

# ECOS NEWS



## *ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse*

Celebrating Our 45th Year in Environmental Education

Vol. XLV

Number 9

September 2017

## NATURAL LEADERS

### Sharing a lifetime of environmental learning

The Capital Region is full of special places that are worth visiting, especially with an expert guide. Two of those places are Wolf Hollow in Glenville and the Vischer Ferry Preserve in Rexford, the sites of ECOS-sponsored walks in the last month. And two of those guides are **Ruth Schottman** and **Nancy Slack**.

The Vischer Ferry walk was on a Saturday morning in late July (in keeping with our attempt to offer more activities on weekends and evenings, so more young people and families can attend). Nancy took the group along the canal towpath in the preserve and then over the Whipple Bridge, identifying plants, flowers and bird calls along the way, talking about the ecology of the area.



The Wolf Hollow walk was on a pleasant August evening. Ruth identified leaves and trees and caterpillars, as she has done on so many hikes over so many years. Co-leader **Arden Rauch** discussed the gorge's origins and geology.

It looks as though the Wolf Hollow walk may be Ruth's last as a guide. She has just announced that she will be retiring from the public walk and talk business.

If that's the case, we understand, but are saddened. Ruth's nature walks have been fun as well as informative, of real value to ECOS members and the organization. We should all be grateful -- and are, as the accompanying tributes to Ruth show.

### On Walking With Ruth: Keeping pace with the wonderful, curious mind of Ruth Schottman.

I was indeed fortunate to be able to accompany Ruth on some of her guided naturalist outings for ECOS in recent years. Drawing from her extensive knowledge of the outdoor world, with its array of local plants and trees, she shared her contagious delight in sleuthing out and sharing specimens with explanation of their fascinating habits. Revisiting even familiar destinations has been made more special as she pointed out and elaborated on features of so many previously unnoticed or underappreciated growing things in all seasons. Any outing with Ruth was truly enriching, helping to open my eyes to the ever more intriguing world of plants and nature.

- Margie Litwin

At the time I retired I did not know Ruth. But her Natural History classes were legendary, and I knew I wanted to join ECOS and take her Wednesday morning classes. I worried she might retire before I did, but I needn't have; she kept working long beyond the age when most people retire. I took the spring and fall classes and went on other walks with Ruth, and found her to be a fascinating person with an incredible knowledge of plant life, enthusiasm for sharing it, patience with those whose knowledge is limited, and a curiosity about everything. And physically fit – still hiking and bicycling! She is a role model for those of us who are a bit younger; I want to be just like her when I grow up.

- Holly Hawkes

(Please see 'Ruth' on Page 10)

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*ECOS: The Environmental Clearinghouse is a non-political, not-for-profit organization. Our mission is to provide environmental information and educational opportunities that enhance appreciation of the natural world, to build a community that is aware and knowledgeable about environmental issues, and to advocate informed action to preserve our natural resources. ECOS is funded through the support of our members and the community.*

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**Thank You ECOS Volunteers!**

**Nancy Slack and Kate Storms**— for leading our Vischer Ferry "Plants, Birds, and Some History" event.

**Ruth Schottman and Arden Rauch**— for leading the Walk in Wolf Hollow.

**Hank Stebbins** of Wolf Hollow — for arranging ample parking and sharing local history.

**Tom Melander** — for co-designing flier for **Art Clayman's** talk on the City Bike Plan, as well as environmental posters for Spring events.

**Susan Van Vorst, ECOS Recycling Committee and SCEAC Recycling** — for developing and leading an educational recycling pilot for SICM's Summer Lunch Program in Collins Park.

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**(New Date)**

**Monday, November 13, 2017**

**5 – 8 p.m.**

**Distinguished Speaker - Tracy Ormsbee,  
Publisher of the *Adirondack Explorer***

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\_\_\_\_ I would like to be a volunteer. Please send me more information.

## President's Letter

ECOS is having a busy summer, as other articles in this newsletter will attest.

We are making progress in our search for a new part-time executive director, and hope to have an announcement to that effect very soon. We have had volunteers assisting programs in Central Park in Schenectady, and we have had volunteers preparing for our fall walks.

On a sad note, we report that our past president and executive director, **Claire Schmitt**, has died at 89. She was many important things to ECOS in our earlier years. She was the author of our guides to natural areas in Albany, Saratoga, Schenectady, and Rensselaer counties, and as such her work will be appreciated for years to come. We have long considered a similar guide to Schoharie County, and have the material blueprint in hand. If you or someone you know wants to volunteer to work on completing this guide, please contact me at the ECOS office.

I want to take a moment to thank some of the members who have helped manage our responsibilities during this period when we have not had a paid employee in the office. **Denise Cashmere** and **Beverly Clark** have shared time in the office, allowing me to be elsewhere some days of the week.

Our treasurer, **Bruce Bonacquist**, has seen that our bills get paid and our necessary filings are up-to-date. **Art Clayman**, vice president for programs, led the Central Park effort this summer, and several have helped **Jim Ormsbee** compile our newsletter. Several board members have rolled up their sleeves and are doing more, and many members have volunteered to do more. That is what it takes, and that is what I am thankful for.

Our board secretary, **Holly Hawkes**, has stepped in to chair our Rachel Carson Dinner. (Note the date change from our announcement last month. The Schenectady County Community College changed some course offerings and our original date could only have been a luncheon.) If you can offer Holly any assistance, please contact our office.

There are a couple of volunteers who check our mailbox in Niskayuna, as well as the volunteer crew who help fold our newsletter and add the inserts every month. Our backbone is our membership volunteers, and it is strong and reliable.

The summer may be wrapping up, but we have our fall walks and other activities planned, and important announcements in the near future.

Respectfully,

Will Seyse, ECOS President

## ECOS Executive Director Search Update

As you are probably aware, ECOS has been without an executive director since Patrick Clear resigned in March.

Shortly after, the Board of Directors began a search to find a new one, a process that, as this is being written, is in its final stages. An announcement can be expected soon.

Treasurer Bruce Bonacquist spearheaded the search process, and the search committee consisted of ECOS' executive board: Bonacquist, President Will Seyse, Secretary Holly Hawkes, Vice President of Programs Art Clayman, and Vice President of Outreach Arden Rauch.

After publicizing the job opening online and in print, at schools and with other non-profit organizations and associations, we received more than 25 applications. Those were winnowed to 12, and the search committee eventually chose six to interview.

The interviews were conducted Aug. 7 and Aug. 9, after which the search committee discussed and ranked the candidates.

On Aug. 15, we offered the job to one of the candidates, who accepted. The final steps are reference checks and approval by the full board.

It's been a long time, and a long process, but we think you will agree with us that it has been worthwhile.

Watch [www.ecosny.org](http://www.ecosny.org) and our Facebook page for future updates.

## ECOS Dinner Speaker Inspires Book

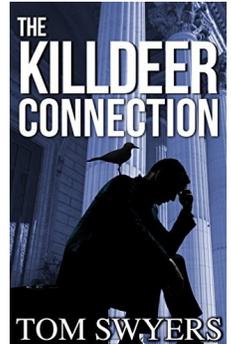
Tom Swyers, author of the award-winning "The Killdeer Connection," will host a book signing at the Open Door Bookstore in Schenectady on Sept. 30 from 1 p.m. until 2:30 p.m. The book's plot revolves around fracking and bomb trains and is set in the Capital Region.

The "Killdeer Connection" was conceived at the 2015 Rachel Carson Dinner hosted by ECOS, where Justin Mikulka was the featured speaker and addressed the same topics.

When Swyers heard Mikulka's talk on fracking and the bomb (oil) trains that pass through heavily populated communities on their way from the Dakotas to the Port of Albany, he was deeply concerned.

After doing extensive research, he decided the best way to publicize the extreme hazards and the commercial and government reluctance to address the problem was a fictional platform.

The result was "The Killdeer Connection," winner in Amazon's 2017 international Kindle Scout writing competition, and now published in paperback.



### Nature Walk through River Road Park

**On Sept. 13 at 10 a.m.**, ECOS board member and expert naturalist Arden Rauch will lead a leisurely introductory walk through the trails of River Road Park for the Niskayuna Seniors.

Call the Senior Center Tuesday or Thursday, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., for information or to sign up.

## A Successful Start at Summer Camp

It's been a long time since most ECOS members went to summer camp, but 15 of them got a chance to return in July, this time not as campers but as teachers. The kids they worked with -- 90 of them -- were at-risk Schenectady schoolchildren, attending a camp in Central Park run jointly by the city school district and county youth bureau. The camp is designed to keep the kids learning during summer while also having fun, and ECOS' volunteers helped them do both.

The volunteers were there for two weeks, three days each week.

Week 1 focused on the environment. Over the three days, all the kids got a chance to engage in nine different activities: hiking, tree identification and compass reading; fishing, kayaking and water sampling; nutrition, seed planting, and recycling.

Week 2 focused on bicycling. The 90 got a chance to ride around the park, learn about bike safety and bike handling, and how to fix and change a flat tire. For an 11- to 13-year old, the age range of these kids, that last skill can be not only very useful but empowering.



Not all the kids enjoyed all the activities equally, which is to be expected. Some were more interested and attentive than others. But most of them did what they were asked to do, cheerfully, even enthusiastically. And why not? Learning by doing, and in the great outdoors, is fun. The same goes for teaching in that kind of environment, and the ECOS volunteers seemed to enjoy themselves at least as much as the kids. You don't have to take my word for it. See for yourself by looking at the photos posted on our Facebook page: (<https://www.facebook.com/ECOS-The-Environmental-Clearinghouse-183850741651609/>.)

ECOS' participation in this camp was part of an effort by the organization to raise our visibility in the community, partner with other organizations, and do more programs with urban youth. And it was a great start. You can bet we'll be back next year.

-- Art Clayman, Program Director

## Safe and Sustainable Drug Take-Back Options

### New Drug Drop Box at Schenectady County Sheriff's Office

Following up on several years of successful participation in National Prescription Drug Take-Back Days, the Schenectady County Sheriff's Office and the Town of Niskayuna recently installed permanent Drug Disposal Drop Boxes. The Sheriff's Office hosts the deposit box in the lobby at its 320 Veeder Avenue location in the City, and is available for use by residents from 6am to 10pm daily. Niskayuna's box is located in the rotunda just inside the main entrance of Town Hall, and is available Monday thru Friday from 8am to 5pm (sometimes later in the event of meetings, town court, etc.).



Like Drug Take-Back Days, Drop Boxes provide residents with an outlet to bring medications that are expired, leftover, unwanted, or just going unused, but have the added advantage of greater accessibility (like the Sheriff's Office & Niskayuna Town deposit boxes' year-round daily and M-F availability, respectively).

The cost of the Drop Boxes was funded by CVS Pharmacy Medication Disposal for Safer Communities program, and their on-going operating costs are being funded by the County for the Sheriff's Office, and Niskayuna Community Action Program

(N-CAP) for Niskayuna.

**No forms, paperwork or ID are required.**

#### What Can I Safely discard?

Acceptable items that can be deposited in the Drop Boxes are prescriptions for medications including patches, ointments, as well as pet meds, in addition to over-the-counter medications and vitamins.

#### What Items are *Not* Acceptable?

Items that are not acceptable for deposit include sharps, thermometers, hydrogen peroxide, inhalers, aerosol cans, lotions, liquids, and trash bags of items.

Please see 'Drop Box' on page 9

Drop Box cont...

### Why Use Drug Drop Boxes?

Drug Drop Boxes give residents a location to deposit these potentially troubling substances.

Two important reasons to use drug drop boxes:

— **They help prevent drug abuse** by minimizing their accessibility to people for whom they are not intended (e.g. the federal Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) estimates that 70 to 80 percent of non-medical use of prescription pain relievers begins by raiding the medicine cabinet at home);

— **They reduce toxic contamination** of our waterways and landfills, as the substances are increasingly being detected in drinking water samples and degrading water quality (more harmful practices of flushing drugs down drains or disposing them in landfills are replaced with current less harmful management practices).

### Drug Drop Box Locations In and Around Schenectady County:

**Schenectady County Sheriff's Office Lobby**  
(6am to 10pm daily); 320 Veeder Ave, Schenectady  
518-388-4596, x-5147 [www.schenectadycounty.com/node/611](http://www.schenectadycounty.com/node/611)

**Niskayuna Town Hall** (8am to 5pm M-F);  
One Niskayuna Circle 518-386-4585  
[www.niskayuna.org/home/news/drug-take-back](http://www.niskayuna.org/home/news/drug-take-back)

**NYS Police Troop G Headquarters,**  
760 Troy-Schenectady Rd, Latham 518-783-3211

**Walgreens Pharmacy** (8am to 10pm daily);  
4999 NY Route 30, Amsterdam 518-843-6661

~ *Information courtesy of Patrick Golden, ECOS Recycling Committee Member & SCEAC Recycling Team*

## Autumn Is Coming Plan now for your fall clean-up

The Schenectady County Composting and Resident Recycling Facility is located at the Schenectady County farm in Glenville and is operated by the Schenectady County Soil and Water Conservation District.

The facility accepts yard waste, residential recycling (including most electronic equipment), and offers compost, topsoil, and natural and colored woodchip mulch for sale to the public.

The facility is open 8:00AM - 3:00PM, Monday through Saturday from April through December and Friday & Saturday only from January through March.

A Facility Permit is required to utilize the facility for all services, including the Schenectady County Household Hazardous Waste Disposal Program.

The Schenectady County Composting and Resident Recycling Facility offers compost, garden soil, and mulch for sale to the public.

For more information contact:  
Jason Cass, District Manager

24 Hetcheltown Road  
Glenville, NY 12302

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**'RUTH' from page 2...**

I am so very thankful to Ruth Schottman for how she so generously shares her comprehensive knowledge of the natural world. I am fortunate to have shared many nature walks with her and am constantly amazed by how much she knows, about the names of plants, of course, but also about their origins, uses, and lore.

She knows lots about the animals, as well! And she imparts this knowledge with clarity, enthusiasm, humor, and patience toward those of us seeking to learn.

Even more amazingly, despite her considerable breadth and depth of expertise, she eagerly welcomes contributions from those less schooled than she is, encouraging all to add to the conversation about the wonders of the natural world.

I just love walking with her!

- Jackie Donnelly

When I retired from full-time work over 17 years ago, I immediately signed up for the ECOS wildflower walks. That's when I met Ruth Schottman, who guided us to remote and beautiful places to see and to marvel at the beauties of nature at our feet, or hidden under leaves, or tucked back in the brush.

She taught us the parts of a flower, its life cycle, its peculiarities. Ruth was always quite specific, and quite precise about a flower's parts, its reproductive cycle, its sex life. Her Cornell training and her mastery of the botanical world were, and are, always in evidence.

I so loved the flower world Ruth taught me that I papered my kitchen with wildflower prints. When I look at that wallpaper I remember those walks, and Ruth. I also remember that wonderful line from Chaucer (with a change): *And gladly would she learn, and gladly teach.*

- Pat Rush

Please visit our Facebook page [www.facebook.com/ECOS-The-Environmental-Clearinghouse-183850741651609](http://www.facebook.com/ECOS-The-Environmental-Clearinghouse-183850741651609) for additional reflections on what it's like to walk with Ruth.