SKWC

SAW KILL WATERSHED COMMUNITY

NEWSLETTER

Issue 7: May 27th, 2020

Protecting the Saw Kill watershed and its ecological, recreational, and historic resources through hands-on science, education, and advocacy.

A NOTE FROM: SKWC LEADERSHIP TEAM

Howdy, fellow Saw Killovers! We hope everyone has been able to get outside over the past few weeks to enjoy this beautiful Hudson Valley weather! Before we get to this week's newsletter——we want to share an update on the Watershed Roundtable event held on May 19th by the Hudson River Watershed Alliance.

Representatives from more than a dozen watershed groups and several organizations were in virtual attendance, from Yonkers to Albany and the Mohawk River basin-- and it could not have been a more fruitful experience! Each representative shared an update on activities, plans and strategies for keeping connected with our communities through this unprecedented time. The array of watershed projects included bank erosion repairs, educational kiosks, website updates, flood studies, invasive aquatic plant control, expanding recreational opportunities, updating management plans and action agendas, trees for tribs maintenance, and water quality monitoring. Divided into small groups, we highlighted priorities and interests. These discussions will contribute to the Hudson River Watershed Alliance's Needs Assessment project (more to come later this year). All of this reminds us of what we share, gives us new ideas, and helps us respond to problems and concerns relating to water.

Several groups were particularly interested in finding ways to connect with students in their communities during this time, and we were happy to be able to share insight into how we are doing that. Our last newsletter, which featured artwork from local students in appreciation of Earth Day, is a good example. We look forward to continuing to support our local students.

A virtual tip of the hat to HRWA Executive Director Emily Vail for running such a tight and engaging meeting! As always, please feel free to reach out with questions, comments, or suggestions as we continue to navigate through a world of remote watershed stewardship.

HUMMINGBIRDS IN YOUR BACKYARD

Sheila Buff, Saw Kill Watershed Community Leadership Team

Hummingbirds are very small, colorful birds with long, slender bills adapted for reaching deep into tubular flowers to feed on nectar. These tiny birds are amazing flyers, with the ability to not only fly forward, backward, and even upside-down but also to hover in place. The name comes from the humming sound produced by their rapidly beating wings—over 80 beats per second in the smaller species.

The hummingbird family (Trochilidae) has between 325 and 340 members (depending on how you count), almost all found only in Central and South America. Only about a dozen are seen routinely in North America, and of those, only the ruby-throated hummingbird (*Archilochus colubris*) is found in the northeastern U.S. Ruby-throats are just under four inches long and weigh only a few grams. They're metallic green with a deeply notched, forked tail. The males display a brilliant red throat area; the throat area in females is white. Hummingbirds make a variety of rapid, high-pitched squeaks and chips; sometimes they sound like static on a phone line.

The ruby-throated hummingbird is the smallest bird in our area, but it's one of the easiest to see up close. These tiny birds are fearless and readily come to nectar-filled feeders. Add some hummingbird-friendly flowers to your garden and you'll attract even more.

All hummingbirds feed almost entirely on nectar, the sweet liquid secreted by many flowering plants to attract pollinators. Many of these flowers are red, orange, or yellow, colors that strongly attract hummingbirds. In fact, they're so keyed in to these colors that you may get buzzed outdoors by a hummingbird if you're wearing a red cap or shirt.

Hummingbird feeders come in a wide range of shapes and sizes. The design matters less than what you put into them. Fill your feeders with sugar water in the ratio of one cup sugar to four cups plain water. This is the formula that matches natural nectar and attracts the birds—don't make it stronger or weaker. There's no need to add red coloring to the mix. To stir up nectar for your feeders, combine the water and sugar in a pot, bring to a boil, and turn off the heat. When the mixture has cooled, pour it into the feeder. Store any extra in the refrigerator.

To keep your hummingbirds happy and coming back, clean and refill the feeders every few days, even if there's still some liquid left. Rinse out the dead ants, bees, and other insects that get into the feeder, then run it through the dishwasher or wash by hand with soap and water.

Place your hummingbird feeders in an area with some plant shelter, like a tree branch or near some potted plants on the porch. Hummingbirds are very pugnacious and will defend a feeder against others. If you notice the birds dive-bombing each other or hear a lot of chatter at the feeder, reduce the conflict level by putting up one or two more feeders in a different area.

To attract even more hummingbirds, fill your garden with plants that have red, orange, or yellow tubular flowers. Good choices are monarda (bee balm), trumpet vine, butterfly bush, fuchsia, day lilies, penstemon (beardtongue), and phlox. Hummingbirds also love the jewelweed that grows wild in abundance in our area. Bonus: The same plants that attract hummingbirds also attract butterflies.

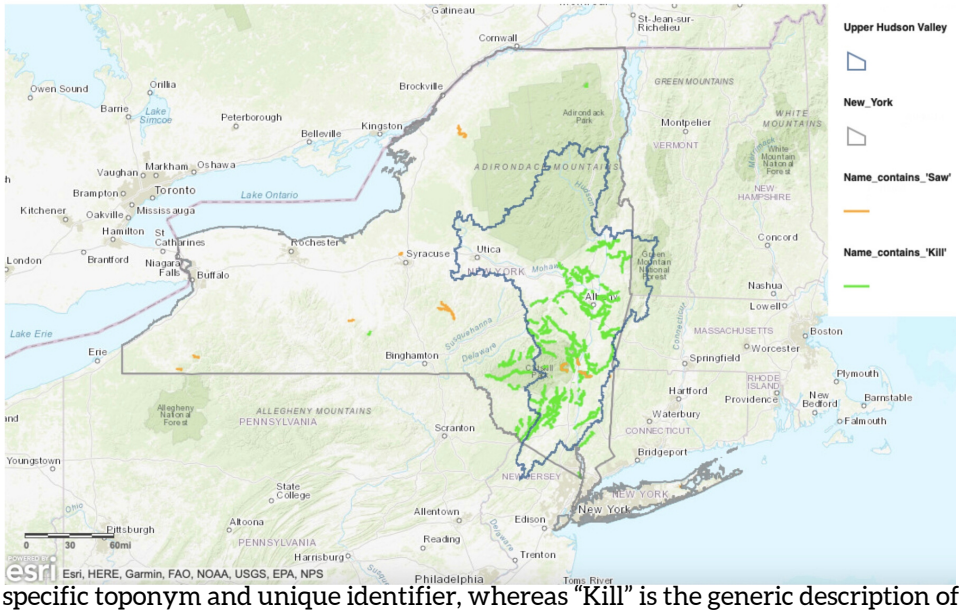
https://unsplash.com/photos/EXhQYizpCZE

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Julia Gloninger, Saw Kill Watershed Community Intern, Bard College '21

Place names, or toponyms, come in two forms: specific (the unique identifier) and generic (the basic description for a geographic feature). We decided to investigate the origins of the name of the Saw Kill, based on an interesting project which mapped the variations on generic stream terms. The project illustrates a striking spatial pattern of generic stream names across the United States with terms like "bayou" appearing near Louisiana and "slough" on the West Coast.

We began our project by mapping variations of the "Saw Kill" name within New York State, using the ArcGIS online mapping system. First, we mapped all streams in New York State which contain the word "Saw" (shown in orange). Seventy-two streams contain the word "Saw" within S 20 of those results are within the Hudson Valley. Of those 72 results, there were 18 Saw Kills, including our own, and 16 Sawmills. Other variations including "Saw" were names like Sawmill Creek and Sawyer Creek. Next, we mapped all streams in New York State which contain the word "Kill" (shown in green). Within the state there are 880 streams containing the word "Kill;" 668 of those streams are within the Hudson Valley. Local examples include Fish Kill, Bear Kill, and Wall Kill.



In our case, "Saw" is a specific toponym and unique identifier, whereas "Kill" is the generic description of a geographic feature. This explains why there are far more results for stream names containing Kill. When we look at generic stream terms across the entire country, Kill appears to be mostly found only in the Hudson Valley. A look into the etymology—the study of the origin of words and the way in which their meanings have changed throughout history—of these terms helps us understand why.

Some etymologies are easier to track than others. Take the Hudson River, for example. It was named for Henry Hudson, an Englishman sailing for the Netherlands, who in 1609 was the first European to explore it. The term "kill" can easily be traced to the history of Dutch exploration and settlement in the region. It's derived from the Dutch word kil, which translates to "a channel" and from the Middle Dutch word kille, which translates to "riverbed, inlet." Today, it commonly refers to creeks and streams. The word is preserved in place names in the Mid-Atlantic states where the Dutch influence has survived in many forms: through the names of our rivers and towns, through architecture in the region, or even through the Sinterklaas celebrations in both Kingston and Rhinebeck which uphold the Dutch custom of celebrating Sinterklaas's return in early December.

The history of various unique toponyms, like Saw, can be more difficult to trace. Like the Hudson, some unique identifiers are derived from the names of prominent people. One example is the town of Peekskill, which was named after the river (kill) that ran through the property of a resident of New Amsterdam named Jan Peeck—hence, Peeck's Kill. "Saw" is likely a reference to the sawmills built by the Dutch along the waterways, which were common along our Saw Kill, in addition to other types of mills. Some old mills in New York are preserved as historic sites, such as Bloom's Mill in Dutchess County (now called Salvato Mill) which used to be a sawmill, gristmill, and eventually a cider mill, and now operates as a rental property.

Many cultural and environmental factors influence the naming of rivers and places. The Saw Kill Watershed Community is planning a community project to name the 21 unnamed tributaries of the Saw Kill. Part of this naming process will involve reviewing historical archives to identify any existing names of these tributaries. This includes names that reflect the people who lived in the region before the Dutch settlers, like the Wappinger People. If you would like to get involved in the project, please email sawkillwatershedcommunity@gmail.com

ENHANCE YOUR NATURE EXPERIENCE: BECOME A CITIZEN SCIENTIST WITH THE NEW YORK-NEW JERSEY TRAIL CONFERENCE!

Brent Boscarino, Invasive Species Citizen Science Coordinator with the NY-NJ Trail Conference

For many of us, the thrill of being on a trail is not just about racing to the top of a summit to take in the views, but it's about pausing to appreciate the sights and sounds along the way. Can you remember a time you've seen a unique plant or bug on your hike and been curious what it was, but had no easy way to find out? Have you ever been on a trail and been frustrated by the amount of vines overtaking the trees and wondered if there was anything you could do about it? Joining the citizen science-based Invasives Strike Force team with the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference is a fun and great way you can make a difference in protecting our native habitats and learn about the diversity of life you are seeing outdoors!

In 2011, the Trail Conference launched the Invasives Strike Force (ISF) program in an effort to help keep trails free and clear of invasive species and to help the outdoor community feel more involved in the stewardship of our natural areas. An invasive species, by definition, is a nonnative organism whose accidental or purposeful introduction by humans is negatively impacting or threatening native biodiversity.

ISF volunteers become forest health detectives. They are trained in the identification and reporting of invasive species by attending a fun and interactive webinar, complete with field ID footage, to help learn what key ID features to look for when out in the field. Volunteers are then assigned a section of trail that they have the entire summer and early fall to survey and report back to us.

Trail section assignments are individually tailored to make it easy and convenient for that volunteer to access, and each volunteer can survey their trail assignment on their own schedule. Our goal is to make it fun, educational, and convenient to help protect the land you love! Data from these community-powered surveys are utilized to help make management decisions to help fight the further spread of invasive species into our natural areas and to organize volunteer workdays to help with the removal of invasive plants.

Not only will you learn how to identify invasive plants as part of your ISF experience, but you will also learn how to use some user-friendly mobile apps to help identify many other types of native plants and wildlife that you are seeing along your hike or in your neighborhood. It truly takes the nature experience to the next level!

The next free training workshop will be offered on May 30, from 9-11 a.m. Please visit our website at nynjtc.org/events to learn more and sign up or contact us at invasives@nynjtc.org with any questions. Please consider joining our Invasives Strike Force team today. We'd love to have you aboard and our native habitats will thank you for it!

Invasive Species Citizen Science Coordinator with the New York New-New Jersey Trail Conference, Brent Boscarino, leads the Invasives Strike Force (ISF) Survey Program. Training workshops to become an ISF surveyor are now being offered as free webinars. On the left is a snapshot of a field ID segment of an ISF training webinar that featured the invasive plant, Japanese knotweed. On the right, Brent is demonstrating a hemlock twig infested with the invasive insect, hemlock woolly adelgid, during a live training session, which are offered in most typical summers.