

Project Wild America

Youth Ambassadors Program Summary

In the summer of 2015, the Roger Tory Peterson Institute of Natural History (RTPI) commenced a new conservation corps program entitled, "Project Wild America Youth Ambassadors" (PWA). Through the pilot year of the program, six local high school students and two Jamestown Community College students were employed to serve as crew members and crew leaders, respectively, while assisting RTPI in their efforts to better understand the natural history of the region and bolster environmental literacy and stewardship. Over the course of the six week program, PWA Youth Ambassadors discovered the wild side of the Chadakoin River in Jamestown NY through daily explorations in and around the water. Students observed local flora and fauna and collected data through the execution of a variety of survey types while also sharing their insights and interests with community members.



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(Left to Right) Sarah Quadt, Makenna Graham and Morgan Motherwell (PWA Crew Leader) identify a captured dragonfly.



Crew Leader Emma Wade and crew member Abbi Warner inspect a Musk Turtle recently caught from the Chadakoin River.

Due to the success of the initial iteration of Project Wild America Youth Ambassadors the program has returned every year since, marking 2018 as the fourth season. Since its inauguration, the program was expanded to accommodate a wider breadth of surveys and reach within the local community. Building upon studies that were established from the beginning, students collected specific data related to each, gaining further understanding of protocols, survey methodology and interpretation of results. Some of these research projects included conducting bird banding of breeding birds, mark and recapture of dragonflies, presence or absence of certain macroinvertebrate species and population dynamics of the spiny softshell turtle. Expanded baseline assessments continued alongside research projects building upon the previous year's data and analyzing changes between years. Through these endeavors, PWA students identified and documented over a hundred different species.

In addition, the youth ambassadors devoted considerable time engaging the public to share their enthusiasm, objectives and findings; this included maintaining a website and several social media outlets, conversing with people that they encountered in the field, hosting educational outreach events, and setting up informative displays during festivals and at the James Prendergast Library which served as PWA's home base throughout the program duration. Acting as true

ambassadors on behalf of the local environment, students imparted their knowledge of this valuable urban river system and showcased how the community can better steward this natural resource through their actions.

PWA Youth Ambassadors: by the numbers

In **6 weeks** and a combined **2,052 hours** Project Wild America Youth

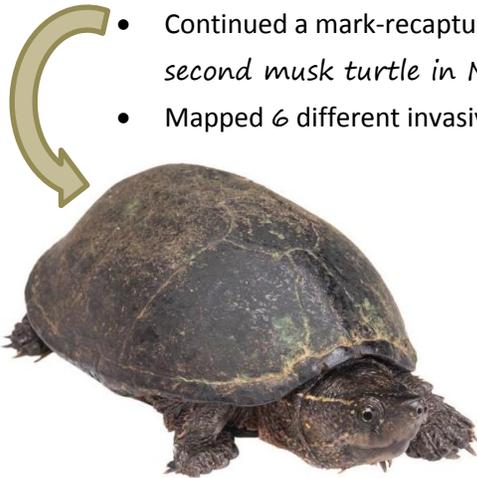
Ambassadors accomplished the following:

OVERALL

- Focused on *5 themes* throughout the summer (1 per week) including: *Roger Tory Peterson's Early Life in Jamestown NY Where His Passion for Birds Began, Amphibians and Reptiles, Invasive Species, Wild America and its Biological Diversity (including unique habitats), and Environmental Issues and Practical Solutions.* These themes were used to guide survey efforts and educational programming.

CONSERVATION

- Identified **168+** *species* throughout the City of Jamestown.
- Recorded **45** bird species and successfully banded **61** individual birds representing **15** different species.
 - Students carried out mist netting and general birding in sites that were *historically visited by Roger Tory Peterson himself.*
 - They assisted in banding **15** *purple martin fledglings* at *Chautauqua Institution.*
- Continued a mark-recapture study with Common Musk Turtles (*Sternotherus odoratus*) and *marked the second musk turtle in New York State.*
- Mapped **6** different invasive species residing in the City of Jamestown.
 - Assisted in the *removal of Water Chestnut* from Audubon Community Nature Center's Big Pond
 - Planted approximately **40** trees with the City of Jamestown's Arborist
 - Studied water quality by sampling *macro-invertebrates*. Students found water quality results to be inconclusive (some pollutant sensitive species mixed with pollutant-tolerant species).
 - Continued *mark-recapture* of dragonflies.



EDUCATION

- Carried out weekly reading hour programs at the James Prendergast Library for **30+** attendees including YMCA day campers.
- Interacted with the *SPROUTS* program at the Jamestown Farmer's Market and delivered a "*For the Birds*" program for **15** children and their families.
- Created and manned table displays at the Wild America Festival and Bridge Festival where a combined **4,000** *people were in attendance.*
- Represented RTPI at the Chautauqua County Fair and talked to approximately **60** *visitors* about the Institute's programs and upcoming events.
- Held a *BioBlitz day* at *Chautauqua Institution* and explored the grounds with **20** children from the Kids Club Plus program.



A Northern Cardinal, one of several species banded in the City of Jamestown.

- *Communicated* findings and events throughout the summer using blog posts on the PWA website and social media outlets including Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.
- Publicized activities and events weekly during the “*Saturday Breakfast Party*” radio show hosted by Dennis Webster (WJTN) at Friendly’s Restaurant to over *1,800* listeners.
- Gave a summation of PWA’s findings in a *formal presentation* held at the Roger Tory Peterson Institute.

For more information, please visit the Project Wild America Youth Ambassador website at

www.projectwildamerica.org.



2018 Project Wild America Youth Ambassadors (top left to right): Abbi Warner, Jasmine Buffone, Leanna Stratton, Sarah Quadt, Makenna Graham, and Anna Burt; (bottom row left to right) Emma Wade (Crew Leader), Elyse Henshaw (PWA Coordinator) and Morgan Motherwell (Crew Leader).