

# FORGET-ME-NOT

## Myosotis Messenger

Edmund Niles Huyck Preserve  
& Biological Research Station  
P.O. Box 189, Rensselaerville, NY 12147



### Introduction

*Richard L. Wyman, Executive Director*

In these newsletters we frequently explore the modern roles of nature preserves and biological field stations. In our last two newsletters we wrote about the significance of salamanders to forest processes, about the nesting behavior of house wrens, the behavior of pumpkinseed sunfish, and of mallard ducks. This time we write about some other things that make the Huyck Preserve the unique place it is. We hope to share with you some of the wonder that we on occasion experience in our efforts.

For instance, we have begun a new educational initiative with Parson's school to help these children feel some of the thrill of the outdoors. Also we write about how the writings of naturalists can be used to help in our educational endeavors, but this piece is also about how this kind of writer informs us and places us in our setting.

Amongst the remarkable aspects of life on the Preserve are the people who come here. We describe a visit by a delegation of Chinese biologists to illustrate one such encounter.

We hope you enjoy reading about some of the variety of life on the Huyck Preserve.

### Preserve Cooperates with Parsons Center

A new hands-on environmental education program is being offered to students of the Parsons school by the staff of the E. N. Huyck Preserve. The program, conceived by Marilyn Wyman, educational coordinator at the Huyck Preserve, and Tom Mikulka, an instructor at the Parsons school, consists of one field trip to the Huyck Preserve where students will learn about field biology and ecology in a natural setting, and

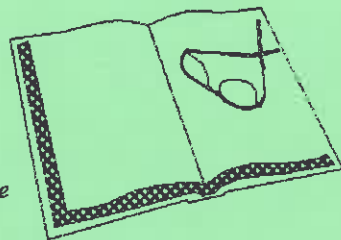
eight workshops at the school. These workshops will provide students with an opportunity to learn about field biology and ecology both in the classroom and in the field at a small wooded plot of land at the Parsons school. Classroom activities led by Tom Alworth, include plant-animal interactions, predator-prey relationships, and specific adaptations that enable animals to survive in various habitats. Each classroom discussion is followed by a live animal demonstration led by Ken Barnett, which have included a black rat snake, tarantula, iguana, and monitor lizard to name a few.

The program has been very successful fulfilling all expectations. The students have shown great interest in learning about field biology and ecology when the information is presented in an informal, hands-on atmosphere. While at the Huyck Preserve, the students walked around both Lincoln Pond and Lake Myosotis and were very excited about the wildlife they found along the waters edge. Our biggest challenge was keeping them from getting too wet as they frantically attempted to catch frogs, salamanders and crayfish for a closer look.

We are very encouraged by the response of the students at Parsons, who rarely get such opportunities to interact with and learn about wildlife. We intend to continue this educational program at the Parsons school in the future, and we are proud to be able to contribute to the growth and development of these very special students.



## John Burroughs Conference



John Burroughs is not as well known as Henry David Thoreau or John Muir, he wrote no single masterpiece, yet during a writing career that spanned sixty years, he achieved recognition as the dean of American nature writers. Burroughs published almost 300 essays most of which were included in twenty-seven books.

"Sharp Eyes: John Burroughs and Environmental Writing in America" is the title of a conference held in July of 1994 at SUNY Oneonta dedicated to the study and appreciation of John Burroughs and his influence on the field of environmental writing. Scholars from around the country presented papers on various topics including John Burroughs as writer, naturalist and educator. Tom Alworth presented a paper at the conference on how he currently uses the writings of John Burroughs in the Animal Ecology course that he developed for Greenville high school. Students are asked to read various chapters from the books of Burroughs and then discuss them in class. By reading Burroughs, students are exposed to natural history and scientific themes in a form of writing that is less formal and more enjoyable than that which is offered in textbooks. One of the many strengths of John Burroughs as a writer is his ability to present relatively accurate scientific information (especially for the turn of the century) in a manner that captures both the students' minds and imaginations. His ability to interpret nature and communicate its beauty through writing is unparalleled, and is extremely valuable in teaching students to respect and appreciate the natural world around them. Because the conference was such a success, SUNY Oneonta intends to host a John Burroughs conference every other year.

## OBFS International Committee Meeting

On November 18th and 19th the Huyck Preserve hosted a meeting of the International Committee of the Organization of Biological Field Stations. Committee members included Nancy Butler (University of Montana's Flathead Lake Biological Station), Thomas Crandell (University of Michigan Biological Station),

Bohdan Dziadyk (Augustana College Field Station, Illinois), Richard Wyman (International Committee Chairperson) and David Steadman (NYS Museum). They met to define short and long-term goals and prepare a proposal seeking support to aid in establishing a global communication/ information network among field stations.

Although much of the research on the effects of human activity and natural phenomena on ecosystems is conducted at biological field stations, there is no global network to help disseminate the information that is gathered. Over the past few years we have been contacting field stations in various parts of the world to gauge interest in establishing such a network. Responses have been overwhelmingly positive and it was generally agreed that an International Organization of Biological Field Stations would facilitate such cooperative interactions among field stations.

The Committee identified several immediate and long-term goals of the organization. Over the next three years a directory of field stations around the world and a newsletter will be produced to assist in this effort. Also during this three year period, an international meeting will be held to assess needs of field stations, set information network guidelines and formalize the organizational structure and mission.

Long-term goals include the establishment of a computer network among member stations, the provision of geopositioning devices to allow for accurate location and mapping of biological diversity, and the strengthening of library resources at field stations.

At the conclusion of the meetings a dinner was held at the Eldridge Research Center which gave members of the Huyck Preserve Board of Directors, Scientific Advisory Committee, Preserve staff and local biologists a chance to welcome the committee members and discuss the project. Special thanks to Belle Melzer for her time, talents, and input, Sandy Alworth and Marilyn Wyman for the wonderful dinner and ambiance and to Beth Brand for the scrumptious desserts.



The Fifth Annual

## GROUNDHOG DAY WINTER CARNIVAL

February 4, 1995 from 12:00 noon to 4:00 pm

at the

Edmund Niles Huyck Preserve  
Eldridge Research Center at Lincoln Pond  
Pond Hill Road  
Rensselaerville, NY

*Ken Barnett and his Wild Animals*

sledding  
cross-country skiing  
ice skating

storytelling  
ice fishing on Lake Myosotis  
food, food & more food



## Winter Night Walk

Join the Huyck Preserve staff at the Eldridge Research Center at 7:00 pm for an evening saunter in a winter wonderland on Friday, January 20. We will listen for coyotes, call in owls, look for animal tracks and drink lots of hot chocolate. To best enjoy this nighttime hike, bring your boots, skis, snowshoes, flashlights, and WARM CLOTHES! This will be fun if old man winter is agreeable... Please RSVP by calling Carolyn at 797-3440 or stop by the Mill House. Refreshments will be served!

## Wild Animal Shows

Naturalist Ken Barnett will bring a collection of unusual native and exotic creatures to the Eldridge Research Center for an up-close presentation for children and adults on Saturday, February 4th at the Huyck Preserve's annual Winter Carnival. He will return for a spring presentation on March 11th at noon.

Ken Barnett works at the Preserve during the Summer as a field assistant for Dr. Wyman. He presents wildlife programs to schools, libraries and special events throughout the year using his collection of unusual creatures.

Come join us for the fun! Call Carolyn at 797-3440 or stop by the Mill House for more information.



## Visitors from China

Richard L. Wyman

One of the wonderful things about living and working on the Huyck Preserve is that you never know who might show up. Four years ago Dr. Xingguo Han, then at Rutgers University, applied for and received a grant to study soil chemistry on the Preserve. He would come up from New Jersey with Rob Parmelee, another researcher working on the Preserve. For two years we worked together, as part of my detritus food web team, and in the evenings, after dinner, we would sit around my wood burning stove and talk. We learned a lot about China and Xingguo's early life there. We learned that he had taught himself his high school education by memorizing the Chinese dictionary. For instance when learning about trees he would come across the word "botany" which he would then have to look up. Then there would be the words, "the biology of plants", so he would have to look up biology. And so on. This study allowed him to take and pass well the college entrance exam. He did well enough in college to earn a fellowship to the University of Georgia to work on a doctorate in ecology. Interestingly, he worked at the Institute of Ecology, started by Eugene Odum, the first resident biologist at the Huyck Preserve in 1938.

Xingguo then did post doctoral work at Rutgers. During one of our evening discussions, Xingguo told us he would return to China when his post doctoral work was finished. He felt he could make a difference there.

He returned to China during the summer of 1993 to take up a position with the Chinese Academy of Science. Then he sort of disappeared. We feared that something untoward may have happened to him because our letters went unanswered. We thought perhaps he had gotten himself in trouble with the authorities. A year and a half went by and no word.

Then this October I received a phone call from Oregon and there on the phone was Xingguo. He told me that he and several colleagues were in the U.S. to attend a conference and visit major sites in the U.S. He would have a couple of days in New York and would love to introduce his colleagues to the Huyck Preserve. I picked them up at La Guardia toward the end of October. His friends turned out to be Professor Ling-zhi Chen, director of the Beijing Forest Ecosystem Research Station, Dr. Qinghua Cai, head of the Institute of Hydrobiology in Wuhan on the Yangtze River, and a fourth fellow, who did not have a business card, head of Chinese biodiversity research program.

I spent an afternoon showing them around the Preserve, visiting two of our active research sites where

Xingguo had done some of his work. They marveled at the huge hemlock trees north of Lincoln Pond because China's forests have long since been gone. They liked the story about the 300 year old hemlock whose canopy prevents the development of younger (80 year old) hemlocks under them. The old hemlocks have to die before the understory trees may grow. They thought this sounded a lot like the Chinese government. They went chasing after the Canadian geese on the shore of Lake Myosotis to see if they could get some fresh goose eggs. Of course it was October, long past goose reproductive season, and so there were no eggs. They marveled at the salamanders we had in the lab. They loved Niko, our large black dog, and before they left they took one another's pictures next to Niko. There is no wildlife throughout much of China, wild geese, big trees, and salamanders don't exist except in a few remote protected areas. So all these things were wonderful to these biologists.

That evening we again sat around my wood burning stove telling stories. Xingguo has done well back in China, he is now an associate professor with the Institute of Botany and believes he may soon be head of the ecology department. He continues his studies of soil nutrient cycling in a beech forest there. He knew that it had been 411 days since he last sat with me around the wood burning stove.

I bid them goodbye at the railroad station in Hudson. They were on their way for a day in New York City and a visit to Rutgers. Then they were to fly back to China. How culturally enriching it is that such exchanges are fostered by the Huyck Preserve. You never know who might show up at the door.

## UNESCO Considers Global Recognition of Catskill Region

An application was submitted on December 15, 1994 to the United Nations Scientific, Educational and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Man and Biosphere Program for designation of the Catskill Region as a Biosphere Reserve. Under the leadership of the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development, the Olive Natural Heritage Society, the Edmund Niles Huyck Preserve, and the Mohonk Preserve; the application was prepared by a committee of non-profits, governmental agencies, local groups and educators.

Globally the program, which aims to achieve a long-term, healthy balance between humans and their environment, has designated over 300 Biosphere Reserves.

"The Catskills are a world-class landscape, with outstanding natural values and community traditions. It is also a world-class laboratory of how a region may integrate economic growth with environmental health. The Biosphere Reserve Program will link the Catskills to other mountainous areas, help us learn from their experiences, and enable us to share our own ideas in this quest for the best future for the Catskills." Tom Hatley, Executive Director of the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development.

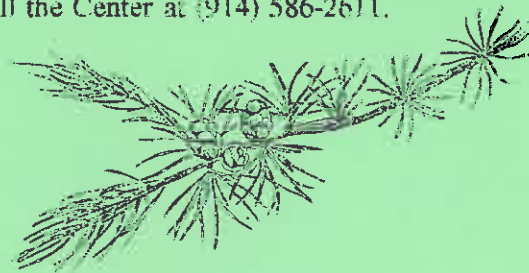
The Man and Biosphere Program seeks to reconcile economic development, conservation of precious natural resources and maintenance of cultural values. Biosphere Reserve designation recognizes an ecologically and culturally significant region where these issues can be addressed. This designation could bring money and attention to the region for education, studies and pilot projects in conservation, economic development and community planning. Biosphere Reserve designation is voluntary and completely non-regulatory in nature, and the activities within the program are a cooperative effort between agencies, communities, educational institutions and non-governmental organizations.

The area that has been nominated for recognition by UNESCO includes all of Sullivan, Delaware, Otsego, Schoharie, Greene and Ulster counties, and the southwestern portion of Albany County.

In the initial phases, the Catskill Biosphere Reserve activities will be coordinated by the Catskill Center and a steering committee made up of several organizations. A public meeting will be held in the spring of 1995 on the Man and Biosphere Program and what Biosphere Reserve designation can bring to the region.

Facilitated by the Biosphere Reserve Program, the region's stakeholders will cooperate to pursue research in ecology, planning, development and folklore. Education initiatives to increase environmental awareness and stewardship, and to facilitate creative solutions to contentious issues will also be one of the program's activities. A long-term goal in this effort is to build a Catskill Region Biosphere Reserve Center, which would serve the region as a central laboratory, education facility, archive and library of regional information.

Anyone with any questions or wishing to become involved in planning for the Biosphere Reserve Program can call the Center at (914) 586-2611.



## William M. Elliott

Richard L. Wyman

On August 23rd this year, my friend and colleague Bill Elliott passed away after a brief battle with cancer. I met Bill and his wife, Nancy, when I began teaching at Hartwick College in Oneonta, NY, in 1980. Bill taught botany, plant physiology and microbiology. His quiet smile and thoughtful gaze put him in his own class.

Bill could always be counted on to give clear and fresh insight during tense faculty meetings, and his humor lightened the days. What I liked best was his analytical mind. My fields of ecology and animal behavior were far from his areas of expertise. But whenever I asked him an in depth question about my research he would gaze at me for a moment and distill my thoughts into a simple statement or question. For a scientist, there is nothing as important as a colleague who can uncloud your thinking.

Bill, Nancy and I undertook many projects over the last 14 years including several that we conducted on the Huyck Preserve. My favorite however was the work we published on the significance of biological records. What is the fastest thing, the largest process, the longest lived. We found that the largest living thing was the General Sherman tree, a Sequoia, with a 31 m base and weighing 5,550,000 kgs (6167 tons). Another of our sojourns was an analysis of the differences in chromosome lengths between males and females in mammals and birds. Both groups have sex determining chromosomes with male mammals (and female birds) having a short Y chromosome. This results in various degrees of relatedness among close relatives that we thought may act to constrain social behavior in these groups. One humorous result of this work is that female human beings appear more closely related to female chimpanzees than they are to male human beings. This paper is still sitting on my desk waiting to be rewritten following peer review.

You may remember Bill from one of the Huyck Hikes he led or from his presentation on the microbes of the Huyck Preserve's forests during an annual science symposium. You may also have seen his 1 m<sup>2</sup> leaf litter collectors that dot the landscape here and there. I will remember Bill for his warm, open personality and his friendly good humor. I will miss his insightful comments and his presence in the woods.

Bill leaves behind his wife, Nancy, and daughter, Beth. Contributions in Dr. William Elliott's name will be used to support student research on the Huyck Preserve.

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Our Annual Report is on file with and available through the NYS Department of State, Charities Registration Section or the Preserve.

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