

Newsletter IRLC

Indian River Lakes Conservancy

SPRING/SUMMER 2008

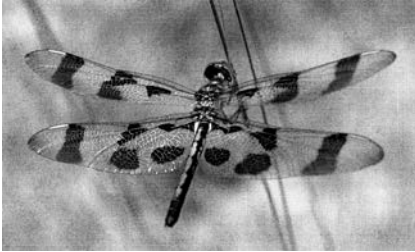


photo by Stephen Diehl Halloween Pennant

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

Thanks to everyone who responded to our winter newsletter with memberships and contributions. The Conservancy has a full slate of activities and projects in the coming months and your support is vitally important to us and our ability to serve you and to continue our work on behalf of the Indian River Lakes region.

Of special importance are a number of initiatives focusing on improvements to the Grand Lake Reserve. Spanning over a thousand acres between Butterfield and Grass Lakes, the Conservancy has been working for several years to enhance the value of this property as a showcase of how preserved lands can serve the public good.

One of the earliest initiatives involved the development of a hunting lottery to encourage the management of the deer on the reserve. Unfortunately, as observed by DEC Forester Glenn Roberts on a recent field trip to the Reserve, the deer seem to be gaining the upper hand. Overgrazing can have significant, long

term detrimental effects on the entire ecosystem, including birds and other wildlife that depend on the diversity of plant life depleted by the deer. Despite the claims of some that the deer have become harder to find, Glenn Roberts' trained eye tells him that they are there in overabundance. We encourage interested hunters to contact Terry Panunzio, who has agreed to head up the hunting lottery for the Reserve. Terry can be reached at 482-2519.

With the help of hard working volunteers, the Conservancy has also sought to improve public access to the Reserve's ruggedly beautiful landscape through the development of parking areas and hiking trails. Over the last two years, more than 3.5 miles of trails have been opened on the Grass Lake side of the Reserve. This year we will begin work on improving access on the Butterfield Lake side with the development of nearly two miles of new trails, including several dramatic vistas overlooking both the lake and extensive wetlands adjoining the lake that are known to be frequented by eagles.

This year's trail clearing day will take place on July 12th, following the Conservancy's Annual meeting, which will be held at 1:00 PM at the Grand Lake Reserve's main parking lot on Burns Road. Certainly, we encourage anyone interested in the Conservancy, especially members, to join us for the Annual meeting, whether or not you are inclined to pitch in for the trail clearing activities. If there is enough interest and more to your liking, we will be glad to provide for guided tours of the already completed trails that day. For more information, please call Mark Scarlett at 324-5240.

Among the most significant opportunities for enhancing the Grand Lake Reserve are those that involve the acquisition of especially sensitive and environmentally important properties nearby. Toward that end, the Conservancy was recently awarded a \$12,000 New York State Conservation Partnership Program grant to help with legal and survey costs for such purchases. In that

regard, we are especially excited to hear from good friends of the Conservancy who have gained control of a large parcel of crucially important land adjoining the Reserve on the shallow end of Grass Lake. Protecting this parcel, which narrowly escaped logging just a few years ago, will preserve a large stretch of Grass Lake shoreline and enhance the value of the remaining properties on the lake. Protecting this parcel will also limit the potential threat to the water quality that further development near those shallow waters might pose.

We hope to be able to share more details later in the summer about the potential for the Conservancy to acquire this unique and environmentally sensitive property. We anticipate this will entail a more ambitious fundraising effort than we have ever faced before, but we also hope you will find this opportunity as exciting as we do and worthy of your support.

Finally, in the midst of all these activities and developments, we are reminded of the fact that the Indian River Lakes Conservancy was established just ten years ago by a small group of thoughtful individuals who were concerned for the future of our environment and the unique qualities of this place. Since then, the Conservancy has grown significantly in numbers and in achievements. As we look forward to all the promise that our future holds, we hope you will take a moment to join us in a special Celebration of the Indian River Lakes and of the Conservancy's 10th Anniversary on August 2nd at a picnic hosted by Sandy and Margie Hillback at their cottage on Butterfield Lake. We will be sending invitations and otherwise providing publicity with more information early in the summer. We hope to see you there.

Conservation Tax Incentives Expanded

In August, 2006 bill H.R. 4 was signed into law. It significantly expanded the federal tax incentive for

conservation easement donations. The new law made the following changes:

-Raised 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 tax deductions for a voluntary conservation agreement from 5 to 15 years.

The new legislation imposed several reforms to help prevent abuse of the incentive including new rules for taxpayer misstatements and appraiser qualifications.

The old law only applied to easements donated in 2006 and 2007.

The new 2008 Farm Bill extends the tax incentive for conservation easement donations to 2008 and 2009.

If you want to preserve conservation worthy lands for the benefit of future generations now would be a good time to act and take advantage of the enhanced tax benefits which will expire on 12/31/2009.

With this fully volunteer program a landowner can donate a conservation easement to a 501(c) (3) land trust, like IRLC, and receive the federal income tax benefits.

An appraisal of the property is required before and after the donation to determine the reduction in value which is the basis for the donor's IRS deduction.

The donation is the value of the development rights, mining rights, logging rights, or any other rights negotiated with and donated to the land trust. Each conservation easement is unique and customized to meet the needs of the landowner and the land trust.

The landowner maintains ownership of the property and can pass it along in the family or sell the land at any time. This is an excellent opportunity for any taxpayer wishing to preserve some or all of their land and is especially beneficial to working farmers and ranchers who wish to keep their farms in production for future generations.

SUMMER EVENTS

SAT. JULY 5: Booth at Redwood Community Celebration

SAT. JULY 12: 1:00 Annual Meeting at Grand Lake Reserve Main Parking Lot. Trail Clearing Day immediately following

SAT. AUGUST 2: 10th Anniversary Picnic/Fundraiser

Damsels and Dragons

By Vici Zaremba and Stephen Diehl

While some become almost hysterical when confronted with snakes, spiders, salamanders and other "creepy crawlers" found in our diverse northern woodlands, almost everyone young and old smiles at the mention of dragonflies and their cousins, the damselflies. But few bother to study them or even know that the two groups make up the order Odonata. It is not enough to think of the 190+ species of Odonata, found in New York State, as flying jewelry with their magical combinations of gold, yellow, turquoise, green, red, blue, and mixtures in-between. We must study them to know what habitats they require and in the mean time continue to protect the wetlands, forests, and fields we currently know they need. Eggs are oviposited (laid) in or on aquatic vegetation or in the water. Once a dragonfly or damselfly's egg hatches, it becomes a nymph. Depending on the species, nymphs live underwater from a few months to two or more years and they are constantly hungry. A dragonfly nymph can eat up to 60 mosquito larvae per hour! The nymphs live in ponds, creeks, rivers, lakes, marshes, bog, fens, and vernal pools...just about anywhere there is relatively clean water. Some Odonata species prefer a specialized water environment such as a bog, while others are less choosy. Nymphs are extremely hard to find and observe. Some of what is known about them has been gleaned from raising them in controlled conditions. Starting in early May and lasting through late September, depending on the species, fully developed nymphs leave the water. They crawl onto vegetation, rocks, bridge abutments,

etc., where the adult will break out of the nymph skin. This discarded skin, known as an exuvia, is exciting to find although hard to spot. The skin provides critical information such as what species hatched and that it was breeding locally or nearby. The newly hatched adult is known as a teneral and is somewhat delicate and slower reacting than a "hardened" adult. The teneral may not have fully developed colors and patterns critical for identification.

On a given day we can see adult dragonflies and damselflies from early morning until twilight if the air temperature is adequate.

"Crepuscular" species prefer to fly only early and late making them difficult to study. While most damselflies overwinter within 6 feet of the ground, dragonflies rest from ground level to high in trees, often hanging vertically.

*There is much fieldwork to be accomplished in Jefferson County alone. It is predicted that there should be at least 90 Odonata species county wide, yet, as recently as 2006, only 47 species had been recorded in Jefferson County. Currently the New York Natural Heritage Program is in the 4th year of the dragonfly/damselfly survey. The program is a partnership between The Nature Conservancy and NYS DEC. Fieldwork last summer in conjunction with the New York Natural Heritage Program added 15 new county records/species lending hope that even more will be found this season. Some of the new record/species were found on IRLC property or in the Indian River watershed all the way to Indian Lake on Fort Drum. The Nature Conservancy/DEC zoologists were particularly excited about two of the new county records. A swamp darner (*Epiaeschna heros*) is a 3.5 inch spectacular dragonfly which was found outside of Watertown and is normally not observed this far north. The more delicate Halloween Pennant (*Celithemis eponina*) was found by the hundreds on IRLC properties. One new record/species has already been found in 2008.*

As more critical wetlands and/or conservation easements are acquired by IRLC, we continue to insure that dragonflies and damselflies dependent on these various wetlands will be protected.

Charismatic Birds of the Indian River Lakes region

Part 6

By: Gerry Smith

Golden-winged Warbler

Many of the birds featured in this column thus far are familiar to the human residents of the Indian River Lakes region. These birds either are large and conspicuous, such as Common Loon and Osprey, or present near residences such as the Eastern Phoebe. The species chosen for this newsletter will have been heard by few residents and seen by even fewer. The Golden-winged Warbler is a denizen of young swamp woods and other suitable wooded habitat in the Indian River Lakes Region. Our area harbors one of the best remaining populations of this declining species in New York State. If the population slide continues Golden-winged Warbler will be a candidate for the Federal endangered species list in the not too distant future.

The Golden-winged Warbler is a relatively recent arrival in the Indian River Lakes region. Forty years ago they would have been rare locally. This is because this species is slowly expanding northward as its close relative the Blue-winged Warbler does likewise. Before massive changes to the eastern North American landscape as a result of human activity, these two warblers were geographically isolated from each other during the breeding season. This development allowed these very alike birds that occupy very similar habitats and ecological niches to breed in the same areas. When human activities resulted in developing this overlapping range it meant trouble for the less aggressive and less adaptable Golden-wing. The two warblers are now interbreeding and in essence the Blue-winged Warbler is genetically swamping

its close relative. In all but a few areas, once Blue-winged Warblers arrive Golden-winged Warblers disappear within fifty years. Hopefully our region will be an area where active habitat management can help them persist.

The Indian River Lakes are near the northeastern edge of this species breeding range that extends westward to Minnesota and southward to the Appalachians. For a warbler the Golden-winged is a relatively early migrant. Males appear in the first 10 days of May a few days before the females. They quickly establish territories that will be defended from other pairs. The primary method of defense is the male's song, a throaty BEE BZZ BZZ BZZ repeated frequently early in the nesting season and less often later. This song is very similar to the Blue-wings BEE BZZ song but adds extra BZZ notes. Nesting begins almost immediately after the pair is formed. The female builds the nest on the ground usually under low shrubs. On average 5 eggs are laid and in less than two weeks they will hatch if predation does not intervene.

Once hatched, if they survive, the young will leave the nest in about 12-14 days. Like all ground nesting birds this species suffers from a high rate of predation so many nests fail. Re-nesting will occur and is often successful. In addition to predation brood parasitism by Brown-headed Cowbird is a major threat to many of our eastern songbirds. The cowbird is much larger than its smaller host species and lays one or more eggs in the warbler's nest. These young cowbirds develop and grow faster than young warblers. The adults feed all young in the nest and young cowbirds out compete the smaller warblers for food. As a result the host species own young die. Historically the Golden-winged Warbler had little interactions with Brown-headed Cowbird before the large scale clearing of eastern North America. The warbler has no evolutionary defenses against cowbird parasitism since this contact is so recent.

The young Golden-winged Warblers that survive to fledge are distributed as each parent takes part of the brood to care for. The splitting of the brood reduces the probability of predation of the entire

group. The young become independent in a few weeks and the adults then begin their annual molt. Once the care of young dominates the adult's world, singing becomes very infrequent and this species become very hard to find. I have often walked past a group of Golden-winged Warblers and not detected them until I saw a slight movement as I passed by.

Just as this species is an early spring arriving warbler they depart early as well.

Southbound migration may commence in early August and is well underway by the middle of the month. By Labor Day almost all of our Golden-winged Warblers are headed for their wintering grounds that extend from Honduras to Northern South America. This species wintering range covers a relatively small area of the tropics and thus it may be under unknown threats there as well as in North America.

Many long-time birders and professional conservationists are very concerned about the future of this beautiful little highly imperiled warbler. Aggressive habitat protection and management will be required if this species is to survive here and breed, as it does now, on the Grand Lake Reserve in the 22nd century. The first step in assuring they have a place to return to each May is protecting lands for wildlife habitat throughout the region. If we succeed future generations can search for this interesting species and enjoy their lazy buzzy trill for time to come.

Next Time: Ruby-throated Hummingbird

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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

Redwood, New York 13679

Return Service Requested

