

The Delaware Valley



Wildlife Journal

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Glimpses of a Loon

by Yoke Bauer DiGiorgio

Standing along the shores of the Delaware River my husband, John, and I looked out over the Big Eddy. The water was still calm and there was a slight mist rising from the surface. A perfect spring morning for exploring and paddling up river in our kayaks.

We had not yet opened the garage door to carry out our kayaks when we caught a glimpse of an unusual large bird diving in the shallows. We watched as it reemerged. With our binoculars we could see a black dagger-like bill, black head, black top with white dotted pattern, and white neck and belly. But it was the strikingly colored crimson eyes, which looked directly back at us through our binoculars that caught our attention. Was this a common loon? Was this the common loon whose call our friends down river had

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The Shape of Things to Come...

by Barbara Yeaman

Thirty-five years ago the U.S. Congress passed *The Wild and Scenic River Act* that declared: "*certain selected rivers of the Nation which ... possess outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural, or other similar values shall be preserved in free-flowing condition, and that they and their immediate environments shall be protected for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations.*"

In 1978 the Upper Delaware River was singled out for that protection. This triggered local praise and

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been hearing recently?

Loons constitute one of the most ancient bird lineages with fossil evidence dating back well over 70 million years ago. Perhaps best known for their haunting wails and elaborate displays during the breeding season, they provoke awe and mystery. The common loon (*Gavia immer*) is the most common of the five species of loons in North America. Nesting on remote lakes and ponds across Canada and northern US and migrating south in the winter along the warmer continental coastal areas, they typically do not venture this far south inland.

Common loons weigh between 8 and 12 lbs. (Males are generally larger than females). Their body length is nearly 3 feet with a wing span of almost 5 feet. Most of their life is spent on the water, touching land only at birth, when nesting, or when sick. As such, they are ungainly on land. The set back position of their legs, which is so important for propulsion while swimming and diving, makes walking almost impossible. Swimming is natural to young loons. They are able to swim within hours of hatching and begin to dive when only a few days old. A loon can stay under water up to a maximum of three minutes and there are reports of diving to depths of more than 150 feet.

Loons are monogamous, they typically choose and stay with just one partner each year. Recent research indicates however, that partner changes from year to year, are not uncommon. Breeding once a year, the average clutch contains two eggs. Little is known about adult survival, but estimates indicate 90% with a life expectancy of 10 – 15 years.

We continued to watch as the loon came closer. Because the river is so clear we were able to observe it swimming under water. Its shape was smooth and streamlined from head to tail ending with legs and feet protruding from the rear.

We packed our cameras, carried our kayaks down to the river, and proceeded to follow our lone loon now swimming across the Big Eddy. Photographing a loon presents a challenge, capturing two extremes of light - the white and black body - as well as the dark red eyes. Up for the challenge, we set out with a slow approach, always studying the loon's behavior and letting the loon set the distance it felt comfortable with.

It never displayed its wings or called out, showing us its alarm. It did not seem concerned with our presence or that of the nearby boats and canoes. We let our kayaks float with the current and observed it diving and feeding along the shorelines. Peering down with bill and eyes submerged, it used its bill to capture, not spear, small fish (Loons also eat shellfish, frogs, and aquatic insects). Between diving and feeding it would rest and preen itself. Our sense of

wonder growing, we continued to float along side for almost an hour.

Because their body weight per wing area is too high, loons cannot take flight directly from land or while floating on water. They require a long runway of open water to gain enough speed to "lift off". We watched as the loon beat its wings rapidly and pattered along the waters surface for a considerable distance to get airborne. Once airborne it flew under the Narrowsburg Bridge and headed up river. Loons are excellent flyers. During migration they may travel more than a thousand miles between breeding and wintering areas, depending on where they spend the summer. They have been reported flying more than 60 miles per hour.

We turned our kayaks, paddling up river, hoping to catch another glimpse, but did not see it again. Loons live within a specific geographical range, moving within that range to meet their seasonal requirements. Perhaps our loon will return. Perhaps it will return with a mate.

Common loons are not listed as Endangered or Threatened Species. They are however, a species of conservation concern in the lower 48 states. Due to a wide array of threats that have resulted from human activities, their range have shrunk and populations are small (present estimates are a total of 20,000 birds in the lower 48). Perhaps the greatest problem in the northeast is acid rain. As lakes acidify, phytoplankton die causing food chains to collapse leaving nothing for the loons to eat.

Our challenge, as humans, is one of balance. Do we have the will to balance our use of our environment? As an example, historically, common loons had also nested into Connecticut and Pennsylvania. Loss of habitat due to lakeshore development and disturbance by people led to their disappearance from those regions. Increased awareness, improved knowledge and conservation programs are now beginning to reverse this trend.

Yoke Bauer DiGiorgio and her husband, John A DiGiorgio, established Nature's Art LLC and are dedicated to promoting awareness and understanding of the beauty and heritage of our wildlife.



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Take Me to the River

by Anthony Ritter



LOOKING NORTH. LONG EDDY, UPPER DELAWARE RIVER.

© 2003 Anthony Ritter Photographer

New York State Route 97 is a road built in the mid 1930's which traverses the federally designated Scenic and Recreational Upper Delaware River valley for 75 miles. The road begins in the town of Port Jervis, New York and runs north to Hancock, New York. Last week this highway, which meanders its way near the river towns of Pond Eddy, Barryville, Narrowsburg, Callicoon, Long Eddy – among others - received the honor of becoming a "Scenic Byway" by the state of New York.

This recent designation made by the governor, state legislature and other dignitaries is yet another feather in the cap of the Upper Delaware River Valley. Many people have long known about this region's attributes – its' natural beauty and bountiful resources.

The publicity bestowed upon the river corridor by the state will mark the river valley as a scenic destination which will further attract visitors from many areas of the world.

I have been fortunate to have been able to make a living as a licensed fishing guide on this river for the past eight years. The majority of my customers are from the metropolitan area of New York and New Jersey. Many of them are looking for an affordable day on the river – far away from the workaday grind of bumper to bumper traffic, ringing phones, beeping pagers and other 21st Century facts of life. In the high tech world that we live in, a mellow fishing trip on the river gives one the opportunity for reflection and quality time with family and friends.

The role of a fishing guide is similar to that of a teacher in that I explain to customers how to read the water, cast a fly or spin rod, tie different knots and describe

outrage as a plan was begun to manage the Upper Delaware National Scenic and Recreational River. Frightened by the prospect different aquatic insects among other topics. These lessons occur while I navigate my driftboat without hitting boulders, and avoiding errant hooks thrown by my guests in the wind.

It is not unusual that – over time – the neophyte student becomes a friend – which may form a bond for many years between the guide and pupil.

As a guide, I get an opportunity to meet and listen to many different types of people from all walks of life while on the driftboat gliding along with the current of the Upper Delaware.

These people are beauticians, builders, brokers, bartenders and butchers – to name but a few of their vocations – who are looking forward to getting away from it all – albeit for a day – on the Upper Delaware River. However varied their backgrounds and occupations, I have found that they have one thing in common at day's end, and that is their appreciation for this beautiful river valley and how close it is to New York City.

There are very few areas in the northeast that can boast the recreational opportunities that exist here.

To name a few:

Fishing for a variety of gamefish such as wild trout, walleye, striped bass, American shad and smallmouth bass on this particular river. Many anglers would have to travel long hours, spend big bucks and make complicated commitments to have the luxury and sport of fishing over - not one - but all of these species - in a day on one river! The Upper Delaware River, however, boasts all of these fish – all within two hours of New York City.

Or, birdwatching. Bald eagles which, on many of my trips taken in the summer, have become so numerous that we are seeing more than one eagle on over 75% of our floats. These birds along with the red tail hawk, osprey, mergansers, blue herons are common sights along the river. On more than a few occasions, clients have exclaimed to me that they have traveled all the way to Alaska without seeing a bald or golden eagle but here they are – roosting atop the white pines that guard the river valley.

The hamlet Narrowsburg, located on the river, now features an annual day in the winter to celebrate the resurgence of the bald eagle within the river valley.

EagleFest features seminars by regional raptor centers, slide talks, ice sculptures along with exhibits

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Take Me to the River Continued

were viewed up close by close to a thousand attendees to **EagleFest**.

The river valley. Floating down the river from April through October, I never tire of rivermarks such as the rock walls painstakingly laid in the 1840's for the Erie-Lackawanna railroad, which became the first rail system which would link the Atlantic Ocean to the Great Lakes. Or, the Roebling Bridge - built as an elevated aqueduct for the coal barges of the Delaware and Hudson Canal Company by the same engineer who would later construct the Brooklyn Bridge.

Drifting down the river, we see and hear waterfalls that surge downwards in a frothy plume into the Delaware River during the spring, from a vertical drop of hundreds of feet among the second growth of hardwoods and pines.

Eel weirs, built of wood and rock that form a "V" – and stretch from almost bank to bank - in the river. These structures have been here long before the reservoirs. They are a device set to trap one of the native species of this river, the American Eel, during their spawning run back to the Atlantic Ocean in the fall. All these weirs are built by hand - *each summer* - since the weight of the early spring ice floes destroy what was built just six months before.

In the past few years as the Baby Boomers of our population continues to age and think about slowing down and retirement, people from the urban and suburban areas of New York City have yearned for a retreat that offers "quality of life" – both for themselves and their children.

The Upper Delaware River Valley has witnessed a surge in the amount of interest – both by entrepreneurs and developers - in the last few years. Many of these individuals are originally from urban areas who have opened restaurants, antique shops, farmers markets, bed and breakfasts and retail stores in the region.

Developers, contractors, real estate brokers and architects have been busy as well, due to the interest of city dwellers enticed by the value, beauty and proximity afforded by this region.

It's an exciting – as well as challenging - time for the river valley. Thomas McGuane wrote in *"The Longest Silence: A Life in Fishing"* that:

"We have reached the time in the life of the planet, and humanity's demands upon it, when every

Fisherman will have to be a riverkeeper, a steward of marine shallows, a watchman on the high seas. We are beyond having to put back what we have taken out. We must put back more than we take out."

As the population of the river valley grows and changes –as it will throughout the years - it will become our highest priority to preserve what we presently have. It is our responsibility to "give back" to our towns and the river in order to preserve what we so dearly cherish.

To me, it means leaving the river and it's shoreline cleaner than when you found it. Or, teaching kids about fishing and the outdoors. Spending a few minutes explaining something about the history of the river to tourists wandering down your Main Street. In addition, many organizations exist such as local planning and zoning boards, conservation groups and others which function at their best when the public is informed and involved.

Think about what brought you to this area in the first place and how you first reacted when you saw the mist along the ribbon of water we call the Upper Delaware.

I moved up here from the city sixteen years ago. Every day that I spend on the river is another opportunity for me to appreciate how fortunate I am to have what I consider to be the best job in the world. More than once a customer has remarked to me at the end of a day's river trip - "Boy, Tony... you've got a great corner office!"

Amen.

Anthony Ritter is a resident of Narrowsburg, New York and has operated Gone Fishing Guide Service for the past eight years.

www.gonefishingguideservice.com



DELAWARE RIVER AT LITTLE EQUINUK CREEK

© 2003 Anthony Ritter Photographer

The Shape of Things to Come... Continued

Outrage as a plan was begun to manage the Upper Delaware National Scenic and Recreational River. Frightened by the prospect of another Tocks Island fiasco here in the Upper Delaware (with seizures of land; damage by squatters to old family farms; and fear of national control over local lands) citizen outcry produced extreme limits on federal actions.

Eight years later, a National Park Service (NPS) management plan established an Upper Delaware Council of local citizens to oversee and restrict the federal hand. Instead of dictating land use principles, in 1990 the Upper Delaware Council published a *“Design Handbook ... to provide guidance for those involved in building and development along the Upper Delaware River. If you are planning construction, then this handbook... will show you how to undertake construction on your property in ways that ensure harmony with the existing river landscape and help to keep the river flowing free, clean and beautiful.”*

Try to find a copy today.

And if you can locate a copy, you will quickly realize that these guidelines have no authority to implement and are without any incentive to comply.

Throughout the 1990's growth in the area was slow. Now, in 2003, with waterfront land offered at a steep premium, developers and buyers are looking to create view lots high along ridgelines and up the slopes from the riverfront. Now more than ever, we need to support these design guidelines to shape the coming growth and to prevent the loss of invaluable scenic values in this river valley.

Upstream and down we see more clear-cuts to create view lots with little concern about erosion. Landowners with an eye on the bottom line are carving this valley and felling trees with bulldozers. And now we learn that a major powerline to New York City is proposed along the entire Upper Delaware riverfront by business interests. This is clearly incompatible with Scenic River principles.

These proposals may be submitted by responsible businessmen who are only seeking to maximize their investments. But without guidelines they cry, “But I didn't know I couldn't or shouldn't do it this way.”

It is the local planning boards, zoning appeal boards, and supervisors (even more than the NPS) who literally hold the future of this valley in their hands. It is they who must hold the line by creating rules that can insure that this valley grows to the benefit of all its citizens.

The Upper Delaware Council awards planning grants to



PINE TREE EDDY, COCHECTON, UPPER DELAWARE RIVER

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local townships to hire professional guidance to draft appropriate development rules. I believe a time-out on new permits is appropriate until the completion of new rules governing local growth are in place.

One year ago a concerned citizen pleaded: *“The Upper Delaware Council should: take a strong look at the need to update the existing Land Use Guidelines as they relate to identifying ways to reduce visual impacts from future development corridor wide. They also, through their membership, need to find ways to incorporate appropriate new regulations into local zoning both to identify potential scenic impacts in the planning stage and to resolve such issues before the development begins.”*

The author concluded: *“I contend that we have reached critical crossroads in the long and arduous efforts of local, county, state, and federal agencies to protect a vestige of remote beauty in America. The burning question at hand is whether the area can provide for significant development and still retain the scenic quality of the river valley for recreational users and landowners alike for generations to come.”* Angus Ross Jr.

I couldn't agree more. And I am optimistic enough to think we can, with care, create an atmosphere in this valley that will allow for growth without the desecration of our real treasures: outstanding water quality, unequalled scenic virtues, and the quality of life we share with all who are fortunate enough to live here. But it won't be easy.

Barbara Yeaman, trained in graphic design and photography, also devotes much of her time to environmental issues. She is a founder of the Delaware Highlands Conservancy - a land trust working with landowners to conserve the natural and cultural heritage of the Upper Delaware River region.

Questions for the Upper Delaware Council can be directed to:

Laurie Ramie, Public Relations
Upper Delaware Council
P.O. Box 192, Narrowsburg, NY 12764
(845) 252-3022; fax (845) 252-3359
udcramie@ezaccess.net

Discovering Nature

- In a forest the topmost branches and leaves of the tallest **trees create a “canopy”**, a living awning that protects life below. As the plants below grow, they release moisture, which the canopy prevents from evaporating. The moisture remains within the forest system and can be used by woodland plants and wildlife.
- Autumn is a **time for harvest** for people and wildlife living in the Northern Hemisphere. **Seeds** are a valuable food source because they contain a high level of nutrients. In addition, seeds with their high fat content provide more energy than could be produced by an equal weight of carbohydrates.
- **Evergreen cones** come in two versions: **male and female**. The pollen-producing male cones grow in clusters on the lower branches. The larger and more conspicuous female cones develop in the upper branches. Male and female cones do not mature at the same time. Shaking a branch of pollen-laden male cones will produce a yellow cloud of pollen dust. The branches of evergreen trees set so that wind spirals down through them, as well as the female cone being surrounded by needles, all help the pollen find a female cone from its own species.
- It was **late August**. I came upon a **Mourning Dove sitting on a nest** of sticks and twigs in the low branches of a blue spruce in our yard. Able to have multiple broods each year, I was still surprised, as the nights were already cold enough to require a blanket. Despite damp and rainy weather, two chicks hatched. I never saw both parents by the nest at the same time. The chicks were left briefly in the early mornings and one parent would return to feed them regurgitated partially digested food (also known as pigeon milk). For almost two weeks I watched the chicks grow. On September 10th, they flew from the nest and were gone.

For additional information on the Delaware Valley region go to:

www.naturesartllc.com
www.nps.gov/upde
www.tusten-narrowsburg.org
www.narrowsburg.org
www.dec.state.ny.us
www.fish.state.pa.us
www.eagleinstitute.org
www.delawareriverkeeper.org
www.delawarehighlands.org

Tips for the Outdoors

- **On Bird Feeders**
One can feed birds year-round but many only feed during the colder months. Set up your feeder in the early fall to induce more birds to include your feeder in their normal movements. Birds are beginning to establish their winter range at this time. Once set up, continue to supply feed throughout the cold months as the birds depend on it.
- **Viewing Woodpeckers**
Including high protein suet (the least expensive type of suet) in wire basket on the side of your feeder will attract species of woodpeckers. It is not unusual to see two species of woodpeckers (Downy and Red-bellied) at the feeder at one time.
- **Leave No Trace**
 - Even for short trips, plan ahead and prepare.
 - Pack gear for all types of weather.
 - Dispose of waste properly.
 - Minimize campfire impacts.
 - Leave what you find.
 - Respect wildlife.
- **What to do if You Meet a Black Bear**
 - STAY CALM! and DON'T RUN!
 - Back away slowly while facing the bear.
 - Avoid direct eye contact, as it may be perceived as a threat.
 - Give the bear plenty of room to escape.
 - If the bear does attack, fight back.
- **Fall Skies**
The fall tends to have to have the prettiest skies of the year, especially towards sunset. Make sure you take the time to enjoy them

Do you want to be on our mailing list or submit articles? Please direct all suggestions, responses and requests to:

Yoke Bauer DiGiorgio
JYD630@AOL.COM

Editor-in-chief	Yoke Bauer DiGiorgio
	Nature's Art LLC
	PO Box 498
	Narrowsburg, NY
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