



What's a-Float?

Duck, Duck, Goose

by Twan Leenders

February and March are the times when the waters of Chautauqua Lake are alive with birds. Waterfowl primarily. **No fewer than 28 species** of ducks, geese, and swans are routinely seen on the open water sections of the lake during these months, sometimes numbering into the **tens of thousands**. The current winter has been far from typical, and this year's waterfowl numbers have been low, but that situation can change literally overnight when a **cold snap** freezes the lakes around us and pushes flocks of ducks, geese, and swans our way. As a rule, these waterfowl tend to stay only for as long as they need to, foraging on aquatic vegetation, shellfish, and fish as they prepare for their breeding season. **Almost all species seen here in winter do not breed locally**. Instead, they migrate north to the Canadian tundra or into the prairie pothole regions of the Midwest to nest and raise their young. Nonetheless, having a productive lake that provides them with adequate food resources and safe migratory stop-over habitat is **critical** to the breeding success of all these species.

By **mid-April**, most wintering waterfowl will have left the area, leaving only the **Canada geese, mallards, hooded mergansers, and common mergansers** - species that stick around year-round and breed locally. One additional species, the **wood duck**, winters south of us but breeds here. These spectacular little ducks start to return to our waters and wooded marshes around the same time that the winter visitors head north. Chautauqua Lake is an ever-changing whirlwind of waterfowl, and it is worth taking your binoculars out every day to see who's in town. The lake's status as **Important Bird Area (IBA)** is largely due to its importance for wintering waterfowl. As much as we all enjoy our summers on the lake, the bird life on the lake is only a fraction of what we see this time of year.

Oh, and while you're on your way to the lake to enjoy the ducks and geese, don't forget to keep your ears perked as the **first spring bird songs** are beginning to fill the air. **Cardinals, Tufted Titmice, and Chickadees** are singing on sunny days already, and the **Red-winged Blackbirds** are returning to Chautauqua County. Spring is just around the corner!

Article and photos by Twan Leenders. Top photo above shows Hooded Mergansers, bottom is a Blue-winged Teal.

Twan is the Director of Conservation at the [Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy](http://www.chautauquawatershed.org). The author of *Amphibians of Costa Rica* and *Reptiles of Costa Rica* and coauthor

of *The Wildlife of Costa Rica*, his photographs have been featured in many books and magazines, including National Geographic, New Scientist and National Wildlife. Twan is a very popular speaker and guide for the BTG each summer.



To see more of Twan's photos of winter birds, visit the Winter Birds page of our [Explore CHQ app!](#)



Migrating Members!

by Angela James

This is a new column, which we hope will become a regular one, in which we will celebrate the activities of our Life Members when we are away from Chautauqua during our winter migration season!

Our first featured Migrating Member is **Jamie Jamison**. Jamie serves on the BTG Board of Directors as the Marketing Chair. As part of that role, Jamie runs BTG's social media accounts. BTG set a goal to reach 1,000 followers on Facebook and Instagram this year. (Help us reach our goal of 1,000, and click the icons at the bottom of this email!)

So where does Jamie migrate when the Chautauqua season ends? The Answer is twofold: Youngstown, Ohio and the New York Botanical Garden in the Bronx.

With a Master's in Speech, Jamie teaches several courses at the college level on Social Media as well as Speech and Marketing. As a professional photographer, her specialty is florals. Jamie manages her own successful social media presence - [@alaJamie](#) on Instagram with 51,300 IG followers - wow! In Jamie's role as an 'Influencer,' she manages a range of companies promoting their brands through social media. Jamie also combined her love of florals and photography by completing coursework in floral design at the Flower School of NY.

Jamie's flair for florals, skills as a photographer, and understanding of social media landed her as the NY Botanical Garden's instructor both online and in person. Course topics range from Florals of the Baroque and Dutch Masters to Internet Tools for Creatives where she teaches course participants to style florals and promote their business on social media.

I attended Jamie's class at the New York Botanical Garden in NYC in February, which she co-teaches with her florist colleague Barbara Mele. Each participant received over \$150 in florals and props. Barbara presented an inspiring lecture highlighting elements of design within paintings from Baroque masters. Each participant set out to create their own floral masterpiece. The aroma in the design studio was intoxicating, and the concentration was intense you could hear a pin drop! Jamie led the group on a series of styling vignettes, each arrangement with props related to the era such as birds, gilded mirrors, candles, pearls, and rich dark backgrounds. We learned specific camera settings - yes, on iPhones and Androids - and how to post them. Our group of 15 people met all day at the NYBG midtown location and developed great camaraderie! Each person proudly took home their arrangement and about 1,000 more tips, tricks, and ideas.

Photos and article by Angela James. Above: a screenshot from Jamie's Instagram showing one of the arrangements; and below: Jamie in action at the NYBG.

Angela James is the BTG Photographer and former President. She lives in New York City in the off-season.

Jamie Jamison is a natural light and still-life photographer with a passion for flowers, vintage finds, and handmade treasures. She is a social media content manager as well as an influencer for several national companies, a communication Instructor at Youngstown State, a BloomTV Network Expert, an instructor at NYBG, and formerly an instructor at the Flower School of NY and LA. She also provides private coaching for Instagram, photography, and styling.



**A Little
Latin Lesson**
by Amy Gawtry

The Latin name for the Purple Martin is *Progne subis*, which derived from the mythological story of the origin of the species.

Progne comes from the proper name Procne in Greek. In Greek mythology, Procne was a princess and a queen - the daughter of King Pandion of Athens and the wife of King Tereus of Thrace.

Procne had a sister named Philomena. While visiting her sister at the palace, Philomela was raped by her brother-in-law, King Tereus. After raping her, he cut off her tongue so that she couldn't speak of the crime. However, Philomela wove the crime onto a tapestry, which she gave to her sister, Procne. When Procne realized what

had happened, she killed her son Itys, boiled him, and served him to his father, King Tereus, for dinner. After Tereus finished his meal, Procne and Philomela showed the head of the poor boy to Tereus. Realizing what had happened, he grabbed an ax and tried to kill them as they fled. While being pursued, the sisters pleaded to the gods to save them. The gods answered their prayers and all three of them were turned into birds: Procne into a swallow (the family name for the purple martin); Philomela into a nightingale; and Tereus into a hoopoe.

As for *subis*, the second part of the Latin name, Pliny, the famous Roman author and naturalist, writes that that *subis* means "a bird that breaks eagle's eggs." It may have been applied to the martins because of their aggression toward birds of prey while nesting.

Isn't it nice to know that the Romans were carefully observing the nature of birds as we do today? And so it goes that language - in a name - *Progne subis*, weaves a story of the brilliant and tragic interactions that occur between humans and the animals whom we are so lucky to spend time with.

One final Latin connection to the martins is this: legend tells us that the purple coloring of the bird was applied by a soldier named Cæcina. As a member of the equestrian order, Caecina carried captured wild swallows with him to battle. After the battle his soldiers dyed the birds the color of prevailing party and released them to return home, carrying the result of the battle. His party was purple, which was a very pricy color dye at the time. The purple swallows would make their way back home, forever purple to boast of his victories.

Author's Note: When I was little, my favorite color was purple, and my last name was Martin. As a result, I took a special interest in the Purple Martin for selfish reasons.

Amy Gawtry is a BTG Life Member and Latin teacher. She lives in Charlottesville, Virginia in the off-season and next door to the Hall of Philosophy during the summer.

Photo above by Angela James of Chautauqua's Purple Martin colony, attended by Jack Gulvin.

Click [here](#) to learn about Chautauqua's Purple Martin colonies and to watch a video of Jack Gulvin's Purple Martin Chat and [here](#) to learn even more about the Purple Martin!



If We All Do a Little

by Betsy Burgeson

As a gardener, I am guilty of flower tunnel vision... i.e., looking at my garden with only flowers in mind. As I age - like a fine wine I might add - I am still learning to step back and look at the garden as a whole: "What does the garden NEED?" Not, "Nooooooo, that non-native flower is the prettiest color I have ever seen! I must buy it and stick it in my garden! (*Please note - I am admittedly still guilty of this thought with every flower/seed catalog that gets delivered). Anyway, February always makes me think of one of my best friends from college, as his birthday is early in the month. Whenever I would get stressed out or worried about what I was going to do with my life, he would say, "In the grand scheme of things..." and then finish it with something like, "does this matter?" "Will this decision make a difference, Betsy?"

Fast forward ten years, and from 2008 to 2010, I had the honor of working with the Chautauqua Watershed Conservancy as a watershed educator or, as my mom coined, "The Sheducator." I would go out to schools and various organizations throughout the county talking about Chautauqua Lake and the surrounding watersheds. I would start by asking the groups what the word stewardship meant, and it was a 4th-grade student that gave me the best answer I'd ever heard: "Stewardship is doing what we can to protect the gifts we've been given." WOW.....I still get goosebumps.

Over the past 20 + years, the words of my best friend and a 10-year-old school boy have become my subconscious mantra, not just in general life but in my gardening life too. Every choice I make as a gardener has an impact, whether good or bad. As a steward of Chautauqua Lake and the land around it, I have a responsibility to

PROTECT THE GIFTS and make sure in the grand scheme of things, my choices are making a difference in a positive way.

The gardens throughout Chautauqua Institution have been transforming since long before I started with the installation of some of the first rain gardens anywhere in Chautauqua County. I'm proud to be part of an organization that has been a role model for lake stewardship. One that makes good decisions that help protect the ecosystems throughout the grounds. It isn't an easy call to ban road salt or pesticides that are harmful to beneficial insects when their use would make things a lot "easier." However, in the grand scheme of things, do decisions like these make a positive impact? ABSOLUTELY.

I was asked recently, what's my goal in life? Hmmm...at first, I thought it was like asking me which one of my kids is my favorite. Answer - depends on the day. It actually ended up being a very simple answer: to make a difference and empower others to do the same. Every job on my career path has had this intention at its core, but my position at the Chautauqua Institution brings that goal to the forefront. For the past two summer seasons, I have been leading weekly garden tours throughout the grounds of Chautauqua, sponsored by the BTG. I have been humbled and blown away by the attendees' eagerness, desire to learn, and inquisitiveness week after week, not to mention the sheer numbers! I have come to understand that every decision I make for the gardens here has a significant impact on the Chautauqua region as well as the broader national landscape. I have realized that residents and visitors alike, whether attending a BTG lecture or nature tour or simply enjoying a walk around the grounds, take inspiration from their surroundings. The gardens, both public and private, are a huge educational component of the whole Institution. It makes me smile every time I pass a private garden that is making a positive impact through little changes. The homeowners are "taking chances" on native plants, creating habitats, and CHOOSING year-round function over summer aesthetics.

My hope is that the gardens throughout the Chautauqua Campus continue to educate, inspire and empower others to make small changes in the way we garden within our watershed in order to protect Chautauqua Lake and the surrounding land for future generations. Our choices make a difference, and in the grand scheme of things, protecting the gifts bestowed on us should be our top priority. No matter how small, the cumulative impact of our choices and actions can move mountains. After all, if we all do a little, we can do a lot.

Photos and article by [Betsy Burgeson](#). Betsy is the Supervisor of Gardens & Landscapes for Chautauqua Institution. In addition to all she does for Chautauqua, Betsy leads garden tours every Friday at 12:30 during the season for the BTG. Join us for one this summer! Top photo is of the Rain Garden at University Park and the bottom photo is of one of the Fenceline Rain Gardens at the Amp.



Reconnecting with Nature



I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in order. - John Burroughs

- Photo by Jack Voelker who paired his photo with this lovely quote by John Burroughs and shared it with us.



What's a-Float?

...and How?

Water Striders and Niches

by Dennis McNair, PhD

Water striders (family Gerridae) are those insects that inhabit the upper surface of the water (colloquially called “**Jesus bugs**” because they walk on water) and feed mostly on other insects that have become trapped on the water’s surface.

In shallow, still water along the edge of a pool or stream, they often create **six little shadows** on the substrate beneath the water caused by the dimples they make with their feet on the water’s surface. Often it’s those shadows we see first before even seeing the bugs.

They’re **members of the Order Hemiptera** (“true” bugs) and have piercing/sucking mouthparts and only rudimentary wings. They also have special **hydrofuge (water repelling) hairs on their feet that keep them afloat and allow them to skate** across the water’s surface, propelled by their two back pairs of legs and steering with the front pair.

Gerrid water striders are fairly large (1/2 inch long) and conspicuous, but they escape predation by using a unique part of the aquatic habitat (the upper surface of the water. Their potential predators would sink if they tried to run along the water.

Water Striders are a fine example of the phenomenon of **niche diversification**. Each species has an ecological interrelationship with its surrounding environment that ecologists call a niche. To avoid competition, species fine tune that relationship and diversify that fundamental niche. For instance, if the fundamental niche is to live in an aquatic environment, one species may become a swimmer, one rely on the underside of the water’s surface and another on the surface’s upper surface. All are using the water but none is directly in competition with the others for the resources the water supplies. Thus the fundamental niche is diversified.

Water varies by salinity, and we generally divide it into **freshwater and seawater** – 0 to 0.5% (500 ppm) salinity vs. 3.5% (3500) ppm. Between 1% and 3% is considered **brackish** and greater than 5% is **briny** (the latter levels occur in estuaries, where rivers run into the sea, and tide pools, where evaporation of water concentrates salts). Human blood and fluids are consistently 0.85% saline equivalent. Most other animals are about 0.65% saline. The seas probably contained less salt when animal life first evolved, so it’s often said that tissue fluids resemble seawater, although that’s clearly not the case at this time. Animals that live in freshwater face the problem of eliminating water and concentrating salts from their environment and those in seawater must eliminate excess salts. The elimination of water or excess salts requires energy and is a physiological stress on the animals that accomplish it. Insects evolved on land, where their ability to retain water and concentrate certain salts were both necessary, and later moved to fresh water.

Water is a **transparent medium**, and one of my favorite things to do with my ecology classes was to teach them to look beneath the water’s surface for living things. Most people look only at the surface of a lake, pond or stream, so when they look through the surface to the life beneath, they are usually fascinated. Since I was about 10 years old, I’ve been fascinated by life within the water, and my favorite pastime was taking rocks out of the water and examining the life on them. Now, many decades later, that’s still one of my favorite things to do.

Insects living beneath the water’s surface face several problems as they evolved from terrestrial ancestors. Besides elimination of excess water to preserve their salt and water balance, they had to **obtain oxygen** (air consistently contains 21% oxygen while water has only a fraction of 1%, and that varies with turbulence and temperature). Water striders avoid both of those problems by living in the air above freshwater. A few species of the family Gerridae have actually ventured onto the surface of the ocean, whereas almost all other insects are restricted to freshwater.

Two other families of water striders – Hebridae and Veliidae – are common. Both contain insects that are much smaller than gerrids. One of the most common insects (by numbers) in North American freshwater habitats is the genus *Rhagovelia*, a tiny insect just a few mm long, which inhabits the surface of still water near the shores of lakes and streams in “flotillas” of many individuals together. Their habits are similar to their larger cousins, but their prey and scavenged food items tend to be smaller. Also, they lack some of the propulsive ability of larger striders.

All of these unique insects thrive by their using their unique lifestyles and adaptation to exploit a very specific part of their aquatic environment. Close investigation of almost all insects will reveal such niche diversification. At first glance, there appear to be only a few fundamental niches, but the only way so many different species can exist is by **diversifying those few niches and avoiding direct competition**. Water striders using the upper surface of still waters demonstrate this nicely.

Dennis M. McNair, PhD, is a retired University of Pittsburgh Johnstown biology professor, where he won awards and was beloved by all. But we can all agree that being the official BTG Entomologist is the most impressive feather one could add to a cap. Congrats and thank you, Dennis!





Historical Tidbit

by Janine Obee

As I sit down to write my February "Tidbit" I see a parade of birds snacking at my bird feeder including: chickadees, blue birds, gold finches, cardinals, flickers and even a downy woodpecker. As a bird lover it makes perfect sense that at the very first meeting of the Chautauqua Bird and Tree Club* in 1913 a primary order of business was to establish the Institution as a Bird Sanctuary.

Louise Igoe Miller, daughter-in-law of Lewis Miller, served as the first president of BTC for 13 years, from 1913-23 and again from 1929-31 during the depression. Despite her leadership it turned out that becoming a Bird Sanctuary ran into one major obstacle: cats!

According to the Audubon Society, Bird Sanctuary's must provide food and shelter for birds and protect them from cats, their #1 predator. The first objective was pretty straight forward. The club decided to plant native species around the Institution including: bittersweet, blackberries, crab apple, elderberry, gooseberry, huckleberries, may apples, paw paws, raspberries, sun flowers, and wild roses! They also started making Berlepsch bird houses and hanging them around the Institution. A Berlepsch bird house is known for its entry hole and resembles today's blue bird houses. This design was conceived in 1910 by Hans Berlepsch, a world famous ornithologist at that time. The Bird and Tree Club even recruited youth to help make the birdhouses.

The following year the Bird and Tree Club decided to take on the second requirement, to protect birds from cats. July 1914 they posted a notice in the Chautauqua Daily which read:

"Chautauqua having been set aside as a Bird Sanctuary, owners of cats are earnestly requested to see to it that their animals are prevented from climbing trees in search of birds as otherwise, traps and other devices must be used to catch, and dispose of all poaching animals." -- Executive Committee, Chautauqua Bird and Tree Club

This proved to be unsuccessful, as come August 1914 the Club passed the following resolution:

"Resolved that this Club take immediate practical steps to induce cat owners to tie bells around their pet's necks -- using a narrow ribbon for the purpose. First to secure a stock of these bells and ribbons at the Chautauqua shops; second -- putting of a notice explaining the motives and purpose of the Club leading to this action in the Chautauquan Daily and third -- a united effort to create in the community a willingness to cooperate in this way for the protection of birds."

By 1916 the group had the reputation of being called "The Club for the Suppression of Cats"! Undaunted, the effort continued in 1922 when the Bird and Tree Club petitioned the Board of Trustees to eliminate the "tramp cat" and require all cats to wear a tag indicating licensure. Those cats not licensed were to be 'humanely disposed.' By 1924 less than 40 cats had been officially licensed. This initiative proved yet again to be unsuccessful. This concluded Louise Miller's first 10 yrs as President of the BT Club. No one could say that the Club did not have 'stick-to-itiveness.' Apparently no one told them you cannot herd cats!

However this went on for another 10+ years. The stipulation that a Bird Sanctuary protect birds from harm now had an additional culprit, dogs. To this day the Chautauqua Institution has never met the requirements of being a Bird Sanctuary....

* The Club was called The Chautauqua Bird and Tree Club until 1965 when "Garden" was added. No Oxford comma either - we are the Chautauqua Bird, Tree and Garden Club.

Janine Obee is a BTG Life Member and currently serving on the Board of Directors as the BTG Historian. She lives in Sewickley, PA in the off-season.

About the membership button photo above: this passage taken from *100 Years of Beauty: A History of the Chautauqua Bird, Tree and Garden Club* by Mary Lee Talbot:

"The first two Membership Buttons of the Bird and Tree Club. The club emblem was designed by Louis Agassiz Fuertes. Along with John James Audubon and Roger Tory Peterson, Fuertes is considered one of the greatest American bird artists and illustrators. The Club first entertained Fuertes at the Jones' cottage in the Green Loggia. He, in turn, entertained 'the company with his inimitable imitations of bird music and was rivaled by the actual birds that were singing their evening songs in the Overlook woods and fields and answered Mr. Fuertes calls."

Stay tuned: We will be discussing the current and beloved Bird Logo, which was designed by Bob Ivers, in an upcoming newsletter.



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