

Snakes of Mendon

by *Duncan and Valerie Tyrrel*

Within the Town of Mendon there are a variety of habitats that are conducive to numerous species of snakes. Examples of these habitats include open fields, hedgerows, woodlands, swamps, ponds and slow-moving streams. There are 11 species of snakes common to the Mendon area, all of which are nonpoisonous and harmless. In fact, many are beneficial to man due to rodent control. Mendon Ponds and the Honeoye Creek offer the most diverse habitats and are where you'll most likely find the greatest number of snake species.

All snake species in western New York hibernate during the cold winter months, from early November to early April. Snakes such as Garters often hibernate in large numbers in the same locations, year after year. Places such as abandoned woodchuck holes, rock crevices that go deep into the ground and under deep layers of composting material are common hibernation locations. These "homes" will usually face south, taking advantage of the sun's warm rays.

Snakes, being cold-blooded, must regulate their body temperature and will take advantage of the surrounding environment in order to prevent themselves from becoming too warm or too cold. You will often find snakes on cool nights lying on roads that have been heated by the day's sun, or under logs, rocks and woodpiles to escape the heat of the day. A snake is most active when its body temperature ranges from 70 to 80 degrees F.

The most common snake found in Mendon and in fact all of North America is the Garter snake. Garter snakes can be found in and around all existing Mendon habitats. There are over 50 species of Garter snakes found in North America, and three can be found in Mendon. They are: the Central Plains Garter, the Eastern Garter and the Common Garter. Each one has its own distinct pattern but all have similar colors ranging from yellow and black with stripes to greenish, yellow and black with dots. Their size ranges from 15 to 30 inches. One reason Garter snakes are so common is that they are "live-bearing" snakes, meaning the eggs hatch internally.

Therefore, typically in mid-August, Garter snakes will bear anywhere from 12 to over 60 live babies capable of taking care of themselves. Another reason for their commonality is the variety of food that these snakes will eat. They will eat frogs, toads, worms, small mice, insects and fish. Most Garter snakes are fairly docile and do well in captivity.

(cont'd on page 2)

• Mendon Foundation • Mission Statement

The Mendon Foundation is a non-profit corporation established to:

PRESERVE, protect and enhance the scenic, natural, recreational and structural resources in the Town of Mendon and directly adjacent properties,

MAINTAIN a responsible stewardship of assets and properties held or controlled by the corporation,

ESTABLISH and promote local environmental education on issues pertinent to the preservation of natural resources in the Town of Mendon,

ESTABLISH and promote programs to monitor the natural resources in the Town of Mendon.

As we succeed in these objectives, we enhance property values for all Mendon property owners. The Foundation is supported by membership fees, grants and other contributions. Donations to the Mendon Foundation are tax deductible.

Proceeds are used to cover easement acquisitions, monitoring and communications.
All labor is volunteer.

The Ribbon snake, very similar to the Garter snake is less common. Typically, the Ribbon snake is thinner and smaller with yellow or red stripes against brown scales and their tail is nearly one-third the length of their body. Their diet is the same as the Garter snake.

Another common snake in the town of Mendon is the Northern Banded water snake. Excellent swimmers at the surface and under water, these snakes feed primarily on fish, frogs and other small aquatic life. Water snakes are protective and will strike and release foul-smelling secretion from musk glands at the base of the tail. While visiting Mendon Ponds over the Labor Day weekend, a small crowd of people at 100 Acre Pond was fortunate enough to witness a Northern Banded water snake's attempt to capture and eat an 8 inch catfish. The catfish fortunately escaped and the water snake swam off under water into a cattail marsh to escape the crowd of people. Water snakes can grow 30 to 36 inches in length. Although there are a half dozen or so species of water snakes in the U.S., only the Northern Banded water snake lives in western New York and should never be confused with the poisonous Water Moccasin (Cottonmouth) of the southern U.S. Though water snakes are not poisonous, they are aggressive when caught and can deliver a stinging and infectious bite. It is best to view them from a safe distance. Water snakes are found in ponds, streams and marshy areas in the town of Mendon. As with Garter and Ribbon snakes, water snakes eat their food alive and typically head first.

The Eastern King snake, commonly known as the Eastern Milk snake, is a constrictor feeding primarily on small rodents such as mice and voles. Constrictors kill their prey before eating by grabbing their prey with their mouth and wrapping their body around the animal in order to suffocate it. With each release of oxygen from its prey, the snake tightens its grip in order to prevent expansion of the lungs. King snakes, in general, may also feed on other snakes and some are partially immune to the poisons of venomous snakes found in the United States. Milk snakes of the eastern U.S. have red splotches or rings bordered with black; the belly is pale with black blotches. These snakes are typically found around old barns or under debris, stone fences and somewhat more mature wooded areas throughout Mendon. Constrictors are valuable rodent control creatures and as with all other snakes, should be protected.

A less common constrictor of western New York is the Black Rat snake. Only rarely is one ever encountered in the Town of Mendon due to its need for a more mature, primitive environment. It's most likely that they have been wiped out in the Town of Mendon. Perhaps Mendon Ponds supports a small population. A Black Rat snake's diet consists of mice, rats, chipmunks and

to a lesser degree, bird eggs and small birds. The Black Rat snake is the largest snake in western N.Y., sometimes reaching lengths of over 6 feet. They are large enough to consume six rats at one feeding.

A unique snake, the Hognose snake, is a gentle creature feeding primarily on toads and sometimes frogs and portrays a unique defensive behavior when molested. When threatened the Hognose snake will spread its head and neck (similar to a Cobra), hiss loudly and strike with a closed mouth "appearing" to be very dangerous, but they never bite. If this threat fails, they will roll over with an open mouth and play dead. The Hognose snake has a "hook" on the tip of its nose enabling it to dig for toads. The Eastern Hognose snake is a stout snake growing up to 24 to 30 inches. This is an amusing snake to come across in the wild.

Other less commonly found snakes, due to their size and reclusive nature, are the DeKay snakes, Ringneck snakes, Red-Bellied snakes and Green snakes. These snakes are typically found in moist meadows and under rocks. They range in length from 12 to 18 inches and seldom (if ever) bite. Their diet consists of small worms, toads and small insects. All of these snakes lay eggs in moist, decomposed matter such as rotted logs.

Another less common snake, the Black Racer, is seldom found in Mendon. Consistent with its name, the Black Racer is a very fast snake and almost impossible to catch. Black Racers are not constrictors but do feed on mice, eating them alive and they will bite repeatedly if you attempt to capture them. They should not be confused with the Black Rat snake as they are much thinner with a more pointed head and only grow to be half the size.

All species of snakes found in the Town of Mendon are harmless creatures and should be enjoyed for their unique qualities and "natural fit" in the ecosystem. Snakes are clean, dry animals and not "slimy" evil pests as some people might believe. We should consider ourselves fortunate that we still live in an environment where such diversity of animal life continues to exist. ■

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SPECIAL THANKS TO:

JOE SPEZIO - donation of sand and gravel for parking lot area next to the Little League fields in the Hamlet of Mendon;

AVON LUMBER and **ELITSAC LUMBER** for donation of materials for redecking of the bridge on the trail in the Town of Rush;

TIM SMITH for the use of his building as the headquarters for the Mendon Foundation;

PITTSFORD TREE AND LANDSCAPE for the donation of grass seed, six trees and planting sketches for the parking lot area next to the Little League Baseball fields;

HONEOYE FALLS-MENDON YOUTH BASEBALL LEAGUE for contributing the bulldozing of the parking lot area adjacent to the baseball fields;

BOYSCOUT TROUP 45 from the 19th Ward led by Scoutmaster, Dick Rasmussen for the trail clean-up help provided on April 5th

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Lehigh Valley Linear Trail Progress Report

Since the project of developing the Lehigh Valley Linear Trail became a goal of the Mendon Foundation about two years ago, we have accomplished a great deal. As with any successful project, the first steps include developing detailed plans. Much time and effort has gone into creating a plan of action, developing committees to review and resolve the various issues associated with this project and getting local organizations and individuals involved. Here are some of the essential administrative tasks we have accomplished so far:

- * established a comprehensive, long-term implementation plan for developing the trail which was accepted by and filed with the Monroe County Parks Department;

- * completed negotiations with the County of Monroe, resulting in a contract to develop and manage that portion of the trail situated within the Towns of Mendon and Rush;

- * prepared detailed engineering and construction cost estimates along with estimates for labor, materials and equipment;

- * created plans, obtained support documents and photographs of the trail corridor for records and grant applications. Submitted a 150 page grant application for ISTE A funds;

- * established a working relationship with Victor Hiking Trails, Inc. and volunteers from the Town of Rush to deal with trail development issues and maintenance;

- * established a working relationship with the Honeoye Falls-Mendon Youth Baseball League to pursue joint development of a parking lot/picnic area in the Hamlet of Mendon adjacent to the Little League fields; and

- * created and publicized a concept for the redevelopment of that portion of the trail which traverses the Hamlet of Mendon.

Although these things are not glamorous and rather invisible to the public eye, they are essential in order to establish and operate a well organized and well executed project.

With plans in place, we have been able to effect some improvements to the trail. We have held two official cleanup days at which volunteers cut brush and removed trash and other debris from the trail. We also

WEAR YOUR SUPPORT!

Our Mendon Foundation logo is proudly displayed on our hats (white cap with dark green brim), golf shirts and sweatshirts. And yes, we still have some commemorative "Trail Day" T-shirts. Get one of our commemorative T's before they're all gone. All shirts have a dark green background and white lettering and come in three different sizes. Prices quoted include sales tax.

		TOTAL
<input type="checkbox"/>	I would like _____ hats at \$10.75 each. (one size fits all) <small>(indicate how many)</small>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	I would like _____ Trail Day T-shirts at \$10.75 each. M L XL (circle desired size) <small>(indicate how many)</small>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	I would like _____ Golf shirts at \$16.15 each. M L XL (circle desired size) <small>(indicate how many)</small>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	I would like _____ Sweatshirts at \$21.55 each. M L XL (circle desired size) <small>(indicate how many)</small>	_____
GRAND TOTAL ENCLOSED		<input style="width: 80px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>
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Spring/Summer 1997		

have bulldozed the area near the Little League fields in the Hamlet of Mendon in anticipation of beginning Phase 1 of the development of the parking lot/picnic area. Redecking trail bridges, putting signage on the trail and completing Phase 1 of the parking lot project are our main goals for this season. If we can get the last of the bridges redecked, the trail will be accessible to walkers the entire way within Mendon and Rush.

Phase 1 of the parking lot development includes planting trees and shrubs around the perimeter of the site. New designated parking spots have been established so that some areas could be seeded for grass. Pittsford Tree and Landscape has generously agreed to donate their time and some materials to rehabbing this

Shade Trees – Varieties: Maple, Locust, Oak, Ash 1-3/4" caliper \$200 each*

Two Large Shade Trees are needed for the entrance to the parking area \$500 each*

Ornamental Trees – Varieties: Crabapple, Cherry, Plum 8-10' tall \$100 each*

Assorted Evergreen Trees – 5-6' tall \$100 each*

Shrubs – Varieties: Lilac, Spirea, Forsythia, Burning Bush, Dogwood 3 gal. size \$25 each*

Arborvitae – 3' size \$40 each*

* Price includes the cost of planting

area. You can get involved by making a donation which will be used to purchase a tree or shrub that will be placed in this area. We have shown on this page a list of plants we will be using and what each will cost. Please help us beautify this spot by making a contribution toward these materials.

Please make your check payable to the Mendon Foundation and return it using the Membership/Order Form on Page 8. Check the box that says "Parking Lot Improvement Project" and indicate what you would like us to buy with your donation. Or you can stop by Pittsford Tree and Landscape, select the tree or shrub you want to donate and give your check payable to the Mendon Foundation to the store clerk. You will benefit by making a tax deductible contribution and the community will benefit from a beautifully landscaped parking and picnicking area.

Materials have been donated and volunteers organized to redeck the bridges. For safety purposes, trail identity signs must be placed at all road crossings. Each sign will cost \$45 and we will need a minimum of 50 signs. You can contribute toward the purchase of a sign by completing the Membership Order Form on page 8 and checking the box marked "Trail Signs". Your donation will be acknowledged by a Donor Identification notice which will appear on each sign you purchase.

We need and are grateful for your donation. You can have the satisfaction of knowing that your donation is going to be used to make the trail beautiful as well as safe. Perhaps you will be one of the people who can say as you walk down the trail, "I bought that sign," or "That's my tree." Your donation is something that all the people in the community that use the trail can appreciate. ■

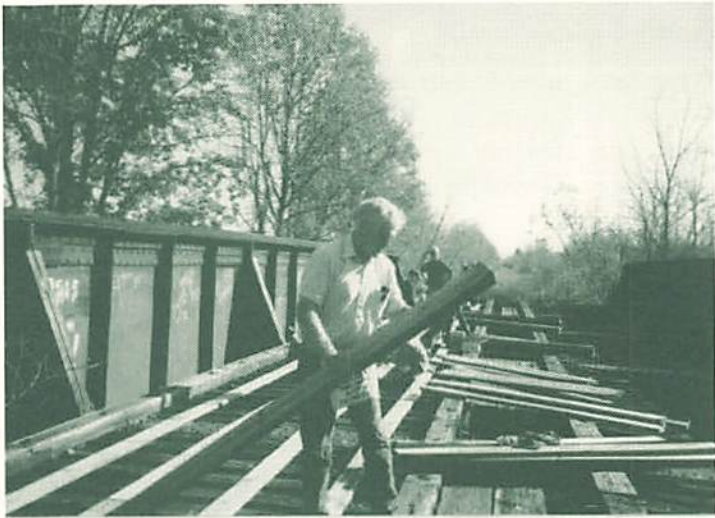


Phase 1 of the Parking Lot Improvement Project is underway.

Photo by John Spinelli.

Rush Trail Volunteers Bridge Another Gap

by Karen Hopkins



Volunteers working on the Lehigh Valley/Black Diamond Trail can really be proud of their accomplishments. Six miles of trail have been cleared of debris; from tires to sinks and toilets, brush; from twigs to sizable trees, and the entire length brushhogged. A new deck has been built on the railroad bridge between West Henrietta and East Henrietta Road.

In the spring handrails will be added to the bridge, signs posted, and we will have an official opening of the trail for hiking, biking, jogging and horseback riding. You can park your car or truck and horse trailer in the hamlet of Rush at the gazebo or in the parking lot on Fishell Road and access the six miles of trail from East River Road to the Rush-Mendon town line.

But, the job is not done! How can you help? Boy Scouts are working on a map of the trail. Is anyone willing to rehab two railroad signal boxes so that we can display and distribute the maps?

Monroe County Parks Department signs need to be mounted so that they can be posted along the trail. Is anyone willing to volunteer time and materials to do this?

We are planning a TREASURE HUNT along the trail for pre-school and elementary school children this spring/summer? Want to help?

To implement our risk management plan, we need volunteers to walk specific sections of the trail on a monthly basis to check for fallen branches and hazards of any kind. Are you willing or do you know of a group or neighborhood team who is willing to accept this responsibility?

This is truly a community project. Call Karen Hopkins, Rush Liaison, at 226-2714 if you have questions or concerns or want to volunteer.



New Members and Renewals

The people and businesses listed below have supported us by becoming new members or by renewing their current memberships since our last issue went to press. The list also includes people who have made special cash donations.

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- I would like to be a volunteer specifically for the Trail Project.
- I would like a Foundation member to contact me.

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- \$50 Annual Business Membership
- Parking Lot Improvement Project \$ _____
To be used to buy _____
- Trail Signs \$ _____

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