

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.



PWA students conducted bird studies in sites historically visited by Roger Tory Peterson throughout the City of Jamestown. Here, students are pictured birding in Willard Park, the location where Roger had his first encounter with a Northern Flicker.



PWA Crew member Shania Nuse shows Festivalgoers a Common Musk Turtle caught and marked by PWA.

Due to the success of the initial iteration of Project Wild America Youth Ambassadors the program has returned every year since, marking 2017 as the third season. The program was expanded to accommodate eight high school students while increasing efforts to expand the breadth of surveys and reach to 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 point counts, bird banding of breeding birds, mark and recapture of dragonflies, presence or absence of microplastics 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 hundreds of 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:



A House Wren, one of several species banded in the City of Jamestown.

OVERALL

- Focused on **6 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, Creatures of the Night, Wild America and its Biological Diversity, and Environmental Issues and Practical Solutions.* These themes were used to guide survey efforts and educational programming.

CONSERVATION

- Identified **174+ species** throughout the City of Jamestown.
- Recorded **42 bird species** and successfully banded **27 individual birds** representing **9 different species**.
 - Students carried out transects, point counts, mist netting and general birding in sites that were *historically visited by Roger Tory Peterson himself.*
- Began a mark-recapture study with Common Musk Turtles (*Sternotherus odoratus*) and *marked the first musk turtle in New York State.*
- Mapped **85 new occurrences** of invasive species, including *Emerald Ash Borer.*
- Studied water quality by sampling *macro-invertebrates* and *micro-plastics*. Students found water quality results to be inconclusive (some pollutant sensitive species mixed with pollutant-tolerant species) and plastics present, respectively.
- Continued *mark-recapture* of dragonflies.



EDUCATION

- Carried out weekly reading hour programs at the James Prendergast Library for **30+** attendees including YMCA day campers.
- Led stations during an outdoor program for **23 students** enrolled in St. Luke's Episcopal Church summer program.
- Erected **10 signs** at Chadakoin Park and **10 signs** at the Great Jamestown Riverwalk to raise awareness of monarch butterflies and the protection of milkweed as well as Mallard Duck health and the effects of feeding them



PWA Crew Members (from left to right) Hanny Qadri, Lauren Garvey and Jonah Rizzuto process macroinvertebrate samples in the lab at Jamestown Community College.

bread (with healthy alternatives provided).

- Hosted guest speakers leading *bat* and *moth* programs for the public to join and learn more about these often misunderstood species.
- Created and manned table displays at the Wild America Festival, McCrea Point Festival and Jamestown Farmers Market where a combined *5,000 people were in attendance*.
- Presented surveys for the public to participate in and received 277 responses.
 - McCrea Point Festival question: “*What do you think is one of the biggest environmental issues?*”
 - Wild America Festival question: “*What part of an ecosystem is most important for biodiversity?*”
- *Communicated* findings and events throughout the summer using blog posts on the PWA website and social media outlets including Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat 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 James Prendergast Library.



PWA Crew and Leaders teach children at the James Prendergast Library Reading Hour Program about invasive species.

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

www.projectwildamerica.org.



2017 Project Wild America Youth Ambassadors (top left to right): Jonah Rizzuto, Lauren Garvey (middle row left to right) Elliott Safford, Anna Sena, Shania Nuse, Emma Wade, Hanny Qadri, Makenna Graham, (bottom row left to right) Becky Rew (Crew Leader), Elyse Henshaw (RTPi Program Coordinator) and Morgan Motherwell (Crew Leader)