

NEWS LETTER



Winter 2026

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The Flora of the Ward Pound Ridge Reservation Project Update

by Patricia Butter

If you hiked past the mill pond near the Michigan Road parking area this past spring, you may have noticed an abundance of unusual-looking plants. These plants were the stuff of legend, a rare plant that had been listed on a New York Natural Heritage Report from 1999 from a location in the vicinity of Honey Hollow, and despite multiple searches, not relocated. And suddenly, there they were, hundreds of beautiful American Featherfoil, *Hottonia inflata*, plants blooming to our delight and wonder. It is likely that the appearance of these plants was thanks to park management's skillful and sensitive restoration of the mill pond spillway in 2024, which provided the conditions and habitat for the seeds to germinate and grow.



American Featherfoil, *Hottonia inflata*, listed as threatened, S2 in New York state. Photo: D. Atha

Not all rare plants are as enigmatic as *Hottonia*, and they often have specific habitat requirements. As part of their dedication to supporting the stewardship of these special plant communities, the Friends of Trailside Museum initiated the flora project in 2022. Through botanical surveys conducted by me and my colleagues Devon Cummings and Daniel Atha over the past three years, the list of rare plants species known to occur at Ward Pound Ridge Reservation has increased from a half dozen to 25 species. By funding the mapping and documentation of these populations, the Friends have enabled park management to have the data necessary to make well-informed management decisions. The results of our fieldwork have demonstrated the remarkable diversity preserved in this unique natural area. In addition to 25 rare species, out of the 835 plants documented thus far, 45 taxa were recorded for the first time from Westchester County.

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President's Corner

DEAR FRIENDS OF TRILSIDE MEMBERS:

2025 was full of activity at the Reservation. Notably, it was the 100th anniversary of the creation of Ward Pound Ridge Reservation, which was celebrated this past May with various festivities and events sponsored by the Friends.

We have over 600 Friends of Trilside members, and we put your member donations to very good use at the Museum and the Reservation. We provide support for things that are consistent with our mission and that the County does not have the budget to provide.

An example of this is the trail repair done throughout the Res. While the trail volunteers do great work, there were areas of severe erosion that required heavy equipment and gravel to repair. The Friends paid for Papitto Construction to do this work last fall. These trails are now safer for walking and access by emergency vehicles.

We are especially proud of our investment in a multi-year project led by biologist Patricia Butter to identify and preserve every vascular plant in the WPRR. Patty has written an article for the newsletter that describes her exciting work in more detail.

The Friends also support Taro Ietaka, our WPRR Supervisor, in the management of the Reservation, including an ongoing Meadow Management Plan. In an effort to promote native plants and control invasive species, The Friends helped finance a "controlled burn" of several fields this past fall. This was the first controlled burn in recent memory in the Westchester Parks system and an important precedent for future environmental efforts.

Membership dollars support our museum curator, Danniela Ciatto, and the Museum's presentation of summer and school programs and special events in The Res, including the Maple Sugaring Off party in March, the summer Firefly Festival and the October Spooktacular.

The list goes on of projects that support our mission to maintain the excellent experiences that The Res provides to all comers which will be highlighted in future Newsletters.

Thank you for being Members.

Happy Trails,
Philip Petronis

Curator's

Journal

by *Danniela Ciatto*

Trailside Nature Museum has been very busy this past year! There have been so many exciting things happening, and I'd love to share some highlights with you all.

As always, we had a very successful year welcoming school groups for our Native American program. We hosted 56 school groups, totaling 1,008 children. This is a wonderful program that schools truly love – they are already booking with me for fall 2026!

Maple sugaring season is always a favorite at Trailside. This year, we tapped 22 trees and collected 160 gallons of sap, which produced 29 bottles of delicious maple syrup. We hosted three Sugar House Chat days, during which we showed the public how we run the evaporator and turn sap into syrup. Our Family Tapping Experience was also a lot of fun. It was super cold, but that didn't stop families from coming out to learn about the process – and, of course, taste the maple syrup! Our Sugaring Off Party was a huge hit, with 300 people in attendance and lots of pancakes made and eaten.

This year also marked the 100th Anniversary of Ward Pound Ridge Reservation. We had 414 people sign up to walk 100 miles in the reservation. One of our hikers, Suk Yean, logged an incredible 701.27 miles, and together we raised \$9,756.24. The event day itself was a great success, featuring music, vendors, a birds-of-prey presentation, and more.

We also hosted a wonderful annual Firefly Festival, with 307 people in attendance. This year, we welcomed Professor Andrew Moiseff, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus and Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Affairs, who gave an engaging talk on fireflies. Children enjoyed arts and crafts, games, and collecting and releasing fireflies.

Lastly, our annual Spooktacular Oktoberfest was a big hit, with over 800 people coming out to enjoy the Halloween festivities. We were lucky to have perfect fall weather, along with lots of activities, including a haunted sugar house, spooky storytelling, trick-or-treating, food, music, and more. New this year, we added a photo booth, costume contest, and live animal presentations.

It has truly been an eventful year at Trailside Nature Museum. If you weren't able to join us for any of these events, be sure to visit us in 2026 for even more environmental education, events, and fun!



Danniela Ciatto, right, and Hayley Lewis, left, at Spooktacular Oktoberfest 2025

Supervisor's Report

by Taro Ietaka

It is so exciting to see the return of the printed Friends newsletter! Twenty-plus years ago I wrote several pieces for it as a newly-hired naturalist and now I am happy to reprise my role as an author to give updates on the Reservation as a whole.

This short piece has a lot to cram in as there have been many, many initiatives underway and completed since my return in December 2023. Some of the projects are County-led capital projects such as the nearly completed restoration of the farm ponds by the office, others were led by the Friends such as the extensive trail repairs at Michigan Road and the Meadow. The community has had a tremendous impact as well with major improvements to gardens, picnic areas, and more. Below is a short list of those projects, any of which could be an article unto itself (and may turn into a longer piece in a future newsletter). – Taro Ietaka

County-led items

- A capital project to rehabilitate small dams at Kimberly Bridge, Michigan Road and adjacent to the park office, also led to the restoration of the farm ponds which immediately attracted wildlife such as toads and trout.
- Fire tower construction and access improvements with expected ribbon cutting in 2026.
- The Delaware Resource Center has been relocated from Trailside to the Visitor Center (aka WPA Gallery).
- Beautification at Michigan Rd included plantings in the traffic circle and creation of trellises with native vines to conceal portable toilets.

Friends initiatives

- Prescribed burn in 20 acres of grassland and meadow to rejuvenate vegetation and control weeds.
- Trail repairs at Michigan Road and the Meadow to address decades of erosion and gullyng.
- Purchase of a Ventrac tractor to be able to manage slopes and allow us to cut areas in peak wildlife season with minimal harm

Community projects

- Bedford Garden Club is continuing to restore the Native Wildflower Garden with a new dead hedge, daylighting of overgrown areas, additional plantings, invasive removal, bridge repairs, and installation of new benches
- Lewisboro, Rusticus, and Pound Ridge Garden Clubs collaborated to install native wildflowers and shrubs around the park office.
- Eagle projects led by Case Clapps and Marc Desforges created new picnic tables for Bergfield and a deer enclosure to allow reforestation in a dying beech tree stand, respectively.
- The amazing trail crew led by Paul, Rose, Geof, Marilyn, David, Fred, Connie and many others kept hikers safe and on trail with repairs to Wheeler trail bridges and more.

In the Beginning

by Maureen Koehl

Ward Pound Ridge Reservation's 100 years of existence have witnessed many changes in its more than 4,000 acres, not only in usage, but in philosophy of management and availability to the residents of Westchester County and neighboring communities. Established as a forest preserve in 1925 and managed for wildlife benefit and reforestation, there were no trails, interpretive maps or exhibits. With hands-on enthusiasm the Bedford Garden Club stepped in and hired William Wheeler of Katonah, a naturalist and bird enthusiast, to "blaze" one of the first nature trails in New York State with the encouragement and help of Hermann Merkel, the Westchester County Parks Commission superintendent. Mr. Merkel obtained \$3600 from the U.S. Department of the Interior for this project.

In 1933, as part of President Roosevelt's New Deal Administration, Civilian Conservation Corps Camp Merkel was established in the Reservation and remained until the program ended in 1942. The CCC enlisted unmarried men between the ages of 17 and 28 to work in conservation projects throughout the United States and its territories. The enlistee received \$30 a month of which he had to send \$25 back to his family. Under CCC management the Trailside Museum was built and completed in 1937. Roads were built and camping shelters were constructed; a huge reforestation program was undertaken to replace the thousands of trees lost to the Chestnut Blight that had devastated Westchester County over the first quarter of the 20th century and the elms that were being destroyed by Dutch Elm disease in the 1930s. Roosevelt's Tree Army planted 500,000 pines, hemlocks and spruces throughout the park's 4,371 acres; many of these pines greeted visitors until a major blowdown destroyed the woods along the Reservation entrance road a couple of decades ago. Other giants still hold watch over acres of the reservation forest. The BGC kept Trailside Museum going through WWII paying Mr. Wheeler's

salary and it established the wild-flower garden still welcoming visitors today.

The 1920s and 1930s were ripe for the establishments of nature parks and preserves to provide everyone a place to experience the outdoors and to observe and appreciate nature up close with nature trails and forests and fields to explore. Our beloved Reservation was stitched together like a quilt from 92 separate parcels from 55 owners, some of which had been farmed for generations by the same family, some from real estate investors, and some by eminent domain. There are stories of resentment from those whose land was obtained through eminent domain, although all were monetarily compensated. Former Trailside Friends Board of Trustees member, Phil Pessoni, documented this history of The Res's formation in his book, *Historical Notes on the Ward Pound Ridge Reservation: 1640 – 1940*. With unpaved roads and minimal facilities, early park visitors could explore over 4,100 acres of streams, forests, meadows and incredible geological formations undisturbed by city noises and other adventurers.

In 1926 the Cross River Mountain fire tower was built. It was operated by the Westchester Parks Commission until 1930 when the New York State Conservation Department took over. The tower was decommissioned in 1971 and dismantled in 1982. A replacement tower is now being built in the same location and park visitors will soon be able to enjoy the magnificent 100-mile view of those earlier years.

Why **Ward** Pound Ridge Reservation? Politicians need to be recognized and who better to honor than William Lukens Ward, Westchester County Commissioner of Parks and Republican Party Chairman and former congressman? His family owned an important nuts and bolts factory in Port Chester. The Ward family home, built in 1873 entirely of reinforced Portland cement was known as Ward's Castle.

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In the Beginning
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From 1976 to 1992 the building served as the National Cartoon Museum. It reverted to a private home in the 1990s and is on the National Historic Registry. A memorial marker to William L. Ward sits near the entrance to the park, and in part, reads: “Westchester’s Great Constructive Citizen – Leader – With Vision and Courage”. He died in 1933; in 1938 the park was dedicated to him.

This article was, in part, taken from research done by former Trailside Curator Beth Herr. A more complete history of the park can be found in Images of America: Ward Pound Ridge Reservation compiled by Ms. Herr and me and available at the museum. Mr. Pessoni’s book is currently out of print.



Civilian Conservation Corps members constructing the roof of the future Trailside Nature Museum

Welcome Kaatje!

Hi, my name is Kaatje Ten Holder and I’m the new Naturalist here at the Trailside Nature Museum in Ward Pound Ridge Reservation. I recently graduated from the University of Queensland, where I received my Bachelors in Wildlife Science. There, I learned about Australia’s stunning wildlife, but found that my true passion was back here with the wildlife in the US. Growing up in the area, I’ve been lucky enough to explore this park for nearly my whole life. Hiking the trails throughout the seasons, sledding down the Pell hill, wading through the Cross River, and climbing on the old fallen oak in the meadow are some of the fond moments I have of this park. This summer I got to lead the Naturalist group at the Trailside Nature Camp, where I was given the amazing opportunity to continue working at the museum. This park was one of the first places to ignite my interest in nature and conservation, and I am excited to continue to learn about and share my knowledge about its fascinating flora and fauna.



Naturalist Kaatje Ten Holder proudly displays a skull outside the Trailside Nature Museum

Thinking Outside The Box: Turtle Conservation Efforts at WPRR

by Leah Cass

With its habitat mosaic of forests, meadows, wetlands, ponds, and streams, Ward Pound Ridge Reservation provides ideal habitat for many important wildlife species. One such species is the eastern box turtle (*Terrapene carolina carolina*), and while this elusive animal may not make frequent appearances to park visitors, their presence on the landscape influences park management decisions. So who are these unique reptiles and how is their presence at Ward Pound Ridge Reservation influencing park management?

Box turtles are a medium-sized dome-shaped species that can be identified by vibrant yellow/orange markings on their otherwise brown colored carapace (top shell). They are so-named because their plastron (lower shell) is hinged, allowing them to fully close themselves within. Box turtles are the most terrestrial species of turtle in the northeastern United States, spending much for their time in meadow or shrub-dominated habitat but also entering forest and wetland areas. An omnivorous species, box turtles will consume plant matter and fungi as well as insects, slugs, snails, and earthworms.

Like most turtles, this species is long-lived, often reaching ages of over 50 years in the wild. They mature slowly, not reaching sexual maturity until ages five to 10. Once reproductively active, they typically rely on chance encounters to find mates. Successful female box turtles will then nest in the months of May or June by locating

an area of dry, sandy soil where she can dig a small hole and deposit about four to five eggs.

Despite their long life span, box turtle populations have been facing declines throughout their range due to habitat loss and fragmentation, nest predation, and poaching for the pet trade. Habitat fragmentation poses a major threat to turtles, especially when roadways bisect wetlands or separate nesting habitat sites from primary habitat patches. Additionally, nest predation by

raccoons or other medium-sized predators causes the destruction of a significant number of turtle nests in this region.

Given the multitude of threats facing box turtles, creative land-management solutions are often required to promote turtle conservation. To identify possible strategies for protecting box turtles at Ward Pound Ridge Reservation, staff have undertaken a turtle

monitoring initiative funded by the Friends of Trailside Nature Museum.



Mature adult male box turtle stands on a rock at Ward Pound Ridge Reservation

This initiative aims to survey suitable box turtle habitat to identify individuals, locate and protect nesting sites, and identify areas most commonly used by box turtles where land management for their conservation can be prioritized. Efforts undertaken as part of this initiative have included keeping detailed records of all box turtles encountered in the park and hosting conservation dog surveys during which a trained turtle-smelling dog aids staff in locating this elusive reptile.

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Thinking Outside The Box: Turtle Conservation Efforts at WPRR
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While our turtle conservation work is ongoing, information gathered by the project has already been integrated into park management planning. Most notably, mowing schedules to maintain meadow habitat around the Reservation are



Westchester County Parks staff track turtles using radio telemetry in a meadow at Ward Pound Ridge Reservation

carefully planned around turtle activity, especially in fields most commonly used by turtles. Efforts are made to mow during winter when box turtles are safely buried under ground as they are at the time of this article's publication. Box turtles, and our more common species such as painted and snapping turtles, will remain completely hidden from human observation throughout the rest of the winter. Your best chance to observe a turtle in the Reservation is by visiting in May or June when nesting snapping turtles become a common site along the roadsides, especially around Kimberly Bridge. However, if you are lucky enough to see a box turtle this spring or summer, be sure to stop by and let us know. Your observations can help us ensure our shelled-neighbors persist in this special place for generations to come.

The Flora of the Ward Pound Ridge Reservation Project Update
...continued from cover

One of these plants, an aquatic carnivorous plant called a Bladderwort, *Utricularia tenuicaulis*, is the first record of this plant from northeastern North America. This discovery and further study combining fieldwork and genetic analysis has led to the addition of this species to the upcoming revision of Volume 18 of the Flora of North America, expanding the impact of this work on a continental scale.

The dried and pressed specimens of the plants collected as part of the flora project are preserved in an herbarium at Trailside Museum, a lasting record that can be studied by scientists and conservationists both now and in the future. To further increase the availability of these records for study, the Friends of Trailside have funded the next phase of curation of the collection. Specimens will be imaged using the latest photographic technology and uploaded together with the record data to Symbiota, a database of occurrence records utilized by scientists from around the world.



Utricularia tenuicaulis a carnivorous plant new to the flora of northeastern North America. Photo: P. Butter

While we had originally planned for 2025 to be the third and final year of surveys, our studies yielded so many new records that it became evident that another season of work will be necessary to document every wild plant in the reservation. You can follow our work by following the iNaturalist project Flora of Ward Pound Ridge:

www.inaturalist.org/projects/flora-of-ward-pound-ridge.

Bluebirds

by Hayley Lewis

Ward Pound Ridge Reservation's diverse ecosystems provide ample habitat for a wide variety of avian species, with our meadows in particular being known for our abundance of Eastern bluebirds and tree swallows.

Both species, known for their vibrant blue hues and beautiful songs, happen to have particular nesting requirements that require active conservation efforts to fully support. Both Eastern bluebirds and tree swallows are known as cavity nesting songbirds, while this nesting behavior usually requires the breeding couples to find hollows within dead standing trees (often called snags) to safely build their nests and raise their broods within. The unique habitats found within tree snags are seldom found in the abundance and preferred nesting orientation to allow large bluebird and tree swallow populations to proliferate. The lack of suitable nesting locations is in large part due to human development and habitat fragmentation.

Ward Pound Ridge Reservation has been working hard to compensate for lost habitat through construction and monitoring of artificial nesting sites since the 1970s. The nest boxes seen throughout our Reservation today are a current continuation of this longstanding conservation tradition, which has yielded consistent results over the past several years in terms of allowing sizeable populations of bluebirds and tree swallows nesting, reproducing, and rearing their young to fledging within the meadows of the Reservation.

Over the past 3 years, our site had boasted a robust survival rate, averaging at approximately 71% overall. Our most recent year yielded 18 total recorded nesting attempts for Eastern bluebirds and 7 tree swallow

nesting attempts over the breeding season. These nesting attempts yielded 119 total eggs laid, 112 of which hatched, and 85 of which survived to their fledgling stage. While there have been mild fluctuations in the past years regarding species composition, and egg to fledgling success rates, the overall occupancy of our nesting sites have greatly improved when compared to prior decades of monitoring.



Eastern Bluebird flying into a nest box, placed in the meadow of WPRR

In prior years, the nesting behaviors and success were more heavily limited due to access to predators, primarily due to historic nest sites prior to 2009 were primarily mounted on trees within the Reservation's meadow borders. While tree mounted nest boxes sadly yield access for predators such as raccoons, snakes, and luckily, with the standalone structures and predator deterrent baffles implemented currently, mammal and reptile predation has decreased to near zero, with no mammalian or reptilian

predation being recorded in the past 3 years. As of now, the largest threat to bluebirds and tree swallows nesting throughout the Reservation is due to other avian competition, likely due to house wrens and sparrows, which is being mitigated as much as possible through selective placement avoiding hedgerows and shrub lines where these non-target species tend to be most active and abundant.

	Total Count 2025	Total count 2024	Total Count 2023
Other nesting attempts	1	1	1
Tree swallow attempts	7	5	8
bluebird attempts	18	22	19
eggs laid	119	142	128
eggs hatched	112	116	113
hatchlings fledged	85	108	87
approx survival rate	70	76	68

Program Highlights



SUGAR HOUSE CHATS

FEB 28 & MARCH 7
10AM-12PM

FAMILY TAPPING EXPERIENCE

FEBRUARY 21
10AM-3PM

SUGARING OFF PARTY

MARCH 21ST
12PM – 3PM

Join us for our annual maple syrup celebration!
Includes music, sugaring demos, pancakes and more!
Free event. Parking fees apply.
Also learn how to become a member of the Friends!

Calendar of Events



FEBRUARY

Saturday 7th 1PM
The Virginia Opossum: A Unique Animal

Sunday 8th 11AM
Winter Wildlife

Saturday 14th 1PM
Let's Learn About Lye Stone

Sunday 15th 11AM
Leave No Trace: Basics/Awareness

Saturday 28th 1PM
Winter Foraging

MARCH

Sunday 8th 11AM
Wildlife Tracks

Sunday 15th 1PM
Vernal Pool Exploration

Saturday 28th 1PM
The Coyote: America's
Resilient Predator

Sunday 29th 1PM
Welcoming Spring

 WESTCHESTER
PARKS
FOUNDATION

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED For Vernal Pool Monitoring Project

WPF and Westchester County Parks Department are seeking dedicated volunteers to help monitor vital amphibian habitat throughout Westchester County. Volunteers are needed at **Ward Pound Ridge Reservation** and **Blue Mountain Reservation** to survey select vernal pools up to three times throughout the year to assess habitat conditions, amphibian breeding, and other key ecological functions.

Training will be held both in-person and online. Ideally volunteers will be able to commit to three site visits, one each in spring, summer, and fall, but all interested volunteers will be considered.

To apply:
Please follow the QR code
below or reach out to
megan@thewpf.org



WESTCHESTER COUNTY
PARKS
NATIONALLY ACCREDITED

Friends of Trailside Board Members

President- Philip Petronis

Vice President- Susan Harris

Treasurer- Michaelene Durst

Secretary- Linda Burke

Linda Press Wolfe

Ann Marie Lipinsky

Margie Kunhardt

Maureen Koehl

Andrew Lehman

Jack Potz

Peter Bysshe

Friends of the Trailside Nature Museum and Ward Pound Ridge Reservation is a private, not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting a better appreciation and understanding of the natural world and the relationship between people and the land. Through its support of the Trailside Nature Museum, operated by the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Conservation of the County of Westchester, the Friends provides financial and volunteer aid for exhibits, school, and educational programs.

Ward Pound Ridge Reservation Staff

MUSEUM

Curator- Danniela Ciatto

Assistant Curator- Hayley Lewis

Naturalist- Kaatje Ten Holder

OFFICE

Park Supervisor- Taro Ietaka

Reception- Bobby Calabrese

Reception- Lily Akers

WILDLIFE & NATURAL RESOURCES

Curator of Natural Resources- Leah Cass

Natural Resources Technician- Samantha Cronk

*Wildlife Management and
Conservation Biologist -* Dan Aichison

Wildlife Technician - Lucas Andujar

MAINTENANCE

Foreman- Mike Vogt

Grounds- Mario Rodriguez

Grounds- Jake Ramella

Grounds- Alex Pallas

Become a Member Today!

Friends of the Trailside Nature Museum
P.O. Box 236, Cross River, NY 10518

I would like to JOIN / RENEW (please circle one)

MEMBERSHIP

Benefits include our Newsletter, Free Parking on Friends-sponsored event days and Gift Shop Discounts. Special premiums for contributions at \$250 and above.

Note: Membership at the Wood Turtle level or above includes a parking pass allowing free access to the Reservation throughout the year.



- Salamander \$25
- Dragonfly \$50
- Wood Turtle \$100
- Bluebird \$250
- Black Bear \$500
- Mountain Lion \$1,000
- Other \$ _____



Name _____

Address _____

Phone _____

Email _____

The Friends of Trailside Nature Museum and Ward Pound Ridge Reservation is a 501(c)(3) organization. Contributions are tax deductible to the extent permitted by law.



CUT ALONG DOTTED LINE AND RETURN WITH PAYMENT

Trailside Nature Museum
Ward Pound Ridge Reservation
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USA

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

www.friendsoftrailside.org

