

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Elliott Hillback, IRLC President



E.D. Hillback

Another summer in the North Country has come and gone. We have seen the leaves arrive with refreshing hues of green and depart in a flurry of yellow, orange and red. Thankfully, most of the ornery bugs have gone with them. Most of our seasonal bird population has flown for warmer climates and the rest will soon follow. We have been amazed by red sunrises and blue afternoon skies full of puffy white clouds and also drenched by torrential rains. Ospreys, herons, loons and an occasional eagle have caused us to stop and smile. A four inch sunny on a kid's rod or a colorful dragonfly that lands on grandma's shoulder has led to a big grin. These are just a few of the things we are working to preserve with your dedicated help.

The Indian River Lakes Conservancy had an excellent summer. In July a new slate of officers was elected with myself as President,

Jeff Garvey as Vice President, Mark Scarlett as Treasurer, and Shirley Carpenter as Secretary. I would like to thank Mark for his vision and leadership over the last several years. His tenure was defined by several major grant supported land acquisitions, an expanded and strengthened board, a more effective organization with our newly formed Stewardship and Development committees, and strong leadership through a rigorous Land Trust Alliance sponsored self-assessment process. And now he continues to serve as our Treasurer. Thank you Mark!

Our "Celebration of the Lakes" was exactly that – a celebration of the Indian River Lakes area and its unique beauty. All in all it was a fun event during which we could celebrate our accomplishments and share our excitement about the opportunities that lie ahead (*see Shirley Carpenter's article on page 6 for an overview*). (continued)

"As an all-volunteer organization, every volunteer, every member, every committee member, every board member is a crucial part of our long term success."

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Shirley Carpenter, *Secretary*
Mark Scarlett, *Treasurer*

Dani Baker
Vici Diehl
Rick Lopez
Dave Martin
Terry Panunzio
Ed Robertson
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Bob Wakefield

The progress to finalize the acquisition of several significant parcels totaling over 500 acres, which is supported by the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, has been excellent and we hope to close on the land around year end. The majority of these parcels are important wetlands along the Indian and Oswegatchie Rivers and in and around Grass Lake. Efforts are now underway to obtain additional funding to support baseline assessments of these properties and develop a specific stewardship plan for each.

Our new board committees are developing their priorities and planning new initiatives while beginning to take action. The Stewardship Committee, for example, acted quickly to fabricate and install gates at our trail heads along Burns Road after use of four-wheelers on our Grass Lake Trail was reported (*see article at right*). Our new brochure, which is enclosed with this newsletter, was put together by the Development Committee and is the first of a series of communications enhancements that will soon include a website. Major new activities will focus on comprehensive stewardship plans, and new outreach and membership development efforts. We are in the process of building effective methods, practices and programs that will sustain the Indian River Lakes Conservancy for the long term because our legal and moral responsibility is to care for this land *forever*.

As an “all volunteer organization” with no paid staff, every volunteer, every member, every committee member, every board member is a crucial part of our long term success. I would like to thank you for everything you have

done and at the same time ask you to think about new ways that you can become more involved. That could be by helping us **Protect** our land through the implementation of the new stewardship plans for The Grand Lake Reserve now in development. It might be by helping us increase the breadth and diversity of our outreach programs to allow more people to **Enjoy** the Indian River Lakes area, or by organizing opportunities for young people to get out on the land with experts and teachers to **Learn** about the wonders, complexity and importance of our natural environment.

We strongly feel that these three key words -- **Protect • Learn • Enjoy** -- describe the broad range of our responsibilities and our opportunities. You will see them in the new brochure and you will begin to see them provide definition to new programs that are in the early stages of planning. In the longer term we will gauge our success against these key words. In that regard, there is another way you can help – and that is with ideas and suggestions. How could we help people **Enjoy** and **Learn** better? How could we **Protect** our land and all that is on it more effectively? Please be vocal, let us know what you think: e-mail us at our new e-mail address which is IndianRiverlakes@gmail.com, drop us a note to Box 27, Redwood, NY 13679, or call Jeff or myself (our phone numbers are on the front page).

We look forward to the opportunity to **Protect** the natural environment while helping you, our members and neighbors, **Learn** about its complexity and importance and **Enjoy** its special beauty.

Stewardship NOTES

Over the past several months, the IRLC has established a Stewardship Committee charged with maintenance and construction projects within IRLC properties and developing a written protocol for the environmental stewardship of IRLC properties.

Just weeks after beginning this process, a group of about twelve ATVs entered three IRLC trails on Burns Road in the Town of Theresa. Several IRLC board members responded and found that the trails had been damaged by the ATV traffic. Realizing that the signage we display along our property lines and at the trail heads was not enough to prevent this kind of trespass and damage, members of the Stewardship Committee had gates constructed to limit access to the trails. The trail is now blocked to vehicular traffic by the gates, but hikers can still access the trail through the two vertical pipes to the side.

The “up” side of this situation is that we learned how well our organization can respond to a challenge of this nature. An added bonus is that our trails are now easier to locate. All you have to do is look for the “chocolate” gates!



If you are interested in volunteering with the IRLC Stewardship Committee, contact Rick Lopez at (315) 405 1464.

Watch for the launch of our website:

www.IndianRiverLakes.org

coming soon and featuring

trail maps, IRLC publications, events and membership information and great links!

Golden-wings in our Midst

Imagine . . .

You're standing along the forest edge. There is an abandoned farm field on one side and the forest is on the other. You look out over the field and see that the lack of recent agricultural activity has allowed patches of shrubs and small trees to take hold throughout the field. You hear Eastern Towhees, Field Sparrows, and maybe, if you're lucky, even a Prairie Warbler. Then, a bird bursts out of a shrubby patch to perch on the extending limb of a tall sapling. It sits proudly and sings a Bee-buzz-buzz-buzz. This bird traveled more than 2,700 miles from Central or South America to carve out and defend a small area of about 1.5 acres in the Indian River Lakes area to raise a family. You realize that you are lucky enough to witness one of the fastest declining species of migrant songbirds today, the Golden-winged Warbler.

photo by Martin Piorkowski



The Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*) is a small Neotropical migrant songbird that breeds in early successional forest habitats in the northeastern U.S. and southeastern Canada. Golden-wing populations throughout their breeding range have been decreasing by as much 3.7% per year for the past 37 years and are designated as endangered in four states, threatened in one, and of conservation priority in 12 others. These population declines are attributed to several factors which include the loss of breeding habitat (due to human development and maturing of early successional habitats), the loss or degradation of migrational stop-over habitat and wintering habitat, and hybridization with Blue-winged Warblers.

Golden-wings require very specific habitat characteristics for breeding. They prefer shrubby habitats mixed with herbaceous vegetation contained within a larger forest complex. In the Northeast, suitable habitats include abandoned farm fields, utility rights-of-way, forest clear cuts, and wetlands. The need for a specific combination and orientation of habitat characteristics cause Golden-wings to be patchily distributed throughout their breeding range, resulting in dense clusters of birds separated by sometimes hundreds of miles of unsuitable habitat.

In addition to habitat loss, Golden-wings are impacted by encroaching Blue-winged Warblers. Blue-wings hybridize with Golden-wings and after several years, seem to push Golden-wings from their habitat. Over the decades, this has caused the Blue-wing to shift the core of its breeding population northward through the Appalachians and into the Northeast. In 2007 a research effort began to quantify specific habitat characteristics that would promote Golden-wing success without encouraging further interactions with



Golden-winged Warbler

*Photo by Martin Piorkowski
Cornell Lab of Ornithology*

Blue-wings and additional hybridization. The effort stretches across the breeding range of the species, from North Carolina north to Ontario and west to Minnesota and Manitoba. With annual declines over 20% for the northeastern U.S., specific attention is being focused in parts of this region that harbor birds. One such study location is nestled in the St. Lawrence/Indian River Lakes region of New York State. This region is dominated by two land conditions. One is a ridge and valley region located towards the St. Lawrence River and pock-marked with small ponds and lakes. The other is a flatter, agricultural dominated landscape at the foot of the Adirondacks. Most of the Golden-wings in the region are found in the abandoned farmland that occupies the valleys of the St. Lawrence River area.

(continued)

Ron Rohrbaugh is the Assistant Director of Conservation Sciences and **Martin Piorkowski** a Project Coordinator/ Conservation Biologist at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology in Ithaca, NY.

The Cornell Lab of Ornithology is a world leader in the study, appreciation, and conservation of birds. To learn more about their work visit www.birds.cornell.edu.

During 2008, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, along with partners, including Tom Langen at Clarkson University, began monitoring the region to determine the extent of the Golden-winged Warbler population in northwestern New York. We used a standardized monitoring protocol using playback recordings of Golden-winged and Blue-winged warblers to bring them into view, as identification is difficult (if not impossible) by song alone because the individual species and their hybrids sing each other's songs. Then in 2009 and 2010, a small team of trained individuals went back to this region and trapped using mist nets, as many individual Golden-wings, Blue-wings, and hybrids as possible. Each individual caught was banded with USFWS aluminum leg band, and small blood, feather, and toe-nail samples were taken. The samples are being used to determine the genetic purity of the Golden-wings in this area and to help us sort out how pure Golden-wings might use habitat differently than Blue-wings or hybrids. The genetic analyses are needed because in some cases hybrids can look like pure Golden-wings. These hybrids are known as cryptic hybrids and cannot be easily distinguished from "pure" Golden-wings without DNA screening.

Determining whether a Golden-wing is pure or a hybrid only tells us half the story. We need to characterize the habitat within these bird's breeding

territories. We collect habitat data after birds have finished breeding for the year, typically after June 15. Habitat data can be incredibly tedious to collect, as we crawl around on our hands and knees counting all of the vegetation stems in each breeding territory, which is a lot considering that a total of 154 birds were caught in 2009 and 2010. Habitats ranged from shrubby wetland to prickly ash uplands. Copious measurements were made at each site to estimate herbaceous cover, vegetation composition, number of shrub stems, basal area of trees, and distances to water to name a few. Analyses of the habitat and genetic data are ongoing, and we hope to have results soon.

Our current direction is to foster stable and increasing Golden-wing populations throughout their breeding range by management of specific habitat characteristics that lead to successful nesting, while discouraging Blue-winged Warbler encroachment and ultimately hybridization. We hope to apply this to several "habitat management demonstration sites" throughout the Golden-wings' breeding range beginning in 2011, then evaluate the success of these "demonstration sites" through additional monitoring of Golden-wing numbers and genetic purity. This is only half the battle, however, as Golden-wings only spend about five months out of the year here on their breeding grounds. The rest



Blue-winged Warbler
Photo by Martin Piorkowski

of their time is spent migrating or in Central America or northwestern South America during the winter months.

Specific focal areas within their breeding range have already been identified by experts who work closely with this species in order to determine areas that would most benefit from conservation planning and management implementation. It's possible that one such demonstration area will be located in the Indian River Lakes region.

So the next time you are wandering through a thicket on a warm spring day, don't dismiss that buzzy sound in your ears. Take a more careful listen and move near. You might just be lucky enough to hear the *Bee-buzz-buzz-buzz* and see the brilliant black and yellow of one of our most threatened songbirds.

Protect • Learn • Enjoy

Coming in 2011 IRLC Newsletters



Blue-spotted Salamander
photo by Dr. G. Johnson, SUNY Potsdam

Turtles, Snakes, Frogs & Salamanders

Dr. Glenn Johnson, SUNY Potsdam, has spent the last three summers, with his students, looking for nine species in the Indian River Lakes and Indian River Watershed. These species are considered of greatest conservation need meaning they are relatively rare. Dr. Johnson has called the area a "hot spot," having found all nine of the species he sought including Stinkpot Turtles, Blandings Turtles, Map Turtles, Black Rat Snakes, Ribbon Snakes, Green Snakes, Chorus Frogs, Four-toed Salamanders, and Blue-spotted Salamanders.

Articles next year will introduce you to his finds and his research.

Information on Nuisance and Invasive Species

– An invasive is any non-native plant or animal that can cause harm to the environment or human health. Our 2011 IRLC Newsletters will bring you articles highlighting the "most wanted" to be found and destroyed. From Black and European Swallow-wart, to Zebra Mussels, Rock Snot and the Emerald Ash Borer, you will learn what to look for and how to deal with them.

2010 MEMBERSHIP

The mission of IRLC could not be accomplished without the support of our members and donors. Contributions have been received this year from the following:

Antique Boat Museum
 Fred & Rosemarie Belcher
 Peter & Sharry Berzins
 Stephen and Kay Bolivar
 Jim and Gail Borkman
 Mary & Bill Bostick
 David Brandt
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 Janet Buckland
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 Stephen F. Caldwell
 Henry H. Carse
 Robert & Phyllis Dake
 Gifts received In Honor of John
 and Liz Scarlett
 Tessa & Spenser Deng

We value the contributions of all our donors and regret any errors or omissions. Please let us know so we can correct them promptly.

Renew your membership. Don't miss out on our 2011 Newsletters!

____ Renewal

INDIAN RIVER LAKES CONSERVANCY ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP FORM - 2011

____ New Member

Name: _____ E-Mail _____

Permanent Mailing Address: _____ Phone: _____

Seasonal Mailing Address: _____ Phone: _____

Total Amount
 Enclosed:

\$ _____

Dragonfly - \$25.00

Loon - \$250.00

\$ _____ Scholarship Fund

\$ _____ Donation in Memory/Honor of _____

Warbler - \$50.00

Osprey - \$500.00

\$ _____ Endowment Fund

Whip-poor-will - \$100.00

Eagle - \$1,000.00 and above

\$ _____ Stewardship Fund

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: _____

Please contact me: regarding Conservation Easements with information about including IRLC in my will I have included IRLC in my will

ODE NOTES

Jewelwings of the Indian River Watershed

In early June dragonflies and damselflies make their presence known - especially if you know where to look. One June morning we were searching along the Indian River, finding a few specimens to bring to an afternoon presentation for 2nd graders at Antwerp Elementary School. Along with several dragonflies, we netted an Ebony Jewelwing (*Calopteryx maculata*) damselfly. This rather large damselfly with its black wings got the most attention from the 60 enthusiastic 2nd graders. They saw its metallic green body up close with a magnifier and giggled when we gently held it by its wings and lightly touched the Ebony's velcro-like legs to the backs of the children's outstretched hands. At the conclusion of the class, they insisted we release the Ebony and other dragonflies (which was what we intended).

Returning to our morning location, the "visual aids" flew off. Suddenly, what appeared to be a different species of Jewelwing fluttered by. As with most damselflies and dragonflies, they have to be netted and examined closely in order to confirm what they are. After netting several individuals,

Vici studied the subtle differences in wing shape and wing markings as well as the face coloration and determined we had found not one but two Jewelwing species; the River (*Calopteryx aquabilis*) and the Superb (*Calopteryx amata*). The Superb Jewelwing was a Jefferson County record and the western-most specimen found during the just completed NYS Natural Heritage Program Dragonfly & Damselfly Survey. The Superb has a state ranking of S3 meaning it is uncommon. What is particularly interesting is that it is almost unheard of to find the Ebony, River, and Superb Jewelwings in the same location. More astonishing was to find all three a few weeks later on another section of the Indian River. Only six such sites exist in NYS and two of them are in the Indian River watershed!

Ebony, River and Superb Jewelwings are all members of the genus *Calopteryx* which means "beautiful wing." The name is truly appropriate. The wings are gorgeous, ranging from solid black to dark amber with green veins on the leading edge depending on the species.

Female Jewelwings boast white stigmas (a colored area located at the upper and outer edge of each wing), an easy way to separate males from females in the field.

As a group, the Ebony, River, and Superb are larger than many dragonflies. The Superb is

Dragon or Damselfly?

Dragonflies and damselflies are in the order **Odonata**.

A quick translation of the word odonata is "toothed ones," a reference to the awesome, toothy lower lip, or labium, which is used to capture and hold prey while their mandibles do the eating.

Anisoptera, the suborder of the dragonflies, means "different wings" as their hindwings are distinctly larger and differently shaped than their forewings.

The damselflies are in the suborder **Zygoptera**, which means "same wings," as their forewings and hindwings are about the same size and shape.



Male Ebony Jewelwing. Note the velcro-like legs that delighted students at Antwerp Elementary.



Wing Detail - Male River Jewelwing



Female Superb Jewelwing

the largest Jewelwing with a slim body of 2.5 inches, the River is slightly smaller, and the Ebony is the smallest at slightly less than 2.25 inches. Jewelwings breed in creeks, streams, and rivers remaining underwater as nymphs from one to three years depending on the species and environmental conditions. Emergence times for Jewelwing adults overlap, starting in late May and some adults can be seen flying through early September.



Female Ebony Jewelwing

Jewelwings are also unique in that both genders fly inland until sexually mature and then return to their natal environments (other odonata females fly and remain inland until they are ready to mate while males stay at the water's edge). Jewelwings perch on rocks and shoreline vegetation and can be seen opening and closing their wings while at rest. Their slow, bouncy flight resembles that of butterflies, yet is deceptive as they are quite difficult to net.



Female River Jewelwing

Like a majority of damselflies and dragonflies, the presence of Jewelwings is an indicator of good water quality. Prior to 1995, we never saw Jewelwings or

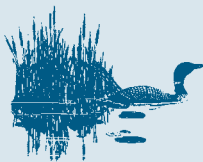
much other animal life on our property bordering the Indian River. Within 3 years after the completion of the village sewage treatment plant in 1993, they began to appear. And as time has gone by we have witnessed yearly increases in the number of species of damselflies and dragonflies along with other insects, frogs, birds, and fish. If you have property near clean running water, it is likely you too will see Jewelwings.

Noted nature photographers Stephen and Vici Diehl volunteer with the New York Natural Heritage Program Dragonfly and Damselfly Survey and the Adirondack Taxa Biodiversity Inventory. Vici is a member of the IRLC Board of Directors and Stephen teaches photography at Rochester Institute of Technology.

A superb shot of a male Superb Jewelwing



Female Superb Jewelwing



Indian River Lakes CONSERVANCY

About the IRLC

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.

Indian River Lakes Conservancy
P.O. Box 27
Redwood, New York 13679

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Current Resident or

Successful "Celebration of the Lakes" to Fund Scholarships for Local Students

More than sixty people enjoyed our annual "Celebration of the Lakes," held in August at Linda Vista, the Butterfield Lake cottage of Elliott (Sandy) and Margie Hillback. The event featured pontoon boat trips guided by naturalist Gerry Smith, followed by delicious barbecue from Dinosaur, and an array of outstanding side dishes and desserts prepared by the IRLC Board members.

The Celebration's silent auction to benefit the IRLC scholarship fund was extremely successful, due in large part to the efforts of organizers Dani Baker and Vici Diehl. Our thanks to the businesses and organizations who donated items for the auction including Clayton Opera House, River Wellness Center, Thousand Islands Art Center, Winged Bull Studio, Thousand Islands Land Trust, Channel Marker Wine Shop, The Gallery, Knorr's Grocery, Antique Boat Museum, Clayton Chamber of Commerce,

Clayton Island Tours, Porch and Paddle, and Save the River. Many individuals also made contributions to the auction including Vicky Storey, Steve and Vici Diehl, Dave and Gretchen Martin, Dani Baker, Mark Scarlett, and Jeff and Elaine Garvey. Of particular note was a Mad River canoe, donated by Bob Wakefield and a spectacular quilted wall hanging depicting plant and animal life indigenous to the Indian River Lakes region created by Denise Robertson.

A significant portion of the funds raised will help to provide scholarships to two local students who plan to pursue studies in environmental science. Students interested in applying for an award in 2011 should contact the guidance counselor in their school district or the science department chairperson at Jefferson Community College.

Happy Holidays
from the IRLC



Vici Diehl

Bunchberry (Cornus canadensis).
You'll find this smallest of dogwoods on trails in the Grand Lake Reserve. Flowering May-July, the berries/seeds are most noticeable in the fall.