



IROQUOIS

MESSENGER

EXPLORE, ENJOY & PROTECT THE PLANET

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Choosing a Reusable Shopping Bag: What Materials are Best?

By Debra A. DeSocio

As reported by the New York Daily News, Governor Andrew Cuomo is considering a state-wide ban on non-recyclable plastic shopping bags.

“It’s clear that we need to address the real environmental concerns caused by the proliferation of plastic bags,” Cuomo spokesman Rich Azzopardi told the publication, “and a ban is one of the options we’re reviewing.”

The Associated Press has also featured considerable coverage of the Ban the Bag movement of late, reporting that, in addition to banning plastic bags, some establishments are considering a fee of up to 25¢ for paper bags in an effort to reduce pollution.

The Iroquois Group Executive Committee’s Bring Your Own Bag (BYOB) initiative further looks at sound choices regarding reusable bags. In reaching a consensus on the best type of reusable bag to endorse, we considered our myriad options with a review of literature on the topic.

Our search revealed a vast array of articles describing the broader issue of recycling and the decomposition of textiles. Plant based bags derived from cotton, bamboo, hemp, flax or wool are biodegradable and will easily decompose under the

influence of water and microorganisms in the ground. Synthetic based bags derived from polyester and nylon are also biodegradable, but it could take up to 200 years for them to break down (some synthetic based bags are also recyclable, but it’s best to check with your trash hauler). In contrast, plastic bags that get buried in landfills may take up to 1,000 years to break down, separating into smaller and smaller toxic particles that contaminate soil and water.



It’s also important to remember that the decomposition of dyed textiles - including dyed reusable shopping bags - causes the release of methane gas, a contributor to climate change.

So, what’s the best type of reusable shopping bag, you ask? While it’s largely a matter of preference, ease of use and cost, organic bags free from dye are preferable. In a March 2018 interview, Dale Cocca, a Recycling Specialist at OCRRA, stated that, while any reusable bag will do, bags made from recycled materials are best.

For more tips on choosing the best reusable shopping bag, visit www.greenlivingtips.com/articles/reusable-bags.html.

HANDS ACROSS THE SAND™

Founded in 2010, Hands Across the Sand/Land grew into an international movement after the BP oil disaster in April of that year. Thousands of people came together to join hands, forming symbolic barriers against spilled oil and standing against the impacts of other forms of extreme energy.

Hands Across the Sand/Land is about embracing energy sources that sustain our planet. It’s aimed at steering America’s energy policy away from our dependence on fossil fuels and toward clean energy. The goal is to show government leaders that public support is strong for moving away from dirty fuels and adopting policies that encourage clean energy.



On Saturday, May 19 from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m., the Iroquois Group will join this international initiative on the shores of Lake Ontario at Southwick Beach State Park (identify yourself as a Sierra Club volunteer for free admission and directions to our meeting point). We’ll join hands to raise our community’s awareness of the dangers of dirty fuels and the ground water pollution caused by fracking wells.

Join us as we clean the beaches of Lake Ontario and join hands with thousands of people around the world to say “no” to dirty fuels and “yes” to clean energy.

Please dress for cold and wind, and be sure to bring gloves for the beach clean up. For more information, contact Rich Slingerland at (315) 298-3130.

Sierra Club - Iroquois Group

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New Members are Always Welcome!

Membership is an important piece of the Sierra Club's mission, as it allows us to be a major political force and have the impact we need to create change in our world. Membership starts at just \$15, and you can join online by visiting www.sierraclub.org/atlantic/iroquois.

From the Chair

Dear Tree Huggers,

After careful consideration I must confess that my sign-off - *For the Earth and All its Critters* - may be "fake news".

First, of course, is Mousie, my un-trainable houseguest. He's long been a questionable member of my critter family, and his continued antics may just land him in the "unwelcome" category.

Speaking of unwelcome, I have a new visitor at my house; a waddling black and white skunk. When it lived under the back shed, we had a fair - if distant - relationship. Now that it's moved to more comfortable quarters - my empty rain barrel, stored on its side on the deck - our relationship is a bit more strained. How do I approach the barrel? We have a real language barrier, Skunkie and I, but occupancy is not an option. Pusscat and I consider the deck *our* space.

So, my critter family may not, in fact, include *all* critters. A couple have temporary visas pending good behavior, and some will never be welcome (e.g., trophy hunters and those with POTUS connections).

For the Earth and *Almost* All its Critters,

Martha Holly Loew



Is Your Coffee Bird Friendly?

By Janet Allen

You probably know that many of "our" birds - the ones we enjoy in the spring, summer, and fall - spend their winters in Central and South America. You probably also know that rain forests are shrinking. But did you know that our hummingbirds, swallows, warblers, orioles, tanagers, and other migratory birds can find a sanctuary in the forest-like environment of traditional coffee plantations?

Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center (SMBC) biologists found that traditionally-managed coffee plantations support almost as many bird species as undisturbed tropical forests.

So what's the problem? A few decades ago, traditional coffee plantations started being converted to sun plantations. This produces more coffee but eliminates the many ecological services shade plantations provide. Sun plantations also require the extensive use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides, creating additional problems.

We in the U.S. consume a large percentage of the world's coffee, so our purchasing decisions influence coffee production practices. Buying Smithsonian Bird Friendly® coffee keeps traditional coffee production economically viable, which helps preserve increasingly scarce habitat for migratory birds.

And for us coffee lovers, this isn't a sacrifice! Coffee was meant to grow in the shade, so it's high quality and every bit as satisfying as industrial agriculture's sun-grown product. You don't need to compromise your health, either, since Bird Friendly® coffee is certified organic. Some brands are certified Fair Trade as well to ensure that local farmers profit from their labor.



For example, Wegmans Guatemalan Specialty Coffee is triple-certified as Bird Friendly®, USDA organic, and Fair Trade, and it's the same price as other Wegmans brand organic specialty coffees.

Cheap sun plantation coffee, on the other hand, may be less expensive for the consumer, but with a price being paid by birds and other wildlife, the earth, and small-scale farmers.

What About Other Certifications?

You may find other coffees that claim to be shade-grown and good for wildlife, BUT some of these certifications allow as little as 30% of their product to meet the standard but still use their certification logo. And their criteria for creating habitat may be less stringent.

SMBC's Bird Friendly® certification promises 100% product purity and requires growers to follow practices that create high quality bird habitat.

Where Can I Buy Bird Friendly® Coffee?

We're fortunate here in Central New York that Wegmans offers one choice: whole bean Guatemalan Specialty Coffee (though **not** the Guatemalan coffee in bulk). Allegro's "Early Bird Blend" is Bird Friendly® certified and is available at Whole Foods stores and online. Birds & Beans is also available online. See the SMBC website for more options.

Note: The SMBC is currently transitioning to a new logo, so you may see two different versions of the logo on packages.

One More Step You Can Take

Let stores that carry Bird Friendly® coffee know you appreciate having this choice available (in my experience, the staff at Wegmans and Whole Foods are unaware that they carry coffee with this certification or that these coffees are special).

Many people and organizations are working to preserve birds' summer habitat here in New York, especially by planting native plants. This is important work, but we also must preserve migratory birds' winter homes.

Support shade coffee plantations by making your next coffee purchase Bird Friendly®!

For more information about Bird Friendly® coffee, visit the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center's website at:

<https://nationalzoo.si.edu/migratory-birds>

To learn more about the ecological benefits of shade-grown coffee, visit <https://tinyurl.com/yjqblp5>.

Conservation Chair Report

By Linda DeStefano

Reusable Bag Campaign & Plastic Bag Legislation:

The Iroquois Group continues our campaign to encourage the use of reusable shopping bags (see front page). The Atlantic Chapter is also supporting legislation that would ban all disposable plastic carryout bags (the thin kind which people tend to use just once) and put a 10 cent fee on paper and heavier grade plastic bags. 80% of the fees would go to the state Environmental Protection Fund, while the remaining

20% would go to merchants for the cost of implementing the new law. The bill is S.7760 (Senator Krueger) and A.9953 (Assemblyman Englebright).

Education is also important, and we are pleased to note that the film "Bag It" was shown at Syracuse's ArtRage Gallery this past March. The film asks viewers, "Is Your Life Too Plastic?" and exposes the effects of plastic bags and other plastic consumer merchandise on land ecosystems, the marine environment and the human body.

Educational Programs & Outings:

We continue our public monthly educational programs, such as Don Hughes' presentation about climate change this past February. As of this writing, we are anticipating a program about new acquisitions by the CNY Land Trust. We are also anticipating our annual Lake Ontario beach clean up, Hands Across the Sand, in May and various outings throughout the coming months.

Supporting the Climate & Community Protection Act:

I represented the Sierra Club at a March 9 meeting with State Senator David J. Valesky and his Chief of Staff. Representatives from Climate Change Awareness & Action (CCAA), Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation, ShaleshockCNY and the Climate Justice Committee of the CNY Solidarity Coalition were also in attendance. We urged Senator Valesky to do more to support the Climate and Community Protection Act, which would put into law ambitious targets for reduction of greenhouse gases and use of renewable energy. It would also provide a just transition for workers and communities adversely affected by a change in energy sources. This Act has passed the Assembly twice but has been stuck in the Senate. The Sierra Club is a member of the New York Renews Coalition, which is pushing for this bill.

Join Our Environmental Issues Listserv:

If you'd like to receive regular updates about environmental issues at the local, state and federal level, please send me an email at ldestefano3@twcny.rr.com.

Spring

By Susanne Farrington

Juicy spring:

Rain,

And a late May snow

Swell the brook.

In the woods,

Two large maple limbs,

Locked in moist embrace,

Grunt from gusts of wind.

Dead, water-black

Horizontal twigs of hemlock

Balance narrow loads of snow

---- in unison!

Who could imagine such beauty?





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Iroquois Outings & Events

The outings and events listed below are just a sampling of those offered by the Iroquois Group. For a complete list of upcoming programs and outings, visit the Iroquois Group's website (sierraclub.org/atlantic/iroquois), Meetup page (meetup.com/syracuse-sierra-club-meetup-group) or Facebook page (facebook.com/sierra-club-iroquois-group). Please note that last-minute announcements and changes are updated first on Meetup.

PROGRAMS: Programs are held on the fourth Wednesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. at the University United Methodist Church, 1085 East Genesee Street, Syracuse. Please park and enter on University Avenue. Programs are free and open to all.

From Skaneateles to Syracuse: An Unfiltered Journey Wednesday, May 23

Shannon Fabiani, Water and Ecology Specialist with Cornell Cooperative Extension, will give a talk on watershed ecology and water quality stewardship in Onondaga County. The talk will focus on the Skaneateles Lake Watershed Program and City of Syracuse's shared goal of protecting the unfiltered drinking water drawn from Skaneateles Lake. Fabiani will cover watershed ecology, the drinking water supply system, and best practices for homeowners and landowners to protect water quality in our communities.

OUTINGS: We're always looking for interesting places to explore. Have a favorite spot you'd like to share? Interested in leading one of our upcoming outings? Email Michelle Wolfe at mjw451@aol.com.

Hands Across the Sand/Land

Saturday, May 19 - 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

Help us "draw a line in the sand" as we gather to bring awareness to the local impacts of climate change. We'll join this national initiative at Southwick Beach State Park (Route 3, Henderson, NY), where we'll work to clean the shores of Lake Ontario. Identify yourself as a Sierra Club volunteer for free admission and directions to our meeting point. Call Rich Slingerland at (315) 298-3130 for more information.

