

Newsletter



FALL
2019

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Ward Pound Ridge Reservation's River Otters

by Sarah Walkley

North American river otters are one of two species of otters that can be found in the United States, and the only species found along the east coast including in Ward Pound Ridge Reservation. River otters live throughout Canada and the United States in regions with healthy water systems. They can be found in rivers as well as ponds, lakes, marshes, bays, and even in the ocean. In California and Alaska, river otters sometimes share habitat with their cousin, the sea otter. The scientific name of river otters, *Lontra Canadensis*, translates to otters of Canada. In New York, river otters are often confused with an animal similar in appearance but very different in behavior – the beaver. As many of you know, beavers also inhabit Ward Pound Ridge Reservation, and evidence of them can be seen as they cut down trees to eat and to build their dams and lodges. Beavers are herbivores in the rodent family; they're rounder than otters and have a large flat tail they use to slap the water when they sense danger. River otters enjoy living in beaver habitat, and will even make dens out of abandoned beaver lodges. As carnivores, and members of the weasel family, otters will eat fish and any other small animals they can hunt near the water. Here in Ward Pound Ridge



(Continued on page 3)



Notes from the Friends of Trailside President

Dear Friends and neighbors:

With the start of Fall, and our recent warm and dry weather, it's been a perfect time for walking the trails in WPRR. The Friends of the Trailside Museum and WPRR have been busy using your donations to enhance that experience. Don't forget to renew your donation as a Friends' member, giving at the \$100 level or higher gets a parking pass for the year.

Just some of the recent projects we have supported include:

- Sponsoring the Ed Kanze Bird walk,
- Providing the monitoring equipment used in various turtle study projects including Turtle Day with 40 participants as well as projects in coordination with John Jay and Fox Lane students,
- Our Augmented Reality Sandbox was used by our curator, Mindy with a meeting of the Watershed Agricultural Council of the Forestry Institute at a meeting at the Museum,
- The sonar and computer equipment provided by the Friends has been demonstrated to various student groups, and selected high school students will be trained in its use,
- The flat screen TV provided by the Friends is now mounted in the Museum and plays video from the trail cameras supplied by the Friends and is used in WPRR and other County parks to record animal activity.

While on your walks in WPRR this fall, if you are not already doing so, I recommend you download an app to your mobile phone named "iNaturalist". It is a free service and a joint initiative of the California Academy of Sciences and the National Geographic Society. Through the app you can take a picture of any plant, flower, butterfly, bird, insect etc. and upload it to the app and quickly receive a set of probable identifications from which to select. These are based on AI comparisons to your photo and GPS location. You can also then share your observation and selection with the other app users who can offer their own advice in return. Also, there is a WPRR Biodiversity Club that has formed that you can share it with. I have inserted a montage of pictures I have uploaded. (Answers: Greater Fritillaries, Round Headed Bush Clover, Common Wood-Nymph, Oil Beetle)

Some of these I knew what they were and just wanted to record them but others I did not know and sought to properly identify them. Give it a try; we have great cell service in most of the Res so the response and satisfaction is almost instantaneous.

Happy trails to you,

Phil Petronis
President, Friends of Trailside Museum



Photos by Phil Petronis

Ward Pound Ridge Reservation's River Otters

(Continued from page 1)

Reservation, their favorite food seems to be crayfish that live in the Cross River.

In New York, river otters are often seen alone or in small groups. These groups will likely be a mother and pups, and sometimes groups of adults will travel together. Pups are born in late winter, usually in litters of two-three individuals. After they're born, their mother will find a mate to produce next year's litter. Although gestation is only two months long, river otters are capable of delayed implantation and will give birth up to ten months after mating. Pups are weaned after three months and their mothers have to teach them how to swim and to hunt. Mother otters have been observed injuring fish and releasing them in small pools of water so that their pups have a chance to learn how to catch them. Otter pups grow quickly to adult size but can stay with their mother for a full year.

We haven't always had so many otters in Westchester. In the 1800s through the 1950s, unregulated trapping led to otters being extirpated from many regions. Thanks to new regulations, and to the efforts of many relocation projects that brought otters back to their previous habitats, otters are now doing well and trapping them has even become legal again in many states. During the relocation projects, nearly 4,000 otters were released throughout the United States. Today, it's estimated that more than 40,000 otters are trapped and hunted each year in the United States and Canada for their fur. Their biggest threat, however, is habitat loss and pollution. As an animal that spends near equal parts of its life in the water and on land, they rely on environments that are safe from development and that have healthy, clean water.

While otters are shy, they are also creatures of habit. They'll visit the same areas of a river bank repeatedly, sometimes for generations, to go to the bathroom and leave their scent. These areas are called latrine



sites. Otters can communicate using the scents they leave behind, and it's thought that an otter can determine the age, sex, and reproductive status through smells at latrine sites. This ability helps otters find reproductive mates and avoid physical altercations with unfriendly adults.

When near one another, river otters also communicate through body posture and by vocalizing. Common vocalizations include *chirps*, *whines*, *hahs*, and *chuckles* (figure 1). Different calls are correlated with different behaviors and can communicate safety, concern, or danger to other otters. *Chirps* are often produced by otters when they're alone and calling out to another otter who is hopefully nearby. *Hahs*, or loud quick exhales of air, are often used as an alarm call or to signal concern, for example if another otter is too close

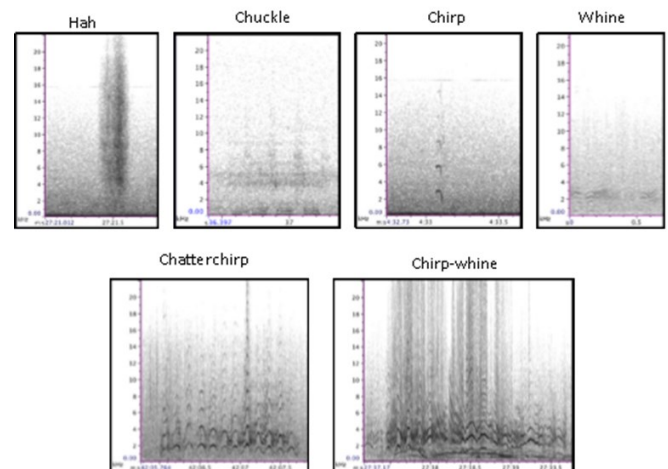


Figure 1. Spectrograms of six common calls produced by North American river otters. Duration is on the x-axis (seconds) and frequency (pitch) is on the y-axis (kilohertz).

to their food. *Chuckles*, quiet grunting sounds produced often in a series of two or three, are used frequently during a large number of behaviors, often as otters are investigating at a latrine site. *Whines*, continuous *chirps* (*chatterchirps*), and a combination of the two (*chirp-whines*) often signal that an otter is highly agitated.

So what are the river otters here in Ward Pound Ridge Reservation up to? We've been monitoring the otters at latrine sites along the Cross River since 2016 using trail cameras. Trail cameras are small weather resistant devices that are activated by an animal's motion

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What's Happening to our Ash Trees?

by Sarah Walkley

The Crisis

Ash trees are extremely common in North America. Of the more than 15 different species, green and white ash are the most prevalent. In addition to providing important habitat and food to a variety of animals, ash trees are also known for their strong and resilient wood which is used frequently for building cabinets, flooring, and furniture. Ash trees, however, are dying at an alarming rate. If you haven't yet noticed, start to look along roadsides, in your favorite parks, and even in your own backyard. You'll soon not be able to miss the many signs of an affected ash: thinning leaf canopies with few remaining leaves and many dead branches, newly sprouting branches with fresh leaves at the base of the tree (known as "epicormic shoots"), and flaking of the bark where woodpeckers have stripped it away in search of the cause of the trees' demise. If you look even closer at these dying ash trees, you'll notice small D-shaped holes in the bark. This is a definite sign of the culprit – an Asiatic beetle brought to North America in the last twenty years, likely on shipping materials and first noticed in Michigan. The beetle, called the emerald ash borer (EAB), is less than an inch long and skinny. It lays its eggs in ash trees and when the larvae emerge, they eat their way through the under layer of bark, effectively strangling the tree and preventing nutrients from being transported through the xylem. An adult ash tree will die in just a few years once infested with EAB.



The adult emerald ash borer (pictured left) is a small but distinct green beetle. The grub-like larvae eat the under layer of ash bark creating "serpentine galleries" (pictured right) that eventually kill the tree.

The Past and the Present

The ash tree crisis is not the first time a group of trees has succumbed to an invasive threat in North America. Older adults will remember the American chestnuts and elms were both devastated by invasive fungal diseases. Naturalists and researchers are hoping to have learned from past tree die-outs in order to apply the knowledge to current tree pests and diseases. In addition to ash trees, beech trees are also at risk today: The mysterious and lethal beech leaf disease (BLD) will kill a beech sapling in two-five years. The disease was originally identified in Ohio in 2012 and has since been confirmed in Pennsylvania, Ontario, and New York in Rockland and Westchester Counties. Symptoms of BLD include a dark/light lateral banding on leaves followed by leaves becoming leathery and shriveled.

The Solution

The Ecological Research Institute (ERI) has created a series of citizen science projects known as Monitoring and Managing Ashes (MaMA) that together lay out a plan to save ash trees of all species on a local level. The first project, Ash/EAB Survey, involves identifying an ash tree and reporting if there is any sign of EAB. This project can be done anywhere in the United States once you've become comfortable with basic tree and EAB identification. The second project, Ash Mortality Monitoring, can be completed by owners or managers of larger parcels of land. In this case, plots

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The Trailside Challenge

by Kendall O'Connell

Last issue's challenge was a piece of red cedar wood. Eastern Red Cedar (*Juniperus virginiana*) is particularly known by woodworkers for its rot resistance making this a particularly durable material to use in harsh climates. It is a conifer, or evergreen, with foliage that lasts year round. This tree is pretty hearty being tolerant of salt and drought. In the fall, it has a bluish berry desired by birds getting ready for winter. It can be found throughout Ward Pound Ridge Reservation.

This issue's challenge is very good at camouflage and can often be found cruising around on rainy days.



Animal Profile

by Kendall O'Connell

Bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) are carnivorous felines found throughout North America. Mature bobcats measure between 45 and 58 centimeters (cm) in height, 65 and 105 cm in length, and weigh between 4 and 15 kilograms (kg) with an average of 7.5 kg. Bobcats have fur that's brown in color with darker spots or stripes on it. They have tufts of fur on the sides of their face and black tipped ears and short, "bobbed" tails.

In the wild, bobcats live between 5-15 years. They are considered nocturnal, although in some populations periods of activity might change. They're solitary and territorial animals, only choosing to interact with others during the mating season or when raising kits. To mark their territory, bobcats will deposit scat, urine, and secretions from their anal glands. This scent-marking is an important form of communication, likely decreasing the occurrences of negative, physical altercations. Bobcats also communicate acoustically and through behavioral cues.

Bobcats are opportunistic carnivores and hunt any small prey available including mammals, insects, birds, and fish. They prey on small mammals such as rabbits, however bobcats have been observed successfully hunting prey as large as a deer. They are stealth hunters that stalk and pounce on their prey, and can jump over three meters in the air to catch their target.



Bobcats can survive in a wide range of habitats, such as forest, mountains, and swamps. They are often observed in habitats with a variety of plants to live among including white cedar, black spruce or eastern hemlocks. Bobcats make their dens on rocky ledges, rocky piles, brush piles, hollow trees, logs and other secluded areas. Dens are used as a refuge from severe weather and to help raise young. Typically, bobcats will avoid habitats utilized by humans. A study examining bobcat ranges throughout 29 locations in the United States found that female bobcats had a mean range of 16 km² and male bobcats had a mean range of 40 km².

Ward Pound Ridge Reservation's River Otters

(Continued from page 3)

in front of them. Many camera models can record videos with sound as well as photographs. They can even film at night by producing an infrared flash that many animals don't notice. Using these cameras, I've been able to observe river otter behavior, vocalizations, and general habits over the last three years. We've discovered that the otters in New York are fairly quiet. Most latrine visits are done in silence, even within a large family group. The most common vocalizations to hear in Westchester are the *chuckle* and the *chirp*.

We've also observed that Ward Pound Ridge Reservation's river otters are most active at night, between 9:00 PM and 2:00 AM (Figure 2). The least likely time to observe otters in the park is between 11:00 AM and 4:00 PM. Otters are active year round, even in the winter. It's typical in the otter literature, and reflected here in the park so far, that otters are least active at their latrine sites in the summer (Figure 3). To learn more about otter research in the park, and to see and hear the otter behaviors described, please visit the Wild Otter Acoustics website at www.wildotteracoustics.org.

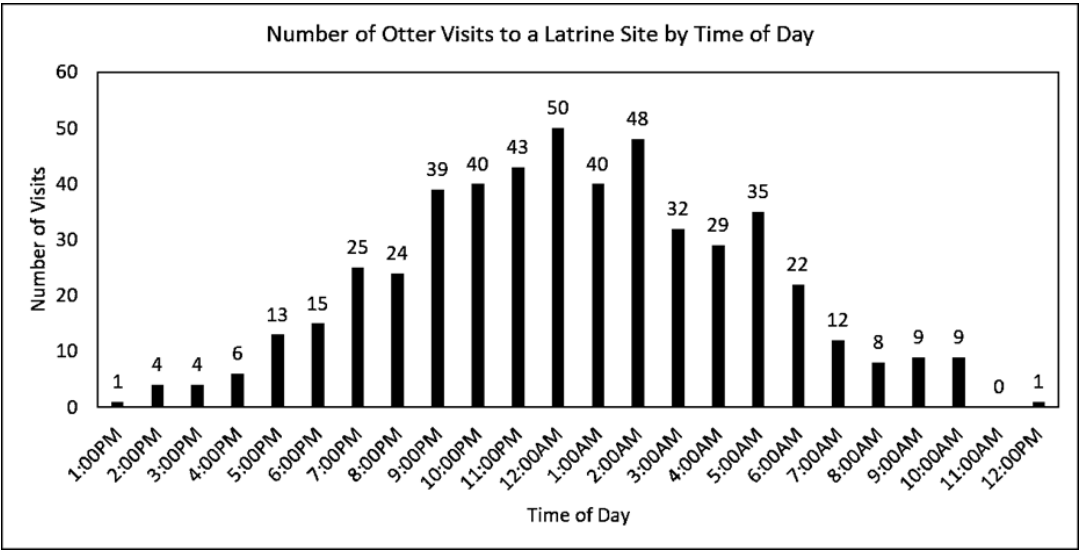


Figure 2. Total number of visits of otters to a latrine site in Ward Pound Ridge Reservation by month between the years 2016-2019.

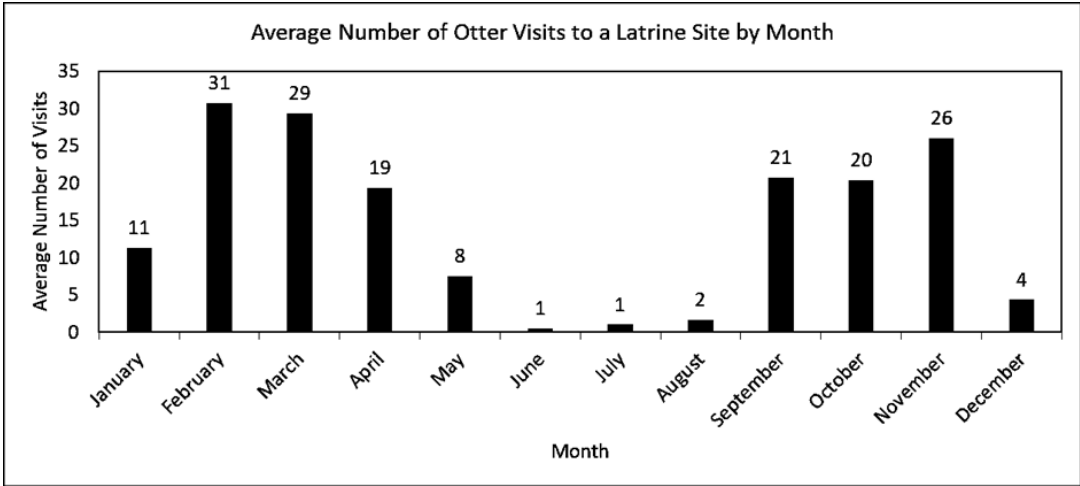


Figure 3. Average number of otter visits per month to a latrine site between the years of 2016 and 2019.

What's Happening to our Ash Trees?

(Continued from page 4)

of 40 ash trees are monitored annually which helps ERI track the rate of tree mortality and identify "Lingering Ash Zones." This information is critical because the end goal of ERI's MaMA Project is to locate and protect the remaining ash trees that are resistant to the beetle. The third project, Lingering Ash Search, is where you can formally report ash trees that are still alive in a lingering ash zone. Scions, or twigs for grafting, are then collected from lingering ashes to aid in the propagation of these very rare, local, and EAB resistant trees.

What is Trailside Nature Museum doing to help?

Westchester County is not yet a lingering ash zone, so it's too early to look for resistant ash trees in the park. Instead, this past summer Trailside staff and the Conservationist camp group participated in setting up a 40 tree plot in the park. The campers identified, tagged, and recorded the diameter and health status of 40 ash trees on the Red/Green trail. The plot will be monitored every summer until all the ash trees have succumbed to the effects of EAB.

What can you do to help?

Visit www.monitoringash.org to learn how you can help by attending an ERI Ash monitoring training workshop and begin participating in the citizen science projects. You can also prevent the spread of EAB and other invasive threats to trees by never transporting firewood far distances. Instead, purchase firewood where you plan to burn it, use certified heat treated firewood, or gather it nearby when permitted. To report tree health issues, such as beech leaf disease, use the free smart phone app Tree Health Survey.

Program Highlights

Hike to Leatherman's Cave

November 9th at 2 pm

Hear the lore of the Old Leather Man as told by storyteller Jonathan Kruk on this annual 2.5-mile hike. Meet at the Michigan Road parking area.
Co-sponsored by the Friends of Trailside.



Friends of Trailside Nature Museum and Ward Pound Ridge Reservation

The End of Michigan Road

by Kendall O'Connell

Sit spots have become a popular phenomenon in a variety of capacities like wilderness therapy and environmental education. A sit spot is a place that a person returns to on a regular basis to observe—usually subtle—changes over time as they get to know that one small area intimately. This process reveals a wealth of knowledge both about local phenology and the observers themselves. Feeling inspired after reading *The Forest Unseen: A Year's Watch in Nature* by David George Haskell, I decided to try to join in on this sit spot phenomenon.

It took me a few months of searching for a place—as Goldilocks would put it—that was just right for me. I wanted a place with the solace of solitude, but also easy accessibility. As I was listening to the radio Paul Simon came on and he sang in the last verse “my life is so common it disappears” inadvertently directing me to my sit spot: the end of Michigan Road—a place so common it disappears.

This first season, I watched a green heron stalk, skewer, and swallow a fish. I saw a mama duck sit on her eggs as I almost fell into her nest. I saw red-winged black birds dancing intricately to find a suitable mate. I saw egg masses of frogs and salamanders—considered obligate species for vernal pool life. Momentarily, I could only hear the chorus of frogs and nothing else as I stood stalk still in the water. I held tadpoles in my hands just as they started to sprout legs.

I smelled the rosemary as I brushed my fingertips against the bushes. I watched as the red maple sapling leaves unfurled before my eyes. I saw the white petals of the flowering Roseaceae plants luring pollinators' in. Giddy with excitement, I waited for the first snapping turtle to come out to bask in the warm sunshine. Reluctantly, I started slathering on bug spray with the first onslaught of mosquitos and ticks. Mallards swam lazily by water snakes sitting on a partially submerged telephone pole of unknown origin. A mink and I startled each other one morning as we started our days. I felt the weather change over time—the bite of the wind, the splashes of raindrops, the kiss of the sun.

I got to know one place intimately—understanding I can't watch the sedges grow daily over time on all 4,000+ acres of this park—although I'd love to be able to. If you've the time, try setting up your own sit spot. Notice and keep track of the changes in the seasons. We'd love to hear about what you find!



View from the Porch

by Jeff Main



After what seemed to be a prolonged summer (a hint of things to come, perhaps), it appears we have, as of this first weekend of October, turned the calendar forward to Autumn, probably my most favorite season living here in the northeast. Recognized as one of the few places in the world to witness these magnificent fall foliage displays, New England (yeah, we were once part of that in this corner of Westchester) is the destination of many a pilgrimage to take in the pallet of color across the landscape this time of year. It is certainly a tree's response to shortened photoperiod (aka: daylight) that triggers the fading of the green pigment (chlorophyll) due to the leaf sealing itself off to water through the stem by forming the abscission layer at the base of the petiole. Ok, that's more than I need to know, you might be saying. Yes, but it is also the combination of warm temperatures on the leaf surface (read: clear sunny days) and the coolness of a near frost period after dark, when sugars are converted to anthocyanins, which creates the reds, purples and even "blue" colors which under the right conditions, can paint the landscape with the Autumn colors this corner of the planet is noted for. And what better destination, locally, to observe this phenomenon than our beloved Ward Pound Ridge Reservation. Take a stroll through the meadow trails to observe the displays on the hillsides or hike to the Leatherman's overlook for a breathtaking view toward the Hudson valley to our west. But don't delay. Yes, Fall can be fleeting, but how fortunate are we to be right here in its presence to witness all its glory.

And with the delay in cooler weather, there can also be an associated delay in migration. So be sure to carry those binoculars to help identify those getting ready to leave, those who might be passing through or even some from up north who drop in on us to spend the winter. And speaking of spending the winter, it is also an opportune time to observe our year round residents as they fatten themselves up or build up their larder for those long winter days and nights that will be here soon enough.

See you on the trails....

Jeff

2020 Memberships Available Now!

Visit our website for details!

www.friendsoftrailside.org

Trailside Nature Museum Calendar of Events • November - December

NOVEMBER

Saturday 2nd, 1 PM: LENAPE OF WESTCHESTER

Children will learn what life was like for the people who lived here before European settlement by exploring their food, tools, toys, and a traditional wigwam.

Saturday 9th, 2 PM: LEATHERMAN HIKE

Hear the lore of the Old Leatherman as told by storyteller Jonathon Kruk on this annual 2.5-mile hike. Meet at the Michigan Road parking area. Co-sponsored

by the Friends of Trailside Nature Museum and Ward Pound Ridge Reservation.

Saturday 16th, 10 AM - 12 PM: FEEDERWATCH

Birdfeeders are up! Come watch the feeders with us, get a closer look at our feathered friends and make your own feeder to take home!

DECEMBER

Saturday 14th, 1 PM - 3 PM: HOLIDAY CRAFTS

A program designed for kids to gather and use materials from the natural world to create beautiful

Another Fun-filled Year of Nature Camp at Trailside Museum



As a member, you're invited to...

The Friends of Trailside and Ward Pound Ridge Reservation's Annual Meeting

Date: 12/7/19

Time: 10:00 AM

Where: Trailside Museum

Refreshments will be
served! Help us save trees
by bringing your own
coffee mug! No RSVP
required, just show up!



Friends of Trailside Nature Museum and Ward Pound Ridge Reservation

Trailside Staff

Curator – Mindy Quintero
Naturalist – Sarah Walkley

Conservation Division of the Westchester County
Department of Parks, Recreation and Conservation

Newsletter Staff

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Contributing Editors: Maureen Koehl
Alison Koppelman
Sarah Walkley

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Susan Gould

Friends of the Trailside Nature Museum and Ward Pound Ridge Reservation is a private, not-for-profit organization dedicated to promoting a better appreciation and understanding of the natural world and the relationship between people and the land. Through its support of the Trailside Nature Museum, operated by the Department of Parks, Recreation, and Conservation of the County of Westchester, the Friends provides financial and volunteer aid for exhibits, school, and educational programs.

Become a Member Today!

Friends of the Trailside Nature Museum

P.O. Box 236, Cross River, NY 10518

☐ I would like to join / renew *(Please circle one)*

Membership Categories

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---------|
| <input type="radio"/> Other | \$_____ |
| <input type="radio"/> Mountain Lion | \$1000 |
| <input type="radio"/> Black Bear | \$500 |
| <input type="radio"/> Bluebird | \$250 |
| <input type="radio"/> Wood Turtle | \$100 |
| <input type="radio"/> Dragonfly | \$50 |
| <input type="radio"/> Salamander | \$25 |

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____

State: _____

Zip: _____

Phone: () _____

Email: _____

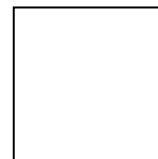
Note: Membership at the Wood Turtle level or above includes a parking pass allowing free access to the Reservation throughout the year.



cut along dotted line and return with payment

Trailside Nature Museum
Ward Pound Ridge Reservation
PO Box 236
Cross River, NY 10518
USA

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www.friendsoftrailside.org



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