



*Spring Has Finally Sprung!*

*The Edward L. Rose Conservancy*



**Dear Friend,**

If you have stepped outside your door any evening in the last few days, you have probably heard one of the most welcome sounds in nature. The peepers are back, singing in their happy choir. It always makes me smile. My other favorite springtime occurrence is the return of the tree swallows. I could sit and watch their aeronautical acrobatics all afternoon.

The warmer weather also means that I have the opportunity to visit properties and talk to landowners about their goals for their land. If you would like to talk about the future of your property, please do not hesitate to call our office. I would be happy to meet you and discuss your options.

Happy Spring!

*Kris Ely*

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## The Income Tax Deduction You Wish You Knew About

How did you do on your taxes this year? Do gas royalty payments or signing bonuses have you paying more to Uncle Sam than you would like? Did you spend hours pouring over possible deductions on your tax forms? If you answered yes to either of these questions, you are not alone. But there may be one potential income tax deduction that you aren't even aware of. It is the tax deduction you may be eligible for by placing a conservation easement on your property.

A conservation easement is an agreement between a landowner and a non-profit organization (typically a land trust) that limits the amount of development allowed on the property. Conservation easements limit the types of commercial development like stores or restaurants. Of course, agricultural uses and businesses can continue as always. Depending on the size and characteristics of the property, a conservation easement may limit the number of houses. But all of these conditions are tailored to fit the needs of the landowner.

These development rights, given up by the landowner, have a value. When the landowner puts these restrictions into writing with a land trust, their value can often be used as a tax deduction. The restrictions are permanent and run with the land. The landowners continue to own and use their land as they always have. They can sell it or leave it to their children. Nothing has changed except certain types of potential development.

So, by placing a conservation easement on your property, you have protected it the way you would like to see it used forever AND you could get a tax deduction on your income taxes for several years. If you would like more information or want to discuss your options, give us a call. We would be happy to come out and discuss your goals and needs.



## Wild Things In Your Woodland



*The American woodcock (Scolopax minor) is a medium-sized bird similar in size to a dove. It has a short neck, relatively large head and a long bill. Its big eyes are set high on the bird's head, giving it 360-degree vision. This trait, along with cryptic brown and black coloration, protects the woodcock from predators. Both sexes look alike. Nesting occurs from mid-March into June. Females lay four eggs in a shallow depression on the ground, camouflaged by dead leaves. The precocial chicks hatch after about 21 days, and are raised entirely by the female.*

The American woodcock, also known as the timberdoodle or bog-borer, is a popular migratory game bird that overwinters in the southern states. In March, the woodcock returns to its breeding grounds in the northeast. Returning males establish territories, or singing grounds, in open fields next to thick brush or woods. They often return to the same area year after year, defending their territories against other males. Singing grounds are typically openings of about one-quarter acre in size, with a straight, 20-30 yard take-off strip that is clear of impeding vegetation.

The courtship flight of the woodcock is an intriguing aerial display that takes place at dusk and dawn beginning in late March or early April, and sometimes continuing into May. The best time to hear and see the display is between sundown and complete darkness. The male will take off and fly 200 to 300 feet up into the sky. His wings make a distinctive twittering sound as the wind rushes through his wing feathers. Upon reaching his upward destination, he spirals or zigzags back down to the ground, making a gurgling sound as he falls, and landing back at his take-off site. Back on the ground, he sounds a nasal, insect-like buzzing call described as a "peent" for several minutes, and then repeats his courtship flight.

Females seek out the males on their breeding grounds, and usually nest within 150 yards of the singing grounds where they mated. Favored nesting habitat includes damp woods near water, hillsides above moist bottomlands, old fields with low ground cover, briar patches, and edges of shrub thickets and young conifer stands.

Woodcocks feed on a variety of invertebrates and some plants. However, this bird favors earthworms, and its long bill is specially adapted for probing the ground in search of its prey. Sensitive nerve endings in the lower third of the bill help a woodcock locate earthworms. A special bone-muscle arrangement lets the bird open the tip of its upper bill, or mandible, while it is underground. The long tongue and the underside of the mandible are both rough-surfaced to grasp and pull slippery prey out of the ground. The best feeding habitat is pole-sized hardwood or alder stands with a dense overstory, fairly open ground cover, and moist, fertile soil that supports earthworms.

The best way to maintain habitat for woodcocks is to protect springs, seeps, moist depressions, and wetlands on your property. These areas provide important feeding grounds. Maintain open grassy areas near water sources. These are prime nesting and courting grounds because they provide a source of food and water nearby. Maintain shrub cover in riparian areas (streams) and adjacent to wetland areas for adequate cover. Alder, hawthorns, gray dogwood, spicebush, and silky dogwood are all good cover species for woodcock. Creating or maintaining areas of young forest will also provide singing grounds, and rejuvenate brood and nesting cover. By maintaining habitat for this unique bird, you and your family can continue to enjoy the courtship flights that usher in the spring.

If you would like to hear the woodcock's "peent" call, click on the following link (or paste it into your web

browser) to see a nice video of a woodcock calling. At the end of the video, you can also hear the twittering sound made during flight <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4Owj52XhoxI>

Interested in seeing a live woodcock and hearing it call? One good place for woodcock viewing is the Friends land at Salt Spring State Park. The Friends land is located along Buckley Road on the south side of the park. There are several good parking areas very close to good habitat, and you may even be able to hear them calling right from your car. There are also woodcock in some of the fields at the Nature Conservancy's Woodbourne Sanctuary, but you may have to walk to them. The best time to hear and see woodcock is between dusk and dark.

By Kristi Sullivan

Kristi Sullivan works in the Department of Natural Resources at Cornell University. She is Co-Director of the Conservation Education and Research Program, and Director of the New York Master Naturalist Program.

## **Basket Weaving Class Offered**

**Join us on May 10th to weave your own Adirondack basket!**

Charlie Ahearn, an expert basket weaver, has kindly offered to teach us how to weave a beautiful Adirondack style basket. These baskets are so useful and versatile as they can be worn like a backpack. You will learn all the techniques you need AS you weave your own basket. The only cost for this class is the cost of materials. The class will begin at 9:00 a.m. and run until late afternoon. Space is limited so that every participant can receive individual assistance. Please call the office soon to reserve your spot. The class is already half full!

### **Don't forget about our other class this spring!**

We are offering a class on invasive species management through the Montrose Area Adult School on June 27th. You can register with them directly or call us for more information.

**Our office phone number is 570-278-9500**

## **Trail Clean-up at Highpoint Preserve**

**Join us on April 26th for a fun morning on the trails!**

We will gather at 9 a.m. Saturday morning for a few hours to get the trails of Highpoint Preserve in shape. No need to bring any heavy equipment or tools. You may want to bring work gloves and wear your good walking shoes. It should only take a few hours to clear away the fallen branches and get the trails in tip-top shape.

If you are interested in helping, you can call Anthony Palombaro or call the office for more details.

## **Quick Links**

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