

STEPHEN PARKER NATURE TRAIL

Dedicated June 17, 1995

Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society



DELAWARE-OTSEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY

The Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society is an organization dedicated to the natural environment. The group's activities focus on protection and maintenance of ecological systems, conservation of natural resources, and environmental quality improvements.

DOAS manages a 100-acre wildlife sanctuary near Oneonta, NY. The Sanctuary is the site of the fall Franklin Mt. Hawkwatch, and the John G. New Audubon Day Camp for children.

Programs on a variety of topics are presented each month from Sept. through May, and a series of field trips conducted throughout the year.

For membership information, contact DOAS, PO Box 544, Oneonta, NY 13820; www.doas.us.

Stephen Parker was a talented young photographer who often used the Delaware-Otsego Audubon Society Sanctuary as a source of subjects for his work.

Stephen spent nine years photographing in and around Oneonta. In 1986, he moved to California, where he continued his career. His abilities and success grew to featuring of his images in nationally renowned publications such as *Audubon* magazine.

Through close-up photos of insects, plants, rocks, water and other natural subjects, Stephen demonstrated their awesome beauty. He died in 1990, leaving behind over 3000 beautiful images of nature.

Stephen requested that DOAS receive proceeds from sales of his photographs. They have been used to establish a fund for projects such as this nature trail.

#1. Most people know that it is possible to determine a tree's age by counting its growth rings. But did you know that some trees can be aged without cutting them down? Each whorl (ring of branches) on coniferous trees, such as this young white pine, represents one year's growth. Count whorls to estimate the tree's age.



#2. Wetlands are the most productive areas in nature, providing habitat for fish, amphibians and reptiles, birds, mammals and invertebrates. In addition, they cleanse water and act as sponges, soaking up water during floods and releasing it during dry periods. Half of our nation's wetlands have been drained or filled in, so it is very important to save those that are left. View this wetland from the boardwalk further along the trail.

#3. Several varieties of lichens grow on these exposed rocks. Lichens consist of a symbiosis between algae and fungi. The algae contain chlorophyll which they use to produce carbohydrates. These are required for food by the algae but are also absorbed and used for growth by the fungi. The fungal tissue in turn may provide shelter for the algae allowing them to grow in harsh conditions such as rock surfaces. The pioneering lichens weather the rock, turning it into soil.

#4. Brush piles, such as this, benefit the ecosystem. They provide shelter and cover for small mammals, birds, amphibians and reptiles. The insects attracted to the dead and decaying wood are often used as a food source by these same animals. The decaying wood also

reintroduces nutrients back into the ecosystem. Land owners who provide brush piles, rather than remove brush to the landfill, can greatly increase their wildlife viewing.

#5. Nest boxes can be found throughout the Sanctuary. In addition to this type which is designed for Bluebirds, you may spot boxes for Wood Ducks, Barred and Screech Owls, and even for bats! Boxes are not always used by the species for which they were intended: squirrels often move into owl boxes, mice or Chickadees into Bluebird houses, and raccoons into Wood Duck boxes.



#6. In biological terms, succession is described as the process by which ecosystems have a tendency to change from simple to complex. Most plants and animals prefer specific stages of succession. By maintaining a variety of successional stages, the diversity of wildlife is maximized. A schedule of mowing keeps this area in the "old field" stage of succession. Without mowing it would eventually become forest.

#7. This area is damp all through the year, even though it is far from a stream or pond. This is a place where the water table intersects the ground surface, creating a seep or spring. The layers of rock underlying the Sanctuary provide a route for water to travel great distances underground. Unfortunately water pollution can travel the same way, so oil, pesticides and other toxic materials should be kept out of groundwater.

#8. This shrub or small tree is Witch-hazel, the last plant to flower each year. In November or sometimes even December, spidery yellow blossoms appear, which in turn produce pods

with seeds that are eaten by grouse, turkeys and other wildlife. If you happen by at the right time, you can hear a sharp "SNAP" as the pods burst open, shooting the seeds away from the tree--the Witch-hazel's technique for spreading to new areas.

#9. This is the site of the Franklin Mountain Hawkwatch, held each fall to count migrating raptors. The excellent panoramic view to the north allows hawks to be spotted as they cross the Susquehanna River valley below. The hawkwatch records large numbers of Red-tailed Hawks from mid-October through November, and is one of the best sites in the eastern US for seeing Golden Eagles in the same time period.



#10. Islands of foliage, which include native flowers, shrubs and trees, produce a great variety of foods for birds, mammals and insects. Birds use nectar, fruit and seeds; mammals may eat stems, leaves and bark; and insects can use foliage, pollen and plant juices. Such areas also provide places to build homes and hide from predators.

