

WILDLIFE PROGRAMS BRING BLUEBIRDS SOME HAPPINESS

The New York Power Authority's wildlife programs are largely "for the birds." At least that's what many people are finding when they come to the visitors center of the Blenheim-Gilboa Pumped Storage Power Project.

Wildlife is abundant in the mountains surrounding the power project. Fish of many kinds abound in nearby Schoharie Creek and Blenheim-Gilboa's two reservoirs. Deer, raccoons and squirrels roam most of the nearby Mine Kill State Park. Those who look closely may also see the more elusive coyote, bear, bobcat and even mink around the 650-acre site.

But it is the bluebird, long considered one of North America's favorites, and the majestic bald eagle, the symbol of our nation, that have Blenheim-Gilboa staff and visitors alike taking notice.

NYPA continues its commitment to maintaining a balance between nature and technology by focusing on ways to protect and improve wildlife habitats.

The common bluebird, or eastern bluebird, has seen a decline in population during the past century. Technology and the shrinking of rural America to accommodate advancing urbanization have diminished natural nesting sites, leaving New York's beloved state bird to compete with other species for places to roost.

Members of the Schoharie County Bluebird Society reached out to the Blenheim-Gilboa staff to assist in making the region the bluebird capital of New York once again. They joined forces with students from the State University of New York (SUNY) at Cobleskill to carve a 2 1/2-mile path, starting just steps from the visitors center's front door, that is dedicated to the species and aptly called the Bluebird Trail.



Nesting-box project at Blenheim-Gilboa attracts more bluebirds to area.

Placed along the path are some 30 specially fashioned wooden nesting boxes strategically placed on fences or posts to attract the bluebird in search of a nesting spot. The boxes, constructed and maintained by SUNY staff and faculty, are designed to encourage reproduction and offer protection to the bluebird, its newly laid eggs, and eventual young offspring.

It is the nesting box program, and the innovations that all involved bring to the program each year, that has earned the Blenheim-Gilboa project multi-year awards for its commitment to the environment from the Wildlife Habitat

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VN NOTES

Catch a Glimpse At Wildlife Festival

There's no better way to get acquainted with bluebirds, and the Schoharie Valley's other abundant wildlife for that matter, than to attend the Power Authority's 20th Annual Wildlife Festival, scheduled for Saturday, Sept. 24, at the Blenheim-Gilboa Power Project Visitors Center.



The festival will run from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. rain or shine, and admission is free.

The event will feature a variety of recreational and conservation-related exhibits and demonstrations, plus musical entertainment, arts and crafts and refreshment vendors.

Children and adults alike can get up close and personal to some area wildlife, such as birds of prey from Raptor Project or the Rain Forest Reptile Show. Special this year is Willow Farms with its miniature horses, as well as llamas from Red Maple Farms and Harvest Moon Alpacas, to name a few.

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Blenheim Covered Bridge Spans 150 Years

A sign at the entrance to the historic Blenheim Covered Bridge from days gone by reads: "\$500 fine to ride or drive this bridge faster than a walk."

A bridge that's 150 years old deserves that kind of tender loving care, and a major birthday bash to boot.

The Power Authority and a committee of local



The historic Blenheim Covered Bridge is the longest single-span covered bridge in the world.

residents are celebrating the bridge's birthday in September, in both North Blenheim and at the visitors center of NYPA's Blenheim-Gilboa Power Project.

Built in 1855 by Nicholas Montgomery Powers and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the Blenheim Covered Bridge is considered the most outstanding covered bridge in New York state and one of the most well-preserved examples of a wood truss bridge in the country.

Crossing over the Schoharie Creek at North Blenheim, it is the longest single-span covered bridge in the world, measuring 232 feet, made possible by three trusses, or supports, with huge pine timber posts, braces and counterbraces bolted together.

Although retired from use in 1931 and retained "as a historic relic" by local officials, it holds the distinction of being one of only six two-lane, or "double-barrel," bridges existing in the United States.

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UPCOMING EVENTS AT THE BLENHEIM-GILBOA VISITORS CENTER

SEPTEMBER

24 20th Annual Wildlife Festival

OCTOBER

15 Schoharie County Harvest Festival
29 S'cary Halloween

NOVEMBER

6, 13 Sunday Matinee Movies

DECEMBER

1–Jan. 2, 2006 Festival of Trees
10 Photos With Santa

Covered Bridge

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A day-long celebration was scheduled for Sept. 10 to commemorate the bridge's historic importance and pay tribute to its longevity. The Blenheim Volunteer Fire Department scheduled a community-wide parade for the afternoon, with fire units, marching bands, veterans contingents, local community organizations and one of NYPA's electric vehicles.

At parade's end, a rededication ceremony was scheduled at the bridge itself, organized by the town's Historical Society and including "an old-fashioned Americana feel" with a performance by the Gilboa-Conesville School Choir and the barber shop-style harmony of the Paul Bonhote Quartet.

At dusk, the Power Authority scheduled a dazzling fireworks display over the Blenheim-Gilboa Power Project, with the project visitors center grounds taking on the sounds and smells of a full-blown party with songs from the Phrog Blues Band featuring George Kilby Jr. and a chicken barbecue from the Schultes family, a favorite with locals.

Craft demonstrations from local weavers and carpenters were scheduled, and commemorative dishes and decorative tiles offered for sale. Shuttle bus service was scheduled from the visitors center to North Blenheim so those attending the free event could enjoy all the venues.

The covered bridge is located off State Route 30 at the north end of North Blenheim. ♦

Bluebirds

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Council. The council is a national nonprofit conservation group founded in 1988 to help large landowners manage their unused lands in an ecologically sensitive manner for the benefit of wildlife.

"The efforts of the employees at the Blenheim-Gilboa Power Project have continued to be outstanding," said William W. Howard, habitat council president, in announcing one of the awards. "Our staff members were particularly impressed with the planning and development of the long-term bluebird nest box monitoring program."

Stephen Coonradt, environmental scientist for Blenheim-Gilboa and NYPA's Central Region for more than 30 years, is proud of the program's success. "Our goal was to promote the existence of the bluebird and encourage reproduction of the species, so we partnered with the experts from the Bluebird Society and students and faculty from SUNY to create and manage a program that has been ongoing for more than a decade," Coonradt said.

The group has been experimenting with different nesting box designs that have proven to be even more successful than their predecessors. "The bluebirds like the new designs — our newer models so to speak — and I'm sure we'll see a notable increase when we do our analysis and report at the end of the nesting season." ♦

Wildlife Festival

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The family can relax with a horse-drawn wagon ride or take part in fly-tying and blacksmith workshops. For entertainment, there's juggling by Mike Inserra, and sing-a-longs with the zany Zucchini Brothers, featuring amusing children's songs, or Cassandra Boucher doing some top 40 hits. Music by "2 Late" and a bit of blues music round out the day's offerings.

The festival is held each year on or around National Hunting and Fishing Day, the fourth Saturday in September. The Power Authority will hold two other Wildlife Festivals on that date, one at Deerfield, near Utica, and at the Niagara Power Project near Niagara Falls. For more information on this and the other Wildlife Festivals visit www.nypa.gov.

But bluebirds aren't the only feathered friends on the minds of the staff at Blenheim-Gilboa. For some 20 years, conservationists have been working to increase the number of bald eagles in the area, a species once endemic to the region.

Peter Nye, with the state's Department of Environmental Conservation's (DEC) Endangered Species Unit, has been instrumental in the return of the bald eagle to the region, according to Coonradt, and works hand-in-glove with NYPA staff overseeing a pair of bald eagles that have lived in the area for several years.

While the eagles have produced offspring in the past, Coonradt explains that two reproductive seasons have been lost recently because the traditional nest site used by the couple has grown unstable, becoming too large, with nearby trees too small to support its weight.

NYPA and DEC staff are monitoring the site, and are ready to step in at the end of the nesting season to construct a larger, sturdier nesting platform nearby.

The DEC will install the platform high in a tree near the existing site in hopes of assuring that the eagles establish a new nest.

"Hopefully the new nesting platform will prove attractive to the seasoned couple and we won't lose a reproduction cycle," said Coonradt. "Better still, it might prove attractive to the fledgling eagles we've seen — the teenage offspring of the older eagles — and maybe we'll see two nests and even more eagles at Blenheim-Gilboa." ♦

The Blenheim-Gilboa Visitors Center is located on Route 30, about 17 miles south of Middleburgh and five miles north of Grand Gorge. ♦

About Valley News

Valley News is produced periodically by the New York Power Authority to update our neighbors on activities at our Blenheim-Gilboa Pumped Storage Power Project and its visitors center, and as a community newsletter for residents of the Schoharie Valley.

If you have questions, comments or suggestions, please contact Steve Ramsey, NYPA's community relations manager, at 518-287-6380, fax 518-287-6381, or at steve.ramsey@nypa.gov. ♦