

The Oneida Lake Bulletin

Fall 2014

www.oneidalakeassociation.org

DEC Steps Up to Fight Growing Flocks

The New York State Department of Environmental Conservation made 2014 a tough year for cormorants on Oneida Lake, deploying hazing and lethal management to reduce the birds' invasive impacts on sport fish. The cormorants fought back with their familiar tricks: populating the lake with too many of their number, and hunting down the lake's prized sport fish for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

"Pretty darned good." That's the Oneida Lake Association Board of Directors report on DEC's cormorant work this year, as DEC took the primary responsibility for protecting Oneida Lake's walleye and perch from cormorants. By all accounts, the DEC effort was significant, sustained, and much needed.

From 2009, when Congressional indifference ended federal management, until 2013, volunteers were a featured element of filling the cormorant management gap. During these years and especially in 2013, there was an increase in cormorant numbers above the 100-bird policy goal set by DEC for Oneida Lake.

To address this concern, OLA directors met last fall with DEC leaders. DEC decided the resources they were putting into volunteer training and coordination could be more efficiently used to expand professional hazing. DEC took the primary role in protecting walleye and perch from cormorants in 2014. They worked hard to keep cormorants at or below 100, and made important progress.

Starting in late spring, DEC fisheries and wildlife technicians from Regions 6 and 7 were deployed each week to count cormorants on the lake and, if the count was greater than 100, haze and cull cormorants. DEC also conducted egg oiling and nest destruction. DEC Fisheries staff from Region 6 and Region 7 worked closely together to update OLA with the



A New York State Department of Environmental Conservation seasonal wildlife technician with the results of a successful cormorant culling effort. Diet study and band reporting data are used to monitor cormorant populations and their impact on Oneida Lake.

latest counts each month.

An overview of the DEC data shows how the cormorant population ebbed and flowed. As May reports came back in the 120-150 range, DEC hazing drove cormorants away, resulting in a June 2 count of 101. All cormorant nesting efforts were given up by June 23, and counts bounced around the 100 mark through June and mid-July, bottoming out in the 70s.

The numbers then increased to 86 on July 3, and to 178 on July 14 as additional cormorants tried their luck against DEC's boats, noisemakers, and shotguns. The pressure on Oneida Lake's sport fish rose to 445 cormorants on Aug. 19. In late August DEC staff were consistently on the lake at least twice per week and ramping up for even more effort in September. They used the full range of control methods, including culling more than 150 cormorants to be delivered to Cornell University for diet studies. The cormorant count responded favorably, dropping to 182 at the end of August.

Hazing became even more vigorous

for the fall migration, which has always brought more than 100 birds—thousands more, in some years. This year the migrating cormorants were met with strong DEC response, which quickly encouraged them to move to less hostile climes. While the numbers were at times above 100, there's no doubt that the DEC employees' hard work kept populations from rising much higher.

To wrap up the year, DEC is compiling its count totals and other data, and will be working with Cornell to better understand what the culled birds were eating this year.

OLA directors applaud DEC's strong commitment and we look forward to continued partnership to continue to protect Oneida Lake from cormorants.

Lake-loving scribe named Conservationist of the Year

For many decades, some of the Oneida Lake Association's most passionate and involved members have hailed from the Oneida County end of the watershed, particularly around Utica. There's a strong tradition of traveling west to chase Oneida Lake's walleyes, yellow perch, and bass. While many authors have chronicled these pursuits, one stands out for his commitment to conservation of Oneida Lake. John Pitarresi, longtime sportswriter for the *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, has been informing Oneida County readers about Oneida Lake for many years, taking a keen interest in issues such as fish populations, hatchery operations, and more.

For keeping Oneida Lake front and center, Pitarresi was named 2014 Conservationist of the Year by the OLA. The award was presented at OLA's annual meeting at Cicero-North Syracuse High School last April.

(Continued on page 3)

President's Message

To All Oneida Lake Association (OLA) Members:

Autumn greetings! I am honored to have this spot in our wonderful *Bulletin* – a first for me and the new editors Matt Snyder and Patricia Cerro-Reehil. They are filling a role and following a great template by author, teacher, and past OLA Director Jack Henke. The Board of Directors is most grateful for Jack's long-term service and dedication.

By way of introduction, I am from a fourth generation Oneida Lake family; we have South Shore roots more than 120 years deep. While I remember my last eel dinner in 1956, and recall burying lamprey-scarred whitefish and suckers all summer long in the late '60's, and noted the loss of the eel flies by 1970, it is extremely gratifying to know that we have mature Atlantic salmon and spawning sturgeon in the lake – and we now have growing number of *Hexagenia* emerging from lamprey-free waters! OLA contributed!!

The Board accomplished a lot in the last year. Our dialog with NYSDEC and USDA APHIS resulted in the return of the agencies in actively managing the migratory double crested cormorant that – coincident with the appearance of the zebra and quagga mussels – altered our fishery. In June, the USFWS extended the 5-year permit that will allow NYSDEC to target a cormorant population limit of 100 birds. OLA members are also targeting the invasive water chestnut, monitoring the threats of round gobies, Asian carp, and other detriments to our lake ecology. On a positive note, we have actively maintained some really great channels in which to float traffic between the agencies, local, state, and federal communications.

An example is the great cooperation this season in removing navigation hazards. Members have our boating safety map as inserted into last year's *Bulletin*. Last year's floods and ice-out revealed scores of whole trees and (unauthorized) cut timber shoaled along the east end. We learned that no single entity has authority or responsibility for work in the lake. Officials from the Town of Lenox and DEC successfully removed many that were threats to boating...Thanks much to all that contributed to this important effort. OLA is encouraging further interagency funding to address future hazard management.

Aside from watching safety and predation issues, in 2015 your BOD will be looking into a potential east end launch site, reviewing drainage basin sewerage programs, discussing stream erosion and sediment contributions to the lake, weed growth, Constantia Hatchery challenges, and of course the fisheries reports that Cornell provides. What a wonderful situation we have on this lake to have a dedicated research station since 1957 at Shackelton Point!

Members, please reach out to a Board member (contact info at www.oneidalakeassociation.org) or officer anytime you have a question, suggestion, or concern. Enjoy the rest of the open-water season, get ready for ice fishing, be safe, and remember to put our Annual meeting next April in your schedule – with your kids and grandchildren! Some of them can be President someday!



Scott Shupe
President, Oneida Lake Association

The Oneida Lake Association, Inc.

Founded in 1945

The Bulletin is published by the Oneida Lake Association, Inc., so that its members may be informed regarding the activities of the association. The Oneida Lake Association, Inc., was organized in 1945 to restore and preserve the natural resources of Oneida Lake and its environs.

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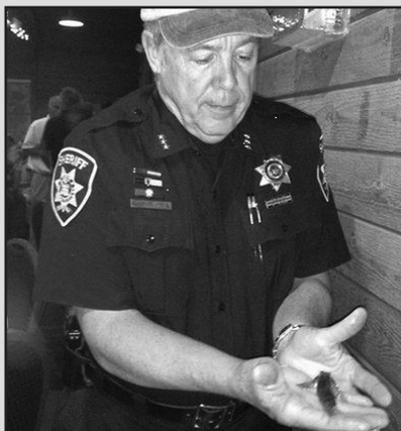
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Toby the Goby has arrived!

Undersheriff Warren Darby, OLA Director and avid Oneida Lake angler, took this round goby (nicknamed "Toby") aboard his boat during a wall-eye fishing trip this summer. Toby was in attendance at OLA's August networking outing to remind all the participating officials and policymakers of the danger of invasive species brought in via commercial shipping.

Conservationist of the Year

(Continued from page 1)

Conservationist of the Year is the most significant honor presented by OLA, given annually to the person who has done the most to advance the mission of protecting, restoring and preserving the lake and its environs.

Pitarresi has worked at the O-D for most of OLA's 68 years, starting at the paper in 1973. The outdoors are Pitarresi's first love, and he's written about his passions for angling, hunting, and other outdoor activities since 1979 as the outdoor columnist.

He has been an angler since age 4 and started to hunt in his teen years. A versatile outdoorsman, Pitarresi is appreciatively familiar with all of the wide variety of activities available on Oneida Lake.

Pitarresi's articles and columns have had a positive influence on efforts to steward the lake's natural resources. He was among the first reporters to cover the threat posed by cormorants in the late 1980s, and news clippings with his byline have long been a part of OLA's advocacy with Congress, federal agencies, and New York State. When OLA has needed to bring independent, third-party analysis to decision-makers to promote a decision in the lake's favor, directors have seldom fared better than when equipped with Pitarresi's writing.

Pitarresi has also covered issues of concern like algal blooms, invasive mussels, and threats to Oneida Lake fish populations. He has repeatedly covered poaching and the efforts made by DEC to combat it. Pitarresi writes not just as an observer of news, but as an educator about it—a skill he honed as a teacher at the Perry Junior High School in New Hartford, where he worked before joining the O-D. A history major at Hamilton College, Pitarresi was co-captain of the college's football and lacrosse teams.

"It's a profound honor for the organization to have the chance to recognize someone of John's reputation and stature in the outdoors community," says President Scott Shupe. "His contributions to the Oneida Lake cause have been appreciated

for many years, and this award recognizes his entire body of work about the lake, even the articles and columns that he's yet to write."

Also at the annual meeting, the OLA Board of Directors honored member Cindy Schantz with the President's Award. Working with her son, OLA Director and Membership Secretary Bruce Schantz, Cindy manages OLA's incom-

ing mail, assists with membership administration, and performs many other tasks as a volunteer. With the President's Award, OLA recognizes Cindy's tireless commitment to Oneida Lake.

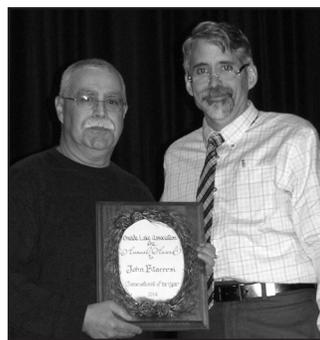


Photo left: John Pitarresi, outdoor writer for the *Utica Observer-Dispatch*, is presented with the Conservationist of the Year Award by OLA Treasurer Lance Vella at the OLA annual meeting. Photo right: Outgoing OLA President Dr. Edward L. Mills presents OLA member and extraordinary volunteer Cindy Schantz with the President's Award at the 2014 Annual Membership Meeting.

Invasive, non-native, or banned?

New species regulations affect Oneida Lake

By Diane Carlton and Michael Putnam, New York State Department of Environmental Conservation

Recently, New York State issued a new regulation, New York Code of Rules and Regulations (NYCRR) Section 59.4, which requires boaters using any kind of DEC administered boat launch (e.g. South Shore Boat Launch, Toad Harbor Fishing Access Site, etc.) to remove any plant or animal, or parts thereof, visible to the human eye, in, on, or attached to any part of the watercraft, including livewells, bilges, the motor, rudder, anchor or other rigging; any equipment or gear; or the trailer or any other device used to transport or launch a watercraft that may come into contact with the water.

This is in addition to other NYS regulations that deal with the possession and movement of non-native species. Some examples are: Part 180 – which prohibits hunting and trapping of Eurasian wild boar; Part 192 which restricts the planting of certain plants and/or cultivars, establishes white pine blister rust quarantine districts, and provides prohibitions on the transportation of firewood; and Parts 10 and 35 which establish various prohibitions on the transportation and use of bait fish.

The Forest Health Program, operated by the NYSDEC Division of Lands and Forests, dispersed about 30 seasonal staff throughout the state during the 2014 summer season to look for invasive species and inventory ecosystems in general. If you are aware of the location of any invasive species, please contact our staff members: Forest health/firewood hotline 866-640-0652, Giant hogweed hotline, 845-256-3111 or via the DEC Website, Regional Offices or on Facebook (search for New York forest health).

In 2008, New York State established the Invasive Species Council which, among other things, created the Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM). There are eight PRISMs across New York. Residents of the Oneida Lake area are covered by the Finger Lakes and St. Lawrence-Eastern Lake Ontario PRISMs and are encouraged to visit the PRISM link below to learn more.

(Continued on page 4)

Tips For Fall Night Fishing For Walleye

By Tom Pierce, OLA Director

I'm an avid walleye angler, but any tips I write about I have learned from other night fisherpersons – men and women who are accomplished in the art of night fishing. To build a larger knowledge base on the topic, I thought I would confer with a few of the people I know (besides myself) who catch Walleye in the fall.

Captain Tony Buffa, my colleague and friend on the OLA Board of Directors, says, “the fall bite starts when the shoreline water temperature lowers to 57 degrees.” [Editor’s note: The bite started several weeks before this edition of the Bulletin was published-and at press time, it’s still going strong. Get out there and fish!]

Most people believe the best bite is half an hour before sundown until 45 minutes after sundown. OLA member Larry Pelko from Verona advised me to keep changing colors and keep fishing, just in case the South Shore fish didn’t read the same book as the North Shore fish.

Some good spots are off the mouth of a creek, the windward side of points, docks, and the canal at Sylvan Beach.

OLA member Brian Potts told me it is not necessary to wade way out, just wade out far enough to be in 2 to 3 feet of water then cast parallel to the waves which is usually parallel to the shore.

Floater type lures such as Rapalas, Jr. Thundersticks, and Bass Pro XPS lures

usually work best just as long as they are shiny.

The speed of the retrieve is very important. OLA member Cindy Schantz says, “if you think you are reeling slow, reel slower.”

Prime Night Fishing Spots:

At the canal, sometimes walleyes are on top and sometimes on the bottom. Wind has a big effect on the bite, and a west wind for two days is usually good.

The South Shore Boat Launch, Chapman Park Pier (although you need a long net here), and the wall at Godfrey Point Launch.

If you are wading you will no doubt have a snap type stringer. BEFORE you enter the water open the bottom snap. If you catch a keeper put it on the stringer, then take the hooks out of the fish. Don’t forget to open the second snap on the stringer. If you have ever been out there up to your belly button in the water you can appreciate the tip from OLA Director Bill Girvan.

OLA Director Jim Novak says, “for fishing in the canal at Sylvan Beach, using blade baits, i.e. Sonars or something similar are good. Cast them out and let them fall to the bottom and then sharply



The Bite is On! The annual night bite is on! In this photo from 2013, OLA Board of Directors member Jim Novak with a walleye he caught from shore. Photo by Spider Rybaak.

lift them to get them to vibrate. There are snags in the canal so use heavy line of at least 10 pound test. Another canal method is to ‘Walk the Wall’ by dropping your Sonar to the bottom, reel up a few feet and sharply lift and let drop, but not to the bottom. Fish generally hit on the drop of the lure. Walk a step or two and repeat until you get Mr. or Ms. Walleye to wrap his/her lips around your lure!

My last tip is to be persistent. Sometimes the fish come in and sometimes they don’t. Don’t get discouraged - if you go enough times, you’re bound to hit a night when the bite is on!”

Flat calm, clear sky, and bright moon are not considered good conditions. Stiff on-shore breeze ripply water, and an overcast sky are considered best. But then again I have caught them in the worst conditions and been skunked in the best. This is good excuse material for when you go home with no fish.

Be sure to fish with a mate, as camaraderie and sportsmanship are what make Oneida Lake night fishing so much fun. Try it – you’ll get hooked. Best of luck and be careful!!

New species regulations affect Oneida Lake

(Continued from page 3)

For more information regarding laws, regulations, identification, etc..., of non-native species, please visit:

NYS Forest Health Program

www.dec.ny.gov/lands/4969.html

Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISM)

www.nyis.info/?action=prism_partners

NYSDEC Website for nuisance and invasive species

www.dec.ny.gov/animals/265.html

NYS Conservationist article on invasive species

www.dec.ny.gov/pubs/53542.html

Editor’s note: When New York State sought public comment on NYCRR 59.4, the OLA Board of Directors commented in opposition to the regulation as written. While we are on the record as strongly supporting invasive species management, we did not believe that 59.4 was written in a way that would effectively accomplish this goal. We are particularly concerned that the rule punishes recreational anglers and sportsmen without addressing major vectors for invasives. While New York moved ahead with the new rule, the DEC has published information regarding specific species that are targeted: www.dec.ny.gov/animals/50121.html. This is a step in the right direction for recreational users and our lake.

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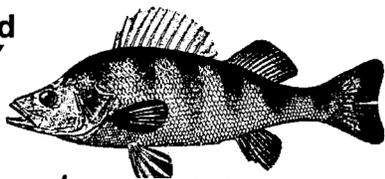
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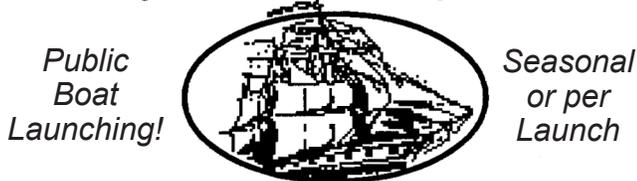


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