

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Elliott Hillback, IRLC President

Since this is the fall 2012 newsletter our summer must be over, but what an interesting summer it was! Of course we always wish for a summer full of sunny days to walk, run, kayak, swim, cycle, water ski, fish, bird watch, garden, etc. but this summer we got all the sunny days we could ever wish for – and much, much more. Rain (and mosquitoes) almost never appeared. As one of my neighbors on Butterfield Lake who is an avid fisherman so beautifully said: “The fishin’ was great... but the catchin’ sure wasn’t.” As the dry summer moved along we were amazed time and again as parts of the natural world adjusted to cope with Nature’s own unpredictable variability. What a wonderful, always interesting place to live, to grow up, to raise a family or to grow old – or even to do all these things at the same time.

August was an amazing month for us. All 6 grandchildren (including two-week old Lydia), who are the fifth generation of our family to live in our cottage, visited at the same time. To welcome Lydia for the first time we dipped her feet into the lake, although based on her reaction I think she will enjoy it more when she can swim like the rest of them. Thinking back on it, what could be a better reminder of why we work to protect nature and the natural beauty around us than a little two week old with her feet dangling in the lake for the first time? The IRLC is working to make sure she will feel the same joy and amazement about the Indian River Lakes area when she is our age and watching her grand kids get their toes dipped. We deeply thank you, our members, for also feeling and acting in that way.

In August the IRLC had its absolutely best ever Celebration of the Lakes at Coyote

Moon Winery thanks to a fabulous effort by all our Outreach Team volunteers. The fun night allowed us to meet and thank many of our supporters and get to know a number of folks who were new to the IRLC while raising record amounts to support our efforts.

Later in August we had our first geologist guided trail walk which was very well received and is likely to become a regular event. The geological history of our area has created a place that is environmentally quite unique and is an important part of the Frontenac Arch that provides a narrow natural corridor between the Adirondacks and Canada’s Algonquin Park.

Near the end of the summer, as a first step in our increased focus on water related issues, the IRLC was pleased to work with Prof. Bill Harman who heads up a new Masters in Lake Management Program at SUNY Oneonta and with the Grass Lake Association to secure a Masters student from the program who will use Grass Lake as his research base for the next two years. See the related article on p. 4 for more details.

With the great weather and all those excellent activities and results, August 2012 certainly was special for the IRLC. But I would like to share with you another series of events that culminated late in August that highlights the strong progress that our Conservancy is making. In late June we learned that the IRLC might be able to acquire a 25 acre pond, which is a major source of water for Lake of the Woods, plus 25 acres of woods and meadows that almost completely surrounds the pond. The owner was prepared to sell it at a price substantially below its appraised value to protect it from development. That was the exciting news,



An Inukshuk overlooking Grass Lake

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President's letter (cont.)



Boyd Pond is located off Cottage Hill Road, just east of Lake of the Woods. The parcel includes 54 acres, the majority of which is a 25 acre pond, and encompasses about 95% of the total pond shore-frontage.

but the challenging news was that the deal had to close before the end of August! The IRLC had just two months to raise \$80,000 but we had never done any significant fundraising before. I won't bore you with all the details but I will fill you in on a few high points. Two IRLC founding members donated \$12,500 each in the first week for the down payment. With help from an outside consultant, a number of our volunteer Board Members got a quick education in fundraising and then began an effort to generate financial support. After only 5 weeks we had received eleven gifts from Lake of the Woods residents (including three from their lake association itself), three donations from long term IRLC supporters, a large first gift from a new IRLC supporter plus the proceeds of our Celebration of the Lakes auction. All these gifts were matched dollar for dollar (\$15,000) by an anonymous friend of the IRLC bringing the total raised to almost \$57,000! We were able to quickly and inexpensively borrow the remaining \$23,000 from a long term IRLC supporter to finalize the acquisition on time by the end of August!!

Wow, while it was a blur it was a very successful one.

We still need to quickly pay off that debt. I am pleased to announce that we now have another anonymous \$10,000 matching challenge grant so the next \$10,000 of donations made by anyone to our "Buy the Pond" fund will be automatically doubled! Please consider helping us cross the finish line on this purchase! But this project is even more exciting than acquiring and protecting a really beautiful and important place. Early in the process we realized that this would be an excellent site for a handicapped accessible trail and picnic overlook, and potentially a suitable place for an accessible dock in the pond.

I am very proud of how rapidly and effectively our all-volunteer organization rose to the complex challenge to acquire the pond property so quickly. Thank you so much! I am confident our volunteers will apply themselves in the same way to make this very special place for special people a reality. Let us know how you would like to be involved in this unique project. With your support this can become a special place in the North Country

In summary, it really was quite an eventful and amazing summer for the Indian River Lakes Conservancy and one which has moved us into a new and exciting stage of our growth. We hope to see you during the winter but if not



Boyd Pond seen through the trees.

we look forward to our next eventful and beautiful spring, summer and fall. Can it be even more exciting than 2012 – we expect so!

As always we welcome your ideas, your feedback, your support and of course, as an all-volunteer organization, your involvement. There are many ways to help make things happen. Let us know what gets you excited, where you think you could make a difference. Thank you again for all that you do.



Looking south. Boyd Pond has no waterfront buildings. Its pristine, tranquil setting overlooks clean placid water and diverse bird and other wildlife.

Evening Grosbeak

Where have all the Evening Grosbeaks gone, long time passing?

Where have all the Evening Grosbeaks gone, long time ago?

I offer apologies to Peter, Paul and Mary but the foregoing summarizes the current reality of this enigmatic species. Unknown in the northeast by nineteenth and early twentieth century naturalists, this species began to increase in numbers during the 1920s and 1930s. By the time I began birding in the 1960s they were common throughout much of the northeast from October to May. They were also a common but localized breeder in the Adirondacks with a small population on the Tug Hill Plateau. In winter bird feeding stations would often attract dozens to hundreds of “grospsigs” that would vacuum sunflower seed at an amazing rate. During heavy invasion years second mortgages were needed to buy enough seed until the hordes departed in May.

All this began to change in the early-mid 1990s. This species became much less frequent in winter and flocks of migrants were noticeably smaller. By the turn of this century Evening Grosbeak had become an uncommon bird in many areas. Their decline was most noticeable in winter. They had now become much more localized in smaller numbers even during this prime season. Breeding populations outside of the Adirondacks also appeared greatly reduced. Migrant numbers were variable but clearly indicated decline. During the 1970s and 80s it was not unusual to count 1000-3000 on single days in early May as they passed the lookout at the Derby Hill Bird Observatory near Mexico N. Y. Now if 100-150 are noted in a day it is considered a large movement. WHY? The human control of spruce budworm outbreaks for

nearly twenty years has been suggested as a factor. Information suggests that budworm outbreaks are important to this species' large northern populations. Other factors may certainly be at work but whatever they are, no definitive evidence exists. The decline could be partly due to some long-term cycle. We simply don't know.

Migration occurs from March to mid-May, peaking during the first two weeks of May. As with most other northern finches this species is somewhat irruptive and numbers vary from year to year. Since sex ratios differ depending on the wintering area, and vary within flocks, migrant flocks may be mainly males, mainly females or mixed. Flocks on the move requiring energy may vacuum seed from feeders in a very short period before moving on. Primarily a diurnal migrant, some nighttime movement by flocks is possible. By late May most migrants have reached their breeding grounds.

Northern New York is at the southern edge of the species breeding range in the east. The primary breeding range of Evening Grosbeak is the Boreal Forest region of Canada. Populations also extend south along the high Rockies. Many couples are paired when they arrive on the breeding grounds. As with many northern species responding to a short summer, nesting is a rapid process. The female builds the nest and lays up to five eggs. Incubation takes about two weeks before young hatch. The nestling period lasts another two to three weeks before young fledge and move about. Parents feed young up to three months of age. At this time they are ready to join late summer feeding flocks prior to migration.

At current depressed population levels they may be very scarce or virtually absent in some years. As I



write this at the end of October, 2012 it appears this fall/winter there may be at least a modest movement south. Several sightings of individuals, pairs and small flocks have been noted in central and northern New York in the last two weeks. It may be that birds from Ontario and Quebec found late summer feeding conditions poor in their northern forest breeding areas. The insect food that sustained their diet during the summer months has waned and seeds/fruits have become increasingly important to their survival. If seed crops of preferred trees and shrubs are poor then flocks must head south seeking better fare.

Today's much smaller flocks also often arrive later in fall and seem to depart earlier in spring. This species' winter range once extended to Virginia and the lower Mississippi Valley but with recent population declines it may be shrinking northward. Flocks in New England and New York in winter are usually dominated by a high

(continued on page 6)

Gerry Smith is a senior Northern New York ornithologist and consulting ecologist. Gerry is a devoted friend and advocate for grass roots land trusts and the dedicated volunteers who share his love of nature.

Our Popular Seasonal Hikes Continue



Hikers at Grass Lake Overlook.

We had a great turnout of 30 members and friends joining naturalist Kim Cullen from the Minna Anthony Nature Center, for an October hike on the Grass Lake Overlook Trail. The outing sparked lively discussions regarding the value of dead trees, the homes they provide for various insects, mammals, birds, reptiles, and fungi; how the leaves reveal their color; and the value of having a forest with mixed species and mature trees. At the end of the hike everyone enjoyed refreshments provided by Dunkin' Donuts (*Arsenal Street*) and Price Chopper (*Watertown*).

Kim has agreed to lead a *Winter Wonderland* hike (or ski snowshoe trek, depending on the weather conditions) on the Grand Lake Reserve on February 2, 2013. Watch for email announcements with further details in January.

Student Begins Masters-Level Project to Study Grass Lake

The Grass Lake Association, with support from the IRLC, has been selected to host a student from SUNY Oneonta's Masters Program in Lake Management.

As part of our partnership with the Grass Lake Association, the Conservancy facilitated initial discussions with Oneonta's Professor Bill Harman and provided funding for the project. To participate in the Oneonta project, Lake Associations are asked for \$2,500 stipends to help cover research costs. IRLC will be contributing \$1,000 toward that total. We are also offering the student the use of our offices on Stine Road.

We hope that this will be the first of a long-term relationship with Oneonta, with at least one student starting a new two-year internship in the IRLC area each year until all of our lakes have been included in the project.

This year's student is Owen Zaengle. Owen is from Cooperstown, NY and received his undergraduate degree in Environmental Science from the State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry (SUNY ESF) in Syracuse, NY. At the end of his studies Owen will receive a masters degree in lake management through SUNY Oneonta.

Owen says the purpose of the project is "to craft a management plan that fits with the needs/desires of that community, creating a sustainable plan that will be responsive to both the social and ecological well-being of the lake system." He will be monitoring the lake, roughly every other week, to collect data and get to know the lake community.

Owen is particularly interested in lake biogeochemistry, how nutrients/elements cycle through the geologic and biotic components of a system, with a specific focus on the sediments.

We'll keep you posted on Owen's progress and his observations about our region. Gerry Cole, president of the Grass Lake Association, is Owen's primary Grass Lake contact and the Oneonta Project liason from the IRLC is Rick Lopez.



Hikers examine White Pine needle cluster.

2012 Celebration of the Lakes

This year's Celebration of the Lakes was an unqualified success. More guests than ever before enjoyed delicious food, including a pig roast barbecue, prepared by the Pickle Barrel Cafe, and additional gourmet treats provided by Tin Pan Galley, Doxtater's Bakery, Hannaford, Chobani and Covered-in-Chocolate.

We had great music for dancing and listening, provided by the Caramelo Trio, a Potsdam ensemble specializing in Latin dance

styles with a touch of swing.

A fabulous Silent Auction raised \$4,100 toward the purchase of Boyd Pond. The Auction's success was the result of generous donations from the individuals and businesses that are listed on the next page, and Celebration of the Lakes guests who bid so generously on the items.

*It's never too soon to plan:
The date for the Celebration of the Lakes 2013 is August 9 at Coyote Moon!*

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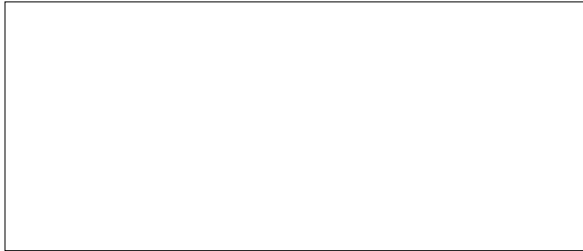
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Grosbeak (cont.)

percentage of males. At a bird feeder even a small flock can produce a great chorus of "gleep gleep" that can be heard throughout the neighborhood. The animation that this species adds to cold/snowy winter days cannot but help to brighten one's spirit. I for one

greatly miss the hordes of winter visitors and their decline should have impacted the stocks of companies producing sunflower seeds.

While there are many theories of why this species exploded eastward from 1920 onward and why recent declines have occurred, as with most

natural phenomenon of this type, a short century and a half view makes determining causes problematic at best. The estimated population decline of 75% for this species is worrisome regardless of the cause. Fortunately we now have tools like E-Bird that will help monitor this conspicuous species in future years.

At the moment the future of Evening Grosbeak in our region appears very much in doubt. More basic research to develop conservation options is needed. Hopefully flocks of this garrulous species will entertain future generations of humans here. Stay tuned.



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An Indian River Lakes Conservancy Membership could be the perfect gift for someone on your holiday list! You can also make a contribution to your choice of IRLC Conservancy Funds: Scholarship, Endowment or Stewardship. Your tax deductible gift contribution or gift membership will be acknowledged with a holiday card featuring one of Mark Scarlett's beautiful photographs

of the lakes area. See the enclosed remittance envelope for details or email us at IndianRiverLakes@gmail.org.

This year we're encouraging our supporters to help fund the purchase of Boyd Pond. Your contribution will help us protect Lake of the Woods by ensuring that the lake's excellent water quality will not be degraded by this major water source. Boyd Pond will also provide another opportunity for people to **Enjoy** the beauty of the Indian River Lakes area

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