To Our Members and Friends,

As we write in early February, we are wondering if winter is ever coming to the East. Perhaps spring is already here.

We are truly grateful for your generous support over the past year. You gave us financial support, volunteer time, and valuable connections that enabled us to continue our work preserving and enhancing John Burroughs’s iconic Slabsides and the surrounding Nature Sanctuary, and promoting his literary legacy.

Here are the major events of 2011:

The Trails Project was our primary focus throughout the year, made possible by funding from a matching grant from New York State and by our valuable volunteers. After a year of planning, construction began in April on Earth Day and continued through November. Our trail volunteers rocked the rocks every week. The stone work is particularly impressive and we are getting terrific reviews. Trail construction is 90 percent complete and will wrap up in 2012, with the trail blazes and signs going up in the spring. For more on the progress and the crew from the Poughkeepsie Day School please see page 6. Stay tuned for information on our opening celebration.

Our Literary Awards for the best contemporary nature writing are always a highlight of the year. The annual awards luncheon was held April 4 at the Museum of Natural History. The John Burroughs Medal was awarded to Elizabeth Tova Bailey for The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating. The recipient of the award for the best published essay and the books added to the List of Nature Books for Young Readers can be found on our website.

Slabsides Open House on May 21 and October 1 drew many visitors who also came to work on the trails in the afternoon. Our featured speakers were:

Evan Pritchard, Director, Center for Algonquin Culture, in May, explored how our own views about birds may be influenced both by writers such as John Burroughs, and by folklore and story, much of which comes from Native Americans.

Jeff Walker, Professor of Geology, Vassar College and JBA Second Vice President, in October, brought a new perspective to Burroughs’s role in early conservation efforts.

We were pleased to participate in the first New York Heritage Weekend in May and the annual Hudson Valley Ramble in September. We welcomed hikers, birders, and those interested in John Burroughs with tours of Slabsides and an inspection of the developing trails.

Letter continued on page 2
As part of our strategic planning process, funded by Museumwise, we held our first focus group. Eight leaders in the Mid-Hudson region, representing a range of government, business and tourism interests, met at the Esopus Library and discussed the direction of the JBA. Our next focus group will gather residents of towns near Slabsides.

Work on the Association’s new brochure is underway with funding in part from a grant from Parks & Trails New York. We are very grateful for their support in this important capacity building project. More information on this partner organization is at www.ptny.org.

We reluctantly accepted the resignation of Jason Dempsey as our Resident Naturalist, a position he has held for more than eleven years. We wish him well in the next steps in his professional and personal lives. See Jason’s last “From Pondside” report starting on page 3. In December we welcomed Keiter Triola as our new Resident Naturalist. He is a native of the Hudson River Valley with an expertise in working with the land; we are pleased he has joined us. Keiter is stoking up the Pond House wood-burning stove and settling in. When you’re at the Nature Sanctuary please introduce yourself.

We sent a representative to the Ulster County Trails Conference in November, organized by The Hudson River Valley Greenway, and already the information gained from it is benefiting our trails project.

Though the water from Hurricane Irene and Tropical Storm Lee was deep and flowing ferociously, we are relieved that Slabsides and the Nature Sanctuary survived both.

As we work to improve our physical plant, we replaced part of the roof of Pond House. Cleaning out the cellar, we filled several dumpsters! We are now able to assess the foundation and systems there and are considering what repairs we need to make.

In December the New York Dept of Environmental Conservation became neighbors when they acquired the nearly six hundred acres at the southern boundary of the Nature Sanctuary and created the Black Creek State Forest. Our new trails were designed to connect with it, extending access to the area Burroughs called the “Shattega.” For the press conference held at Slabsides, see page 3.

Our ongoing programs and projects will make 2012 an exciting time. We will celebrate the 175th birthday of literary naturalist John Burroughs all year. Come join the party at the Literary Awards April 2 and at the Slabsides Open Houses May 19 and October 6. You are always welcome at the Nature Sanctuary.

Executive Committee
Board of Directors

“Men have seen deepest and farthest when they opened their eyes without any special aim.”
—John Burroughs,
“On Indirections,” Leader, 1860

John Burroughs Association

The John Burroughs Association was formed in 1921 shortly after the naturalist-writer died. Among the Association’s aims are fostering a love of nature as exemplified by Burroughs’s life and work and preserving the places associated with his life. The Association publicly recognizes well written and illustrated nature essay publications with literary awards that are given after the annual meeting on the first Monday of April.

The Association owns and maintains Slabsides and the adjoining John Burroughs Nature Sanctuary in West Park, New York. Open house at Slabsides is held the third Saturday in May and the first Saturday in October. A permanent exhibit about John Burroughs is in the American Museum of Natural History.

The membership year begins in April. Contact Secretary, John Burroughs Association, Inc., 15 West 77 Street, New York, NY 10024-5192, or e-mail: breslof@amnh.org. Telephone 212-769-5169. Website: http://research.amnh.org/burroughs/

WAKE-ROBIN is published in March, July, and November. Vittorio Maestro, Richard Milner, and Steve Thurston, editors. Send submissions and editorial inquiries to Secretary, John Burroughs Association, Inc., 15 West 77th Street, New York, NY 10024-5192 or e-mail vmaestro@nhmag.com.


BLACK CREEK STATE FOREST

New York State’s Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) acquired almost 600 acres of land that lies along the southern boundary of the John Burroughs Nature Sanctuary and through which Black Creek flows, creating the new Black Creek State Forest. DEC Assistant Commissioner Kathy Moser made the announcement at Slabsides on December 22. Jeff Walker, JBA Second Vice President, hosted the gathering of several dozen people, which included Seth McKee from Scenic Hudson; Bill Conners, Chairman, New York State Fish and Wildlife Management Board; and, from the DEC, Fran Dunwell, Hudson River Estuary Program Coordinator; Willie Janeway, Region 3 Director; Bill Rudge, Region 3 Natural Resources Supervisor; and Ted Kerpez, Region 3 Wildlife Manager.

The land had been part of the West Park Winery property and is key in establishing a protected corridor along Black Creek from Chodikee Lake to the Hudson River. Because it is a state forest, improvements and amenities such as space for parking will be developed as part of a comprehensive management plan. Although we do not anticipate that such improvements will be made for some time, the old lumber and farm roads are easily accessible now. The transaction has been in the pipeline for several years and was anticipated in 2008 when the JBA applied for the grant to build our new trails. We designed one of the trails to connect directly with the property. Hikers will want to explore this forest and picnic where Black Creek widens and slows. Check our Web site for the press release and map of the Black Creek corridor.

Good Night, Irene!

Ulster, home county of Slabsides, was declared a disaster area because of Hurricane Irene and the deluge that followed. We are grateful that Slabsides and the Nature Sanctuary emerged with no significant damage. Our new boardwalk through the celery swamp was thrust up a bit in two spots and a couple of trees came down across the trails. These we can deal with. The streams and waterfalls were swollen from the fifteen or so inches of rain that fell in one week, but, surprisingly, the section of the Southern Trail we were “grooming” was quite dry and workable. We managed to clip exposed roots and to even the tread on a large section. All eight of those participating were pleased with the progress.

From Pondside
October 2011

After a year spent living in the cold, impersonal damp of the redwoods in Marin County, California (on the verge of Muir Woods, interestingly), I became depressed, and yearned for home. I yearned for the woods that coddled me in my youth, and soothed me in my maturity. I pined for the old and brooding hills, the valleys, and the streams that I understood like the understanding of old friends, which needs no speech. I returned to New York from California in January of 2000. It had been my intention to study education there, and get certified to teach. I returned with the intention of continuing my studies, but I must admit I spent some aimless months bouncing from one friend’s couch to another, until one wet spring afternoon found me in the basement of a church in New Paltz where they were conducting a rummage sale. Whilst poring over some used books in a corner, a kindly older woman behind the counter cheerfully asked me if I needed a colander. “Actually,” I replied in earnest, glancing over my shoulder, “what I need first is a place to live.” The dapper gentleman accompanying her at the counter leaned over and chimed in with a chuckle, “We have a position out at Slabsides.” “I was thinking about that,” I replied. “Your kidding!” he replied, somewhat taken aback. “No indeed!” I assured him. “Well,” he said thoughtfully, “send me a resume.” So I did. The dapper gentleman, as it turned out, was Seldon Spencer, well-known and much loved member of the board of the John Burroughs Association. I had actually been walking a few times with a dear friend who introduced me to the Sanctuary at Slabsides. I had already seen signs advertising the position he mentioned. I have heard it said many times that there are no coincidences.

I began my tenure as the Resident Naturalist here at the John Burroughs Sanctuary at Slabsides in June of 2000, so this past June saw my eleventh year here in that capacity, and much has come to pass in that time. The summer of 2000 rained and rained and rained until water gushed from between the rocks on the hillsides, and water ran audibly underfoot through the talus piles in the woods, though it couldn’t be seen. 2001 saw the passing of my best friend back in London. Later that year my son was born, and when he was but three months old we staged a small concert
here at the sanctuary to raise funds for the restoration of Slabsides. Shortly thereafter the towers in New York fell, and all the world grieved with us. I did not at first believe the news I heard, being swaddled in the calm, quiet safety of the woodlands here in the sanctuary. Besides, it seemed such a ridiculous prospect; an impossibility. Having no television here, and not having listened to the radio, it took quite some time to come to believe.

2001 was also the year when I returned to studying to become an educator. I completed my student teaching while living in Pond House in 2003, and thereafter I completed my Masters in Education as well. Now, as I listen to the high pitched whine of the crickets, and the patter of rain on what is left of the leaves in the trees, I glance back over the years in the halls of my mind, and wonder if I used them as well as I might. Have I lived as deeply (as Henry David Thoreau might say) and sucked the marrow from the bones of those years as thoroughly as I could have? I might have done better perhaps, but assuredly, I could have done much worse. My son, Damon, learned to ride his bike on the pond house drive (a harrowing experience for all but him), and I taught him how to paddle a kayak on the sanctuary pond in the summers, and had great snow battles from the whopping great snow banks in the drive in the winter.

I have loved the rough and tumble life style here at the sanctuary, as Burroughs and Whitman both loved the rough and tumble landscape; it is a land for rough and tumble people. I have loved the cutting and splitting and stacking of wood for the stove that warms the pond house in the winters, and the struggle of plowing against the onslaught of the snow storms. I have also loved summer morning coffee in the shade of the hickory overlooking the pond as the sun crests the ridge to the east, and watching dragonflies patrol the pond for their meals. Every year brings a new natural spectacle I have never yet beheld. One winter a river otter gamboling at the north end of the pond; this past summer the truly bizarre and primordial mating of snapping turtles, barely distinguishable from mortal combat—an alternating, roiling, broiling mass of snapping and claws and shell and soft white underbelly, such as it is. A few months ago I actually had to stop the car, get out, and convince a beaver that it might be appropriate to return to the pond so that I could continue up the pond house drive, “if it wouldn’t be too much trouble, of course, thank you very much.”

There is a beauty and intensity to life here at the sanctuary, from sublime calm, to the most frighteningly powerful displays of nature. I shall certainly never forget late February of 2010 when the heaviest, wettest snows on record piled up around us ceaselessly for five days, ripping trees down with booming crashes and resounding cracks all around Pond House and throughout the hundred acre wood here, that were wont to set the heart aflutter with adrenaline. There is a rawness, and closeness to life here that really lets one know one’s alive. That storm left us without power for nearly a week, but really I had nothing to complain about; during that period I ate filet mignon by candle light in a seventy degree pond house because the contents of the freezer needed to be eaten, and, well, we heat the pond house with wood. I have had much to be grateful for over the years.

So I think gratitude has been the overarching theme of my time here at the sanctuary. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to serve the JBA in my capacity as the resident naturalist. I am grateful also for the opportunities it has presented me; a calm, soothing oasis in the midst of a turbulent and sometimes insane world, a childhood home for my son, and a plethora of sweet memories that will last a lifetime. Serving here afforded me the opportunity to finish yet another undergraduate degree, to complete my student teaching, and even to complete my master’s degree. Life here at the sanctuary has at times been difficult, but then again the rewards have been great. And life here does indeed “lose its complex equations,” as Burroughs once wrote.

But, as it must, a point comes when it is time to move on, and it is time for me to move on. Life has changed for me, circumstances are different than they once were, and while it is not without some heaviness of heart, it seems like the right decision, and I am planning to stay at the pond house until December 1. Now, as I sit at this desk, where I have sat I know not how oft in the last decade, writing my last sanctuary report, I am grateful to have been able to serve you for so long. So, for the last time I thank you for allowing me to serve in the capacity of:

Resident Naturalist
Jason Dempsey of the
John Burroughs Sanctuary at Slabsides.
One year in mid-February, I decided to travel to the Sacramento area in search of the amazing yellow-billed magpie. I had seen this black-and-white corvid with the yellow bill from a distance a few years earlier on the banks of the Sacramento River near Old Town, but this time I explored the American River a bit north of the state capital. Here, in a large, open field in the middle of Ancil Hoffman County Park, I followed (or rather, chased) the yellow-billed magpies around for the better part of a day.

Although I threw out unshelled, roasted pea-nuts to the group of about fifteen magpies, they never let me get closer than about 100 feet. When I started to intrude on their territory, they would simply rise en masse and fly across the football-length field and continue to forage on earthworms and insects in the grass. I would walk across the field with my heavy lens and tripod, and the same scene would repeat itself. Up went the magpies, “qua-qua-qua-qua-quaaing” away until they were back again on the opposite side of the field. I would pick up my camera and tripod again... well, you get the idea!

This went on for three or four hours until I finally wised up. I decided to plant myself in one spot and wait for the magpies to approach the peanuts, which I had dropped on the grass about thirty feet away from me. This time, all of the magpies flew off except for one individual, which remained perched in a tree about twenty feet above me.

We had a Mexican standoff. I refused to budge, and so did the magpie. We just stood there looking at each other. Then, the most remarkable thing happened. The magpie started to utter a soft, peeping sound, with his beak moving almost imperceptibly with each peep. The peeps were separated by about fifteen seconds of silence, but they were repeated like clockwork. The magpie was probably communicating with a nearby mate that was hidden somewhere in the trees lining the field, but I’d like to think that the magpie was talking to me about those peanuts—and in low enough tones that the other magpies wouldn’t discover his treasure trove.

Anyway, after about twenty minutes (which felt like two hours), the magpie suddenly bent his legs as if to jump off of his perch—which is exactly what he did. In fact, he flew to the ground about forty feet away from me—in range for the peanuts. But instead of approaching the peanuts, the magpie strutted away from me, as if he had other concerns.

I blew it, I thought, and I resigned myself to failure. But then, the unthinkable happened. After about ten paces, the magpie turned on his heels and began walking toward me in a zigzag fashion, getting closer and closer. I remained stationary, only looking at the bird through my lens and waiting for the best opportunity to click—which I did.

And lucky I did, because a few steps later, the magpie made a burst toward me in the viewfinder, grabbed a peanut with his beak, and disappeared out of the top of the frame—all in one motion. He flew about fifty feet away from me and landed on the grass with his prize.

This experience taught me an important lesson about bird photography. Sometimes it’s better to let the birds come to you, rather than to chase them around like a wild maniac. You may save yourself a lot of time and trouble this way, and it allows you to make up-close observations of the birds as well.

What could be better than that?

Mathew Tekulsky is the author of “The Birdman of Bel Air,” a column at www.nationalgeographic.com featuring essays about his birding experiences. He is also a contributor to VIREO, the world’s most comprehensive collection of ornithological images, at the Academy of Natural Sciences in Philadelphia (vireo.anssp.org). His bird photographs have been published in field guides and have been displayed in galleries and museums. He is on the board of directors of the San Fernando Valley Audubon Society. See more of his work at his Web site, mathewtekulsky.com.
Happy Trails

Poughkeepsie Day School’s Gravel Trick

We welcomed back nine youngsters from the Middle School. They loaded gravel into wheel barrels and delivered it to the soggy, root-laced Spring Trail. This former “road” runs along the east side of Burroughs’s celery swamp and was his regular route to the spring, his source of water. The spring is still there and today the trail also serves as the approach to our new Highlands Trail. But, staying out of the black mud had become a challenge to visitors except on the driest summer days. To solve the problem the kids first cut bio-landscape paper to fit the wet depressions, then covered it with gravel. With a good rain the gravel will become compact and a top dressing of soil will help it blend in. We now have a welcoming approach to the Spring and Highlands Trail. Thank you PDS!

Stone Tools

Moving huge stones, new volunteers learned the leveraging strength of the rock rod. They pried, flipped, and slowly slid the stones down to the work area on the South Pond Trail, then precisely placed them to create stairs and path surfaces. What started as a tumble of rocks fit together beautifully. The gentle spilling sound of the nearby waterfall and the view down to the receiving pool gave all a peaceful setting in which to work.

Welcome New Members

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<td>Richard Denaro</td>
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<td>Andrea Lurie</td>
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<td>Susan Brownell</td>
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<th>Patron</th>
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<td>Alan Young</td>
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SHARP EYES VII

In affiliation with the Association for the Study of Literature and Environment (ASLE), the seventh John Burroughs Nature Writing Conference and Seminar will be held June 4-7 at SUNY Oneonta. Organizer Dr. Daniel G. Payne is calling for original papers on the theme “Is Nature Writing Dead,” as well on other topics related to nature and Burroughs. For details visit www.oneonta.edu/academics/english/conferences/johnburroughs.asp.
Annual Dues

Coinciding with the 175th anniversary of the birth of John Burroughs, we invite you to support the mission of the John Burroughs Association by becoming a member today and joining us for the special annual literary awards event. Consider becoming a Patron or Benefactor, which will reflect an even greater interest and help in the goals of the organization. Stewardship of the John Burroughs Sanctuary can happen with your generous contribution. Tax-deductible dues for the membership year April 1, 2012, through March 31, 2013:

- _____ Student      $20
- _____ Senior        $20
- _____ Individual  $35
- _____ Additional Gift of $________ for John Burroughs Sanctuary

- _____ Family   $50
- _____ Patron $75
- _____ Benefactor    $150
- _____ Bequest of $________

Name____________________________________________ E-mail_________________________
Address________________________________________________________________________________

Annual Luncheon, April 2, 2012

175th anniversary of the birth of John Burroughs

Member $100  Nonmember $125

Reserve ____ place (s) at the annual luncheon Monday, April 2, Noon:
Member $____ Nonmember $____

Make checks payable to the John Burroughs Association and mail to: John Burroughs Association, Inc., American Museum of Natural History, 15 West 77 Street, New York, NY 10024-5192. Alternatively you can pay by credit card online through NYCharities.org. Start at our Web site http://research.amnh.org/burroughs. Click on “Membership” in the navigation bar at left, and scroll down for information. We are a 501 (3)c tax exempt organization

Annual Meeting Proxy: Please complete and return the form below

KNOW ALL PEOPLE BY THESE PRESENTS, that I __________________________, residing at ___________________________________________________________________________, being a member of the John Burroughs Association, Inc., do hereby constitute and appoint Lisa Breslof as my proxy to attend the Annual Meeting of the members of said corporation to be held at the American Museum of Natural History, Central Park West at 79th Street, New York, New York at 10:30 a.m. on Monday, April 2, 2012, or any continuation or adjournment thereof, with full power to vote and act for me and in my name, place and stead, in the same manner, to the same extent and with the same effect that I might were I personally present there at, giving to said Lisa Breslof full power of substitution and revocation, and I hereby revoke any other proxy heretofore given by me.

Date _____________________________mm/dd/yyyy
Signature ________________________________Member
Print ________________________________Member

Name _________________________________________
Address ________________________________________
City ___________ State ____________Zip ___________

Photo by Craig Chesek
# \textit{Wake-Robin}

John Burroughs Association, Inc.  
American Museum of Natural History  
15 West 77 Street  
New York, NY 10024

Forwarding and return postage guaranteed  
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## 2012 CELEBRATES THE 175TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE BIRTH OF JOHN BURROUGHS (APRIL 3, 1837 – MARCH 29, 1921)

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The John Burroughs Association informs members through \textit{Wake-Robin} and the Web site http://research.amnh.org/burroughs. Occasionally, we reach out via e-mail with news alerts and timely news. Please send your e-mail address to the Secretary (breslof@amnh.org) so that we can better serve you. Members are encouraged to submit articles or news items for publication. Deadline for submissions to the Summer 2012 issue of \textit{Wake-Robin} is May 1, Direct inquiries to the editors.

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\textit{Wake-Robin} Volume 44, Number 2, Winter 2012