

We are grateful to everyone who has worked so hard on behalf of the Conservancy and the vision we share for the future of the Indian River Lakes. The purchase of the Grass Lake properties poses a significant fundraising challenge for all of us who wish to preserve and protect this precious natural resource. We appreciate the financial contributions that you have already made to help with this important work and we encourage your continuing generosity and support.

\$5,000 Grant for Organizational Assessment

Last fall, the New York State DEC and the Land Trust Alliance awarded IRLC a \$5,000 grant from the New York State Conservation Partnership Program to assist with the costs of a formal Organizational Assessment. Working with a consultant funded by the grant, the Board will assess the IRLC's strengths and weaknesses and the opportunities it faces going forward. The assessment process also involves an evaluation of the IRLC's progress in the adoption of the Land Trust Alliance Standards and Practices. The organizational assessment will take place over the course of this spring and summer and will focus on helping the Board develop an action plan that will guide and strengthen the IRLC in the years ahead and assure its continuing success.

SCHOLARSHIPS

Each year the Indian River Lakes Conservancy awards scholarships to students who are planning to further their education in the field of environmental science. One scholarship is given to a graduate of Jefferson Community College who is going on to a four-year school. The other is awarded to a student graduating from Alexandria Central, Hammond Central, or Indian River Central School on a rotating basis. Graduates whose families own property on any of the Indian River Lakes also may apply. All applicants must have attained at least a B average and must have majored in science. The 2008 winners are: Timothy Reddick from Alexandria Central School and Marty Robinson from Jefferson Community College.

Timothy is the son of Robert and Beth Reddick of 222419 Aerie Cove Road,

Alexandria Bay. He majored in science while in high school, and he is attending Virginia Polytechnic Institute where he will major in civil engineering.. While in high school, he competed in soccer, basketball, and golf and was a Frontier League all-star in basketball. He was a recipient of the Presidential Academic Award and attended the American Legion Boy's State in the summer of 2007. He participated in many volunteer activities in Gouverneur and in Alexandria Bay where he worked in a summer program with River Hospital collecting data for the community.

Marty is from Dexter, New York and lives at 16853 Cemetery Road. While at JCC, he was elected to Phi Theta Kappa, the National Honor Society for two year colleges. He has been cited on the dean's and president's lists and has been a member of the peer tutoring system. Marty plans to continue his education at Frostburg State University in Maryland where he will study ethnobotany and biogeography. Following this, he will study at the University of Hawaii where he will pursue a master's degree in ethnobotany.

Funding for these scholarships is provided by conservancy membership, special donations, and contributions from the lake associations. Each year Butterfield Lake holds an auction of donated items at the annual picnic, and half of the proceeds are given to the scholarship fund. Please consider a special donation to this valuable program. We appreciate your continued support.

2008 MEMBERSHIPS AND DONORS

We gratefully acknowledge the following individuals and organizations whose gifts to the IRLC in 2008 have helped conserve for future generations the natural resources of the beautiful Indian River Lakes region. Thank you for your thoughtful generosity.

Anonymous, Molly Ames, Karen Bald & Nadine Gardner, David & Tina Bearup, Bruce & Joyce Beebe, Bob & Betty Belge, Peter Berzins, Black Lake Chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club, Steve and Kay Bolivar, Mike & Bobbi Bolton, Jim and Gail Borkman, Mary & Bill Bostick, Larry Bovenzi, David Brandt, John & Elizabeth Briggs, Joyce Brunet, Janet Buckland, Charles Burlingam, Butterfield Lake Association, Harold & Shirley Carpenter, Henry Carse, Jeff & Priscilla Cashmore, Laura Cashmore, Sheila & Bill Catlin, Robert & Beverly Cliffe, Paul S. & Bridgid A. Cook, Bruce Coyne & Mary Erskine-Coyne, Gary Dake, Phyllis Dake, Vincent L. & Michele C.

DeGennaro, William V. Delaney, Jr., Nancy Dickerson, Steve & Vici Diehl, John & Judy Dixon, Verna Docteur, Mike & Jan Douglass, David Dupra, Janet A. Durling, Michael R. & Ingeborg Eyre, Bill & Barbara Fenton, Lee & Bev Fischer, Ken & Kate Fisher, Thomas & Elizabeth Fisher-York, Kathryn Franjola, Wallace D. & Jane K. Freeland, Jr., Danida R. Friedman-Baker, Jeff & Elaine Garvey, David & Christine Gascon, Peter Gaskin, James & Elizabeth Golembeski, Bob & Pat Hallatt, Rebecca S. Halstead, Raymond & Toni Heer, Allen & Christina Hicks, Elliott & Marjorie Hillback, George Hills, Debbie & Fred Hoffman, Joel & Kathy Hoomans, Jurgen & Judy Hoomans, Brandon Hunneyman, Guy E. Hunneyman, Jordan Hunneyman, Cheryl Hurley & Walter Dutcher II, Robert & Betty Jennejohn, Anne Johnson, Judith Jones, Robert M. Jupiter, Ronald Kittleston, Elliot S. Klass, Lawrence LaRue, Richard & Marcia LeClerc, Frances & Mildred Lehman, Richard & Barbara Lopez, Marcia Luce, Ken & Marcie Mann, Ron & Barbara Mann, Dave Martin & Gretchen Starks-Martin, Joshua Mayo, Joe & Janet McChesney, Gordon McDonald, Steven McDonald, Martha McFall, John & Lorry McMahan, Theodore C. McQuade, Rebekah & Dennis Mead, Andrew Meyn & Luann Elizabeth, Laura S. Moore, Dr. Thomas & Ruth Morgan, Richard & Patricia Muller, Kevin Murray, Bethany Neuroth, Allan Newell, George W. Nugent, John & Lisa O'Driscoll, Jon Ostrander, John & Stephanie Palmer, Louis & Constance Panunzio, Terry Panunzio, Joe & Edith Pasquini, Richard & Lorraine Peal, Dr. Shara Peets, Dr. & Mrs. Dale S. Porter, Richard & Sonja Prenkert, Elizabeth Price, Will Ramseier, Mary Regan, Gail & Daniel Rizzo, Gary & Marcia Robbins, Edward & Denise Robertson, Carl & Arlene Rode, John S. & Judith S. Rothermel, Brian Roulin, Doreen & Lee Curtis Ruderman, Richard & Jacqueline Sabat, John Sandwick, Louise & Mark Scarlet, Doug & Jan Scott, Shari Scott, Al & Carol Sealy, Joe & Pauline Serrao, Michael & Cynthia Sheehan, Joe & Jane Silveria, Thomas & Shirley Snelson, Bill & Kathy Sommer, Chris & Tammi Stoll, Mason Swan, II, Richard & Sharon Sweet, Dr. Kenneth & Shirley Thomson, Butch & Kathy Tipper, John & Paula Tobin, Daniel & Pamela Tordy, David Van Epps, Roland & Nancy VanDeusen, Alex Velto, Richard J & Amy Y. Wakefield, Robert & Janet Wakefield, Gerald Walsh, E. Mary Washburn, Craig & Sally Waterstraat, Harland & Doris Waterstraat, Donald E. Wilcox, Tom & Pat Williams, Judith & Charles Willis, Don & Phyllis Wingerath, David & Lynne Wurster, Allan S. & Bonnie D. Wysocki, Dave & Mary Lou Zimpfer

Donations were received in memory of or in honor of:

Martha McFall, Phyllis Dake, Mike & Jean Ogden, Jack Gormley, Richard Mead, Audrey Hughes

We want to be sure that we properly recognize all our donors and ask that you let us know of any errors you may find in our list.

Our 2009 membership drive is now underway. Your continuous

support makes it possible for IRLC to work for our community.

CHARISMATIC BIRDS OF THE INDIAN RIVER LAKES REGION

Part 7

By: Gerry Smith

Ruby-throated Hummingbird

This marvelous little bird is a wonder of the eastern North American avifauna.

The only hummingbird regularly found in numbers east of the Mississippi River, this little bird amazed the first European settlers to observe it. Unsure if it was a bird or insect this species confounded and entertained these recent human arrivals to the New World. The Ruby-throated Hummingbird is widely distributed as a breeder throughout Eastern North America. Its range extends from central and southern Canada south to eastern Texas and Florida. While occasional individuals may be found in far southern North America in winter, the vast majority depart for tropical climes. The recently completed second atlas of breeding birds of New York shows this species is widely distributed over much of the state. Breeders are limited only on western Long Island and in heavily urbanized regions. Also the atlas effort and other population monitoring methods indicate that this species is increasing as a breeder in sharp contrast to many other neotropical migrants.

There are many aspects of this tiny bird's life history and behavior that are fascinating. For those whose primary experience with this bird is at their feeder, some traits are obvious. The pugnacious nature both within the species and toward other much larger species almost seems laughable. The aggressive nature of territorial male Ruby-throated Hummingbirds is legendary and obvious to birders in many situations. Their tendency to chase everything in sight can often be seen by the feeder watcher. I have seen this carried to what seems like ludicrous extremes as hummingbirds vigorously dive bomb Bald Eagles flying over a given area. This seems silly, as it is likely an eagle's talon would have trouble grasping a hummingbird and the little guy is wasting a lot of energy. But for whatever reason this pint-sized pugilist thinks it's the toughest bird on the block.

A Ruby-throated Hummingbird's life is driven by the necessity of taking in more energy than it expends thus keeping the internal fires burning. While this is a problem for all living creatures, the smaller the body mass of an individual the

faster it loses heat into the environment compared to a larger warm-blooded organism. Given the Ruby-throats tiny size, this problem is obviously magnified thus making the birds life an endless search for food. Even in the warmer months, when it is in our part of the world, cold nights, particularly in spring and early summer, may threaten an individual's energy balance.

Hummingbirds have evolved physiological mechanisms that allow them to lower body temperature, heart rate and other internal processes for short periods thus enhancing the possibilities of surviving a cold period. As soon as morning temperatures permit these eating machines are in the air searching for food.

Other interesting behaviors and adaptations make this bird a marvelous creature to study. Its very rapid flight on hovering wings that appear as a blur to the human eye is a fun thing to watch. Only the relatively recent development of high-speed cameras have allowed us to understand the mechanics of these darting little jets as they rocket through their environment. It is astounding to imagine the number of wing beats required to propel these birds to Central and South America on migration. Unlike many neotropical migrants, many Ruby-throated Hummingbirds migrate actively during daylight hours. This is no doubt an adaptation to their energy realities as it is obviously warmer during the daylight hours. I have spent four decades observing diurnal migrants at Onondaga Audubon Society's Derby Hill Bird Observatory near Texas, New York. One of the avian treats of May is watching Hummingbirds zapping past the lookout like feathered bullets headed north.

While the Ruby-throated Hummingbird is widely distributed in the Indian River Lakes area, it is with us for only about four to four and one half months per year. This is a truly tropical species that, like so many other migrants from the tropics, come north to exploit the food largesse and reduced competition from other species that the North American summer offers. Obviously the physiology of this bird precludes any attempt to winter here. The first migrant Ruby-throats predictably appear along Lake Ontario around the first of May. While the first can arrive on a

warm last week of April, any hummingbird seen before 20 April should be carefully checked for proper identification. While Ruby-throats are Eastern North America's only regular hummingbird species wanderers from the west such as the Rufous Hummingbird have been recorded. These species become more likely outside of the Ruby-throats normal May-September occurrence window. Anyone with a hummingbird at his or her feeder in upstate New York prior to 20 April or after mid-October should take a picture if possible and may contact this author, as I would be interested.

The first migrant Ruby-throats usually arrive in the Indian Lakes region by 5-10 May with most being on territory by the third week of May. Pairs get right down to business as the males courtship displays seek to attract females. As with seemingly everything else this tiny critter does these activities are carried to extremes. The male has a spectacular aerial courtship that involves flying loops from near ground level often to an altitude of hundreds of feet or more. Apparently these displays of flight prowess and other enticements are effective as the pair soon has 3-6 eggs in their tiny nest. For those that have never seen a Ruby-throat's nest, watch the adults movements carefully around your yard and you may be able to find one of the tiny architectural achievements of the natural world. The nest holding the eggs is the size of a quarter across and half a thumb deep holding the eggs. If you take a minute to enjoy their artwork the parents will usually buzz by you uttering squeaky protest notes. After you withdraw and matters settle down the male will return to patrolling his kingdom as the female incubates.

Given the male's aggressive tendency to chase everything in sight it's hard to imagine he has time for parenting. Once the young hatch the parents feed a regurgitated mix of sweet fluids and small insects. The young grow very rapidly on this rich broth and soon they fledge and join the parents in seeking flowers and feeders wherever they may be found. At food sources hummingbird groups exhibit a distinct pecking order with adult males contesting for dominance and everybody else waiting their turn. Under certain circumstances some males seek to exclude

all others, including their mate and offspring from food sources such as feeders. At other times the largesse seems more freely shared. We humans tend to characterize animals in groups and not recognize the very distinct differences in personalities of individuals within a species. The Ruby-throated Hummingbird is a species where individual behavior reminds us of these differences. From mid July to early September broods fatten on natural foods and at feeders in preparation for the long flight south. As long as feeders are cleaned regularly to prevent problems they are a definite boon to the local hummingbird population. By late August a creeping chill will send birds south. In the Indian River Lakes Region most members of this species have departed by 20 September with occasional birds lingering to early October. Feeders should be taken down and stored for the winter during early October in order to prevent enticement of individuals to linger. They may be returned to the feeding station area in late April filled with beverage to welcome back these returning sojourners. Given current population trends it appears this species will continue as a fellow traveler with the human race for generations to come.

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ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FORM - 2009

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\$ _____ for the purchase of the Grass Lake parcels, including the Marc A. F. Baker Island Preserve
[This is a pledge, please bill me in equal installments Annually Quarterly over the next _____ years.]

\$ _____ Donation in Memory/Honor of _____

Make checks payable to: **Indian River Lakes Conservancy** and mail with this form to: **P.O. Box 27, Redwood, NY 13679.**

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

Contact me regarding Conservation Easements

I have included IRLC in my will Please contact me with information about including IRLC in my will

Indian River Lakes Conservancy

P.O. Box 27

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