



new jersey FALL/WINTER 2016 oak leaf

DIG DEEPER: NATURE.ORG/NEWJERSEY

Building Bobcat Alley

From ancient Egyptians to T.S. Eliot to today's Internet culture, people are fascinated with cats, and New Jersey residents are no exception. The American Veterinary Medical Association's *U.S. Pet Ownership and Demographics Sourcebook* reports that more than a quarter of households in our state include at least one domestic cat. But New Jersey is also home to cats that are surrounded by grace and mystery—cats that don't ride on vacuum cleaners or play the synthesizer. Those cats, the last native felines in our state, belong to the species *Lynx rufus*, or bobcat—and with a targeted land strategy

in Warren and Sussex counties, The Nature Conservancy is working to help them.

"Bobcats are truly a symbol of wildness," says Eric Olsen, Director of Lands Program for The Nature Conservancy in New Jersey. "There aren't many creatures in New Jersey that give you that sense." The tufted-eared felines were once plentiful in our region, but their population fell to near zero in the 1970s, mostly due to habitat loss. Restoration efforts by the state and conservation organizations over the last few decades have included relocating 24 wildcats here from Maine and placing the bobcat on the state's endangered species list.

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The Nature Conservancy 



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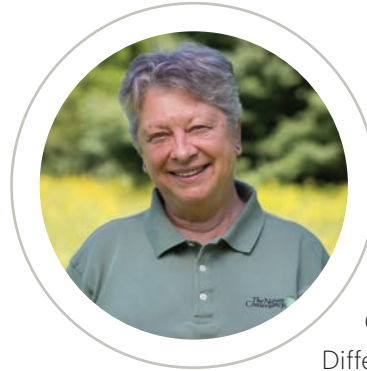
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The Nature Conservancy meets all of the Standards for Charity Accountability established by the BBB Wise Giving Alliance. The BBB Wise Giving Alliance is a national charity watchdog affiliated with the Better Business Bureau.

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Director's Letter



Imagine if every time you needed groceries or wanted to visit a friend, you had to cross—at night and on foot—a six-lane highway of speeding tractor-trailers with a concrete barrier down its center. That harrowing and potentially deadly experience would not be far from what bobcats contend with regularly just to survive in New Jersey.

Our state's last remaining wild felines are endangered here.

Different factors play a part in that decline, but none bigger than habitat loss and fragmentation. I'm excited to share with you in this issue (cover story) The Nature Conservancy's vision and plan to create an uninterrupted wildlife corridor from the Highlands to the Kittatinny Ridge in north Jersey, to give the bobcats (*Lynx rufus*) and other animals dedicated room to roam. We call it "Bobcat Alley," and with a name and a namesake like that, you know it has to be compelling!

An incredible gift from The Estate of Elizabeth Mead Merck (Page 3) catalyzed our work on Bobcat Alley, and will allow us to add 93 acres of preserved land to our Blair Creek Preserve in Stillwater. Betty Merck was a true champion of nature and a founding trustee of the NJ Chapter. It is the support of members and friends like her (and you!) that makes our efforts on behalf of bobcats and all wildlife possible.

Finally, as we transition into the cool, crisp late fall and winter weather, you will not want to miss our featured photo collection (Page 6), showcasing the cheerful expanses of native wildflowers. The Nature Conservancy has grown and stewarded on some of our New Jersey preserves to help support pollinators like butterflies and bees. I hope the photos help you remember, on the coldest nights the season sends our way, that nature has warmth, color and sunshine waiting just around the corner for all of us.

Yours in conservation,

Dr. Barbara Brummer
New Jersey State Director

SEE MORE at nature.org/newjersey

Elizabeth Merck

A NEW PRESERVE AND A LEGACY OF CONSERVATION

It's people who breathe life into The Nature Conservancy and make all of our work in New Jersey and around the globe possible. While staff comprise the head of the organization—listening, analyzing and sharing—our supporters are the heart. Your involvement is the lifeblood of our organization, enabling our scientific research, on-the-ground restoration and conservation efforts to protect nature and preserve life.

The Conservancy has been extremely fortunate to count thousands of New Jerseyans among its champions and members, including Elizabeth (Betty) Mead Merck (1920-2015).

"As a pivotal founding trustee and truly inspiring leader, Betty's conservation vision left an indelible mark on both our

organization and the state of New Jersey," says Barbara Brummer, State Director, The Nature Conservancy in New Jersey.

organization and the state of New Jersey," says Barbara Brummer, State Director, The Nature Conservancy in New Jersey. Located in The Conservancy's "Bobcat Alley" between the Blair Creek and Johnsonburg Swamp Preserves, along the Sussex and Warren county line, the new Elizabeth Merck Preserve will help connect New Jersey's Highlands to the Delaware River providing critical wildlife habitat and protecting water resources in the Paulins Kill.

In recent years, The Conservancy has redoubled its protection and restoration efforts in and around Blair Creek because of the extensive benefits the region's forests provide to people, water and wildlife.

"Nature and the outdoors were a huge part of our mother's life and brought her great joy," says Betty's son, George "Laddy" Merck. "We are so pleased that she'll be remembered in a landscape that honors her name and that will provide opportunities for others to experience and appreciate the natural beauty of New Jersey."

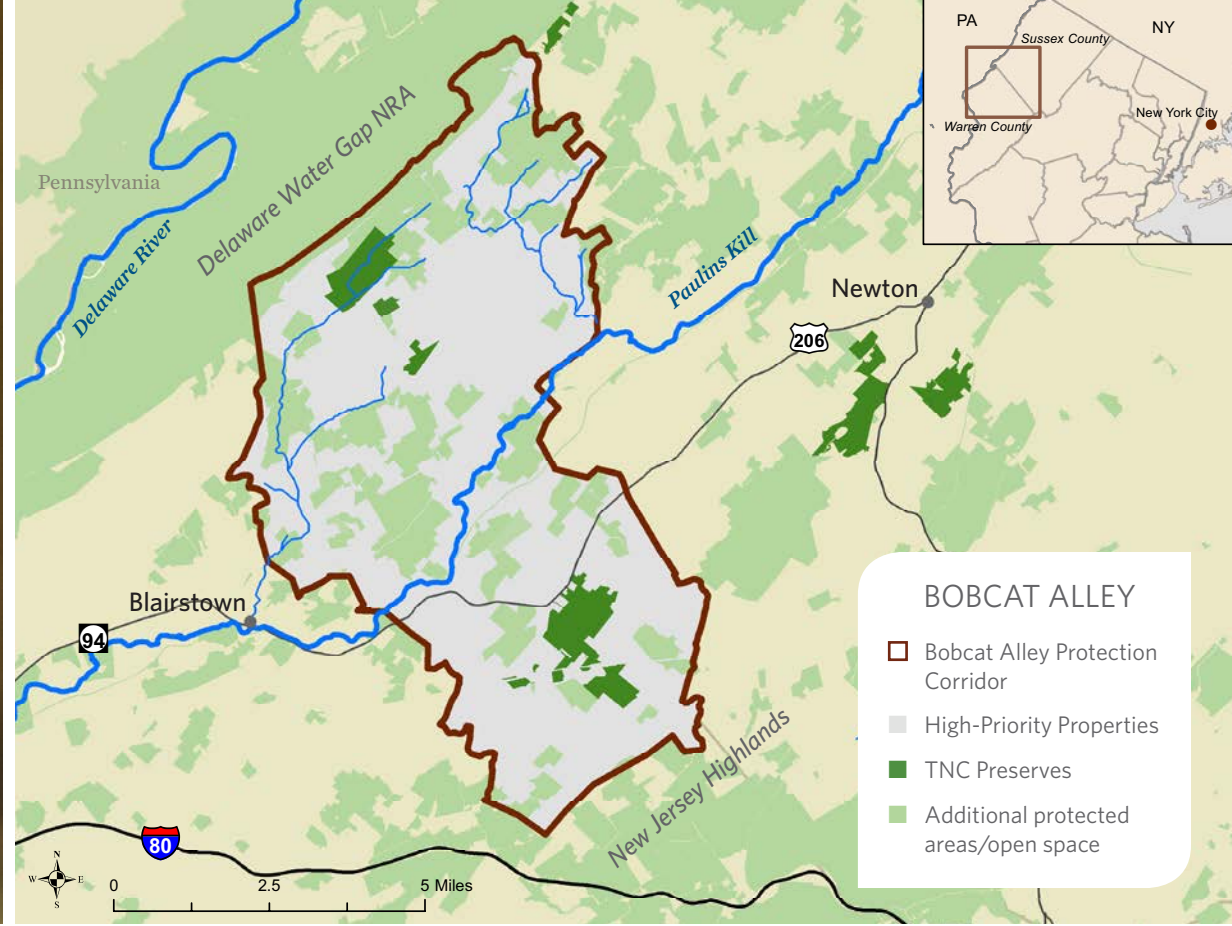
organization and the state of New Jersey," says Barbara Brummer, State Director, The Nature Conservancy in New Jersey.

Betty's legacy to sustain the natural beauty of New Jersey and increase public access to the outdoors continues to expand after her death. The Conservancy is proud to announce plans to establish a new public preserve—to be named the Elizabeth Merck

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PLAN A VISIT to Blair Creek Preserve, explore nature.org/njblaircreek



Bobcats At-A-Glance

Name: The solitary, elusive bobcat (*Lynx rufus*) is named for its tail, which appears to be cut or “bobbed.”

NJ Status: Endangered

Distribution: Widely distributed across North America. Once widespread in New Jersey, today the core of the range is in the northern portion of the state with very few reports from central and southern New Jersey.

Threats: New Jersey’s bobcat population declined to close to zero by the 1970s because of habitat loss and fragmentation, development and unregulated hunting.

Size: Up to 30 pounds in weight, nearly 3 feet in length and standing 2 feet high.

Diet: Bobcats are fierce predators, most commonly eating small animals such as rabbits, rodents, reptiles and birds, but they have been known to also eat mink, raccoons, skunk, fox and occasionally deer.

Life Cycle: Bobcats den in rock crevices, under fallen logs or in vegetation. They breed between February and June and have a litter of one to six young after a gestation period of ~60 days. The spotted kittens are weaned at 12 weeks and become fully independent at 10 to 12 months. Bobcats live 12 to 13 years in the wild.

CONTINUED FROM COVER

TALLY-ING

a bobcat population for New Jersey is no easy task. In addition to their numbers being small, the cats are elusive creatures by nature, making sightings rare. Plus, they have large home ranges and can roam across state lines into Pennsylvania and New York. Gretchen Fowles, biologist at the New Jersey Division of Fish and Wildlife, leads bobcat tracking and monitoring for the state’s Endangered and Nongame Species Program, using a combination of radio collars, a scat-tracking dog, roadkill assessments and community reporting to better understand and help inform recovery efforts for the species within our borders.

“The bobcat data we have been collecting in northern New Jersey is encouraging,” says Fowles. “Our

tracking data show several males and females moving between core habitat areas in northern New Jersey, sometimes more than 30 miles from year to year. Roadkill data and our GPS collar data, though, indicate how problematic roadways can be as barriers to their movement. Two of the chief threats to bobcats—habitat fragmentation and roads—are hindering the recovery of the species in the state. Bobcats are one of the key species we had in mind when initiating our Connecting Habitat Across New Jersey (CHANJ) project, the goal of which is to create tools and resources that will help natural resource managers, transportation planners, conservation professional and universities work together in a more collaborative way to reconnect the landscape in New Jersey.”

The Nature Conservancy, a member of the CHANJ working group, is doing

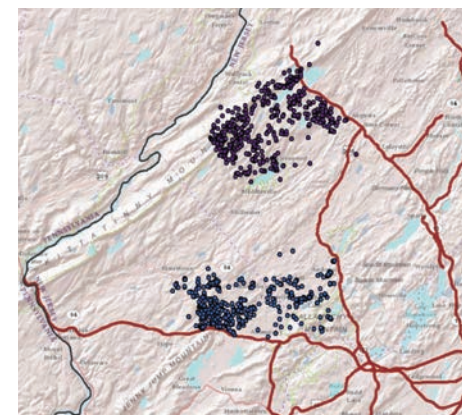
its part to lend a helping paw to these amazing cats by ensuring their access to critical habitat in Warren and Sussex counties. “We’re working with local landowners to protect and connect two vast areas of preserved open space and create an uninterrupted land corridor,” says Joseph Alessandrine, Director of Land Protection for The Nature Conservancy in New Jersey.

“We have an incredible opportunity to make a lasting difference for these animals right here and right now.”

The planned ridge-to-ridge greenway runs from the Kittatinny to the Highlands. It contains mixed forest and multiple creeks that drain into the Paulins Kill. “The preserved habitat will benefit lots of New Jersey’s resident and

migratory wildlife, but among ourselves, we affectionately call this project ‘Bobcat Alley’ because we know it’s a sweet spot for them and that they really need it,” Alessandrine adds.

The Nature Conservancy’s Blair Creek Preserve and Johnsonburg Swamp Preserve together represent more than 1,300 acres of the natural corridor, which, once complete, will link to the Delaware Water Gap and nearly 400,000 acres of additional protected habitat in New Jersey, New York and Pennsylvania. “There is a solid base of protected lands here already, and the land that isn’t conserved yet is of high quality,” says Olsen. “Bobcats don’t live on the Internet. They need real grass and trees and clean water, and a safe way to navigate around. We have an incredible opportunity to make a lasting difference for these animals right here and right now.”



Bobcat Tracks: Roadway Impediments
One year of locator data for two bobcats.

- Roadway with >10,000 vehicles/day
- Female bobcat Feb 2009-2010
- Male bobcat March 2010-2011

BOTH PAGES LEFT TO RIGHT Bobcat © Kent Mason; Bobcat Alley map © The Nature Conservancy; Trail-camera image of Bobcat Alley living up to its name © Sam Casquiera; Gretchen Fowles and Bear © Jared Flesher; Bobcat © Kent Mason

POLLINATOR-PALOOZA

on Our Preserves



The Nature Conservancy's preserves in New Jersey are great for people to get outside for some fresh air, but they also attract some other important visitors: pollinators! From bumblebees to butterflies, at Lummis Ponds Preserve and the Garrett Family Preserve at Cape Island Creek in South

Jersey, our land stewards actively manage the land to encourage pollinator activity. The Nature Conservancy is doing its part to give these critical critters pesticide-free habitat to rest, feed and reproduce, and to create beautiful fields of color for people to enjoy as an added benefit. In fact, we planted 7.5 acres of native wildflowers on our preserves in just the last two years. Here's a snapshot look at the past summer's blooms putting on a colorful show:



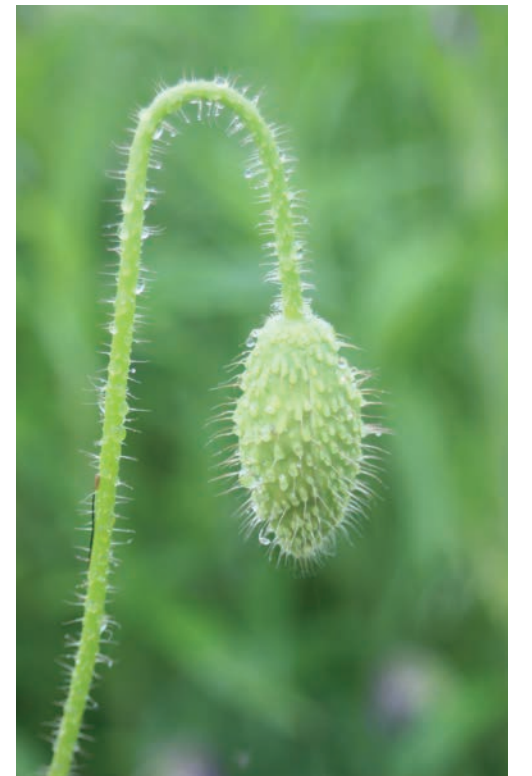
Lummis Ponds Preserve, Lawrence Township

Milkweed is essential for Monarch butterfly caterpillars—it's the only plant they eat. Our 10-acre field of milkweed is possibly the largest in the state, with an estimated 406,560 plants growing onsite! Bees and other beneficial insects also love the flowers.

Garrett Family Preserve at Cape Island Creek, Lower Township

Now fully open to the public, this preserve features meandering paths through meadows of native blooms like coneflowers and wild bergamot. The pollinator oasis honors James M. Garrett, an illustrator whose bequest made the land protection possible, with picturesque vistas, benches for quiet contemplation and public easels for artistic pursuits.

- ➔ **PLAN A VISIT OR WATCH A DRONE FLYOVER:**
- Lummis Ponds: nature.org/njlummis
- Garrett Family Preserve at Cape Island Creek: nature.org/njgarrett



A Bee's-Eye View

Butterflies, bees and birds can even see in ultraviolet light. Many flowers display patterns under ultraviolet light that direct pollinators right to a "landing strip" of nectar or pollen for an easy meal!



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In August, New Jersey Congressman Frank LoBiondo gave our oyster reef breakwater project in Gandy's Beach a thumbs up. He joined State Director Barbara Brummer, Eric Schradung of U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, Conservancy staff and ROTC volunteers from Colts Neck to help with construction. © The Nature Conservancy (Patty Doerr)

Join Us for an Upcoming Event!

All About Snakes of NJ
Saturday, February 25, 10:30 a.m. to noon
Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center
Chester, Morris County
▶ Please register by emailing Damon Noe, dnoe@tnc.org

Nature Walk with the State Director
Thursday, May 11, 10 a.m. to noon
Elizabeth D. Kay Environmental Center
Chester, Morris County
▶ Please register by emailing Lisa Shippy-Woods, lisa.shippy-woods@tnc.org