The Annual Awards Luncheon and Board Meeting Is Monday, April 4, 10:30 a.m. - 2:00 p.m., in the Portrait Room of the American Museum of Natural History. See Page 7 to Sign Up for the Luncheon (12:00 Noon) and Renew Your Membership. The Medal Winner Is Elisabeth Tova Bailey, for The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating.

This key program of The John Burroughs Association is possible because of your support; thank you.

The Well-Spring of Hope

By Julianne Lutz Warren


Hope is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary in its most common sense as the “expectation of something desired.” It is also a feeling of trust or confidence, acknowledging dependency on some being or thing. Hope is of two parts: faith tethered to desire. Looking at it this way, hope thus can be only as reliable as the trustworthiness of the being or thing in which we anchor our confidence. And hope can only soar as far and as wide as the reach of our wants.

The dominating faith of Western civilization for some centuries now has been placed in human know-how and its driving desire has been for humanity’s splendor. As, for example, seventeenth-century philosopher, scientist, and statesman Francis Bacon famously promoted, we have been systematically involved in secreting out nature’s mysteries in order to bend them to our service. We have sought, in Bacon’s words, knowledge for the “enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire to the effecting of all things possible.”

For more than 300 years, since at least the time of Bacon, in an ecstasy of power and desire, many humans have worked hard trying to rapidly fulfill this hope of Human Empire. In so doing the lives of many—though far from all people’s—have been enhanced for a time. Many of us have good breakfasts, hot water, and fast cars. Undesired consequences of Western civilization’s past endeavors now, however, are rippling across the globe from bedrock and ocean floor to atmosphere.

Current conditions call us to question both the past faith and past wants that have led us to where we are—to figure out where we have gone wrong and what we have missed. For life, we need to discover hopes we have not yet imagined or rediscover possibilities we have bypassed. For all the while—existing side-by-side with the hope of Human Empire—for example, have been other, more encompassing and more gentle hopes. Hopes like those of eighteenth-century naturalist Gilbert White who discovered the world in his own backyard, loved it as it was. Respecting earthworms as vital in the life-prospering web of Nature he desired to learn how to live in concert with Nature’s ways.

Well-Spring continued on page 4
Volunteers Needed to Build New Trails at Slabsides

It’s time to put away your snow shovels, grab your work boots and gloves, and head over to the John Burroughs Nature Sanctuary at Slabsides. Be part of the corps of volunteers building new trails at our National Historic Landmark. We promise you good clean exercise (with bits of earth), warm camaraderie, new skills, and a gratifying feeling of accomplishment. This is a chance to get out in the woods to a little-known area that offers a pristine hemlock forest, valley floor of ferns, dramatic cliffs, waterfalls, and abundant animals and birds. The new trails will open the woods to hikers, but you can be among the first to explore it building the trails.

We are laying two new trails that form a loop into the woods in the rugged southern portion of the Sanctuary, starting at Slabsides below the eastern cliff wall and bending around to the Pond to the west. The Highlands Trail will include a twelve-foot ladder over the ridge of a cliff. The new trails will provide access to the trail to Chodikee Lake to the south.

There is a lot to do; here’s a summary of the activities:

**Trail Clearing / Definition:** This light-duty work is the first step in any new trail construction. Volunteers will clear the trail’s tread of brush, clip back protruding branches, and move logs. Some time will also be spent on raking the trail to help define its location in areas where no other tread work is planned.

**Sidehill Construction:** Where the proposed trail will cross slopes, volunteers will use hoes and picks to excavate a level walking surface in the hillside. This is heavier-duty work, but everyone can work at his or her own pace, and when you are part of a larger group of volunteers, the daily rewards are great.

**Sidehill Trail Finishing:** This is a part of “Sidehill Trail Construction” work but is lighter duty. On the Southern Trail much of the digging will be accomplished with small trail-sized mechanized equipment. Following behind this process, volunteers will use hand tools to trim roots, perform final tread grading, and naturalization of the trail corridor.

**Rock Harvesting and Moving:** This is heavier-duty work that will require more training than most other activities. Using twenty-pound steel bars and picks, volunteers will harvest stones from the surrounding forest and roll them to their final location on the trail, where they will be used as steps.

**Highline Assistance:** In areas where the slopes are particularly steep or complicated, we may move stones into location with overhead cable rigging systems. Several people are needed to operate these systems. Volunteers will operate hand-powered winches and help guide stones to the trail locations.

**Material Moving:** This simple task involves moving purchased or prefabricated building materials to their planned installation locations along the trails. Volunteers will help by carrying wooden planks, hardware,
tools, and ladder stringers and rungs. The distances vary. On the ladder trail, the walk is about a half-mile each way; on the other trails the distance is only several hundred feet.

Assisting with Stone Step Installation: This work is more technical and will require volunteers who help out on the Rock Moving days to get qualified. Working alongside trail professionals, these volunteers will assist with step installations.

Work will begin on Saturday, April 23, a celebration of Earth Day. We will be out on the trails every weekend through June offering many weekends to choose from. We will also be working during the week for those who get really hooked.

Come join us and leave a legacy. Your contribution will be tangible and lasting for many to enjoy for years to come. E-mail Joan Burroughs (jjjburrroughs@yahoo.com) to sign up and pick a task and a time.

SAVE THE DATE
Saturday, April 23
EARTH DAY CELEBRATION
Trail Work Begins

CALENDAR
April 4 — 10:30 a.m.: Annual Members’ Meeting, followed by Directors’ Meeting
April 4 — 12 Noon: Annual Literary Awards Celebration Luncheon, American Museum of Natural History
May 21 — 12 Noon: Slabsides Lecture
May 21 — 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.: Spring Slabsides Open House
Well-Spring continued from page 1

Discovering the necessity of the give and take of nature-placed hope for an enduring civilization is what conservationist and author of A Sand County Almanac Aldo Leopold was getting at when he wrote his now-famous essay, “Thinking Like a Mountain.” If we don’t recognize our dependencies on the whole of nature, he shows us, we end up with our future, in the form of nature’s life-supporting capacities, “washing into the sea.” “[T]oo much safety seems to yield only danger in the long run.” In wilderness, Leopold reminds, drawing from Henry David Thoreau’s thinking—“is the salvation of the world.” In trying to transform the world into a place that is secure in its material prosperity, without wild out-of-our-control wastes in other words, we end up diminishing the very sources of our civilization’s long-term survival. For example, killing wolves in the craggy hinterlands of Scotland and the Southwestern U.S. in order to make the lush plains safe for humans and their livestock and to keep all the deer the wolves would have eaten for ourselves, we also extirpate possibilities in these places for our own prosperous future. It turns out that deer need wolves as much as the other way around. Without wolves to prey upon them, we have learned, deer populations explode. Too many deer browse down all of the mountain’s forest sprouts; the forest cannot regenerate and the deer starve to death in winter. The soil of hillsides left without well-rooted vegetation, in stormy weather, erode quickly downhill. In a spiraling irony, no hope remains for humanity when we destroy nature to achieve hope.

In contrast with the hope of Human Empire, for example, stand the long-lived ways of the Tohono O’odum people of the American Southwest who have thrived for generations by the desert oasis of a welling spring of water. They have done so by respecting nature’s long-evolved workings. Rather than conquering nature, the Tohono O’odum have learned to work alongside it as their literal hope in the midst of a wild waste uninhabitable by humans. And, after all, one species’ waste may be another’s hope. Out of the wider expanse, game and other wildlife sometimes visit the oasis fed by and feeding its community of life. By planting small plots of crops and fruit trees along stream banks, helping to prevent them from eroding, the people also attract a diversity of birds seeking refuge from arid surroundings. The Tohono O’odum not only have refrained from diminishing life’s diversity and fertility—with their faith in and desire for nature’s creative goodness, they have enhanced it as community members.

Nature is the well-spring of enduring human hope. . . . What form should—indeed must—twenty-first century hope take for thriving life to grow and endure?

(The following is an excerpt from the rest of the essay, the author’s meditation on Western ideas about humans and nature, including those of nineteenth- to twenty-first-century authors John Burroughs, Edward Bellamy, Bill McKibben, and Cormac McCarthy; the habits and songs of hermit thrushes, European starlings, wandering albatrosses, and an assortment of extinct species; rainstorms; and hope.)

In the Earth’s beginnings, wrote John Burroughs in 1879, reaching back to the ancient past to help in understanding the present, the Sun shone on the planet, but the rain did not fall and there was as yet no life. The “great fact about the rain,” Burroughs said, “is that it is the most beneficent of all the operations of nature . . . it means life and growth.” It was only after the globe began to “sweat”; when these soft, delicious drops [of rain] began to come down and once “the period of organic life was inaugurated,” that “there was hope and a promise of the future” (these and other Burroughs quotes, except as indicated, are from “Is It Going to Rain?” in Locusts and Wild Honey).

Water courses through all organic nature—plants and animals, including humans. “Our life is indeed a vapour.” Burroughs says, drawing on a passage from his childhood Bible training. Humans “are a breath, a little moisture condensed upon the pane. We carry ourselves as in a phial.” “Cleave the flesh, and how quickly we spill out!” The trees, too, are “liquid,” as Burroughs’s friend Walt Whitman put it. “The tree and the fruit are like a sponge which the rains have filled,” Burroughs continues: “Through them and through all living bodies there goes on the commerce of vital growth. . . . to build up, and repair, and restore the waste of the physical frame” of life’s forms.

To Burroughs’s ear the song of the hermit thrush “is the finest sound in nature” (“In the Hemlocks,” in Wake-Robin). Dependent upon intact expanses of forests, the hermit thrush—solitary, with its wild, ethereal hymns-songs, known by some as the “Swamp Angel” for its habits of dwelling in damp localities—eats the
same juicy fruits of bushes and trees, like blackberries, gooseberries, and elderberries, as we do. The Barred Owl—how often do we think of her as fluid?—may eat the thrush’s fledgling in springtime. Our bodies, too, if not by wolves, may be ravaged to death by mere droplets of some microbes—and we pour out of our vials into the soil and perhaps rise up as a gooseberry. Not only from dust to dust, but from watery body to watery body, the forces of life flow on from day to day and age to age, physically connecting all beings. Life is a river.

Rain has meanings beyond the physical, Burroughs again observes. The ebb and flow of rain—in fits and starts—turning and returning in nature, on the whole, finds out “every hidden thing that needs water, falling upon the just and upon the unjust, sponging off every leaf of every tree in the forest and every growth in the fields; music to the ear, a perfume to the smell, an enchantment to the eye; healing the earth, cleaning the air, renewing the fountains; honey to the bee, manna to the herds, and life to all creatures—what spectacle so fills the heart?” What substance may so overflow not only body, but soul: “...rain is the grief, the weeping of Nature. But tears from Nature’s eyelids are always remedial, and prepare the way for brighter, purer skies.” Rain, Burroughs believes, is a wild force whose “skye influences” cannot be replicated with a garden hose. It is as necessary to the human mind as to the soil, the vegetation, the birds, the wolves, and the trees. “Who does not suffer in his spirit in a drought and feel restless and unsatisfied?” he asks, “It is hard work.” he admits, “to be generous, or neighborly, or patriotic in a dry time; and as for growing in any of the finer graces or virtues, who can do it?” Indeed, without rain we would have a dead world, nothing wild—no singing thrushes—and no hope. . . . For the rest of the meditation, including recordings of birdsongs, please go to http://precipitatejournal.com/home/journal/issue-1/nonfiction-warren/.

Julianne Lutz Warren, who teaches Environmental Studies, is Master Teacher in the Liberal Studies Program at the College of Arts and Science, New York University. She is the author (as Jennifer Lutz Newton) of Aldo Leopold’s Odyssey: Rediscovering the Author of A Sand County Almanac (Shearwater Books/Island Press, 2006). She is currently writing her second book, tentatively titled Nature’s Utopia: Audacious Fictions, Real Hopes. Warren is the great-great-granddaughter of Curtis Burroughs, brother of John Burroughs.

**JBA Awarded Grant for New Brochure**

The John Burroughs Association was awarded a $1,400 grant from Parks & Trails New York for the design and printing of a new membership brochure that will present a fresh new identity for the organization and help attract new members. The JBA is one of eight not-for-profit park and trail groups selected to receive one of the organization’s Capacity Building Grants. The awards are designed to help groups increase organizational visibility, generate community support, grow membership, and attract additional volunteers. The new membership brochure will serve as a vital tool in enhancing our identity and carrying our message to the community. It will replace an outdated piece from the 1960s.

Parks & Trails New York is the leading statewide advocate for parks and trails, dedicated since 1985 to improving the health and quality of life of all New Yorkers by working with community organizations and municipalities to envision, create, promote, and protect a growing network of parks, greenways, and trails throughout the state for all to use and enjoy.
Nesting at John Muir Lodge

By Mathew Tekulsky

One morning in early April, I was leaving the John Muir Lodge at Kings Canyon National Park, on my way to breakfast at Grant Grove Village. Suddenly, in the semi-darkness before the Sun rose over the mountains, I saw a birdlike object fly off from a ledge of the porch and onto the roof of the lodge itself, about thirty feet away.

I knew immediately that this object was a bird—specifically, a Steller’s jay, and when I looked to my left, toward the ledge from which the bird had appeared, I was astounded to see a well-developed nest exploding out of the limits of the woodwork there.

Later that morning, I returned to the lodge to watch the nesting pair build their nest—and, I hoped, to get a few photographs of the activities. Well, each of the jays returned to the nest again and again, carrying an assortment of sticks, many as long as its body. Whichever jay returned to the nest would place the stick at the rear of the nest and peck it into place. You could hear the bird’s pecking clearly from ten to fifteen feet away, as beak hit stick and the stick hit wood.

At one point, I set up my camera about twelve feet away from the nest, and as soon as one of the jays landed on the platform of sticks, I clicked away. Off went the flash, and I had captured the jay with black head facing toward the rear of the nest, stick in beak, and brilliant blue plumage showing along his back, wings, belly, and tail.

The jays spent a great deal of time that day pecking and twisting those sticks into place. But at 6:30 the following morning, I noticed that both jays were now collecting large beakfuls of strawlike material from a muddy patch between the snow by the side of the lodge and the front path. The morning after that, they continued to collect those soggy beakfuls of grassy material mixed with mud and deliver them to the nest. They packed this stuff into the center of their container.

At one point, one of the Steller’s jays had such a big clump of muddy grass in his beak that all I could see of his head was the famous “blue front” of feathers on his forehead and his equally renowned crest.

I realized that I had caught the jays in the latter stages of nest-building, and that egg-laying and rearing a brood of chicks would soon follow. But alas, I had to leave Kings Canyon that day, so all I am left with is the memory of that frenetic race against time that these jays were facing—and the grace with which they allowed me to witness their domestic activities.

I’m also left with the fond recollection of one of the most amusing and charming noises that I’ve ever heard. You see, while one jay was busy on the nest, the other often paced frantically on the roof above, eager for his turn to place the sticks that were in his beak on the nest himself. (I like to think this one was the nervous father-to-be.) That back-and-forth tap-tap-tap-tap-tap showed me just how delicate, and yet how hardy, those birds really are.

I hope some of that hardiness rubs off on me.

Mathew Tekulsky is the author of The Butterfly Garden (Harvard Common Press, 1985), The Hummingbird Garden (Harvard Common Press, 1999), and Backyard Birdfeeding for Beginners (Three Rivers Press, 1999). He is also the author of “The Birdman of Bel Air,” a column at NationalGeographic.com featuring essays about his birding experiences. His bird photographs have been published in numerous field guides, and they have been displayed at the Harvard Museum of Natural History, the U.S. Department of the Interior Museum, and the San Francisco International Airport (SFO) Museum.
Annual Dues

Please assist in supporting the mission of the John Burroughs Association by becoming a member. Becoming a Patron or Benefactor will reflect an even greater interest and help in the goals of the organization. **Tax-deductible dues for the membership year April 1, 2011, through March 31, 2012:**

- Student $15
- Family $35
- Life $500
- Annual $25
- Patron $50
- Bequest
- Senior $15
- Benefactor $100
- Additional Gift

Gift Membership of $_____ for (name and address):

Name__________________________  E-mail_____________________
Address________________________________________________________________________

Annual Luncheon, April 4, 2011

Reserve ___ place (s) at the annual luncheon Monday, April 4, Noon:

Member $100  Nonmember $125

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. Scroll down to “Now You Can Contribute to the JBA online!” and click on the New York Charities link given there (include a 3% processing fee). 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 4, 2011, 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 _____________

The John Burroughs Association informs members through 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 2011 issue of Wake-Robin is June 1, Direct inquiries to the editors.
INSIDE

Wake-Robin Volume 43, Number 3, Spring 2011

The Well-Spring of Hope
By Julianne Lutz Warren .................. 1

Trail Volunteers Needed .................. 2

JBA Brochure Grant ....................... 5

Nesting at Muir lodge
By Mathew Tekulsky ....................... 6

CALENDAR

April 4 — 10:30 a.m.: Annual Members’ Meeting, followed by Directors’ Meeting

April 4 — 12 Noon: Annual Literary Awards Celebration Luncheon, American Museum of Natural History

April 23 — Earth Day: Trail work begins at Slabsides

May 21 — 12 Noon: Slabsides Lecture

May 21 — 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.: Spring Slabsides Open House