



**MIANUS
RIVER • GORGE**

2023 Annual Report

Dear Friends . . .



THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING HAPPENING AT THE GORGE!

To stay informed on MRG's lectures, walks, and volunteer opportunities, check out UPCOMING EVENTS on the website homepage, www.mianus.org, or click on the calendar icon. Scroll down to the Quick Links section and click on MRG News to stay up to date on our land protection and management initiatives, community outreach involvement, and the achievements of the amazing students in our educational programs. You'll find MRG's ecological consulting services under the Land & Water Protection tab; papers published by our scientists under the Research & Education tab; and resources for land owners under the Stewardship & Land Management tab.

2023 was another successful year for the Mianus River Gorge. With generous support from individual donors, foundations, and NY State, the Mianus River Gorge continues to be a critical hub for applied ecology, wildlife management, land protection, and forest conservation in the region.

The ecology of our changing forests was the focus of several research, stewardship, and restoration projects in 2023:

- A Ph.D. candidate in MRG's Research Assistance Program, Nick Dietschler, is looking at whether a pesticide applied to hemlock woolly adelgid-infested trees moves from treated to untreated trees, potentially providing protection to more trees
- A grant from the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation, and Historic Preservation helped Mianus River Gorge amplify its care of the unique old-growth forest
- As part of a three-year DEC-funded reforestation initiative across NYS, MRG is working to improve the health and buffering ability of the post-agricultural forest

Additionally, a grant from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation / Land Trust Alliance allowed Mianus River Gorge to embark on an ecological restoration project to restore the function of two adjacent meadows (one is the "Levine Meadow" acquired in 2021). The goal is to re-establish a diverse native composition of plants and shrubs and create a meadow complex that supports birds, pollinators, and other wildlife. Healthy native meadows contribute to the protection of Mianus River Gorge Preserve's array of adjacent habitats.

As part of our continuing goal to have a broader impact on our community and other conservation organizations, MRG wildlife biologists shared their knowledge at local workshops and national conferences, in published research papers, and as active participants in regional conservation partnership organizations. Please see the following pages for a complete listing. The Gorge also welcomed a new class of Wildlife Technician Program high school students who are engaged in high-level research studies with Gorge staff and graduate-student mentors.

We are grateful for your support and welcome you to visit the Mianus River Gorge and Taylor Preserves or our website, www.mianus.org, to learn more.

Sincerely,

Timothy Evnin
Chairman

Roderick G. Christie
Executive Director



Building Strong Relationships in the Community

Lectures and Presentations

Part of MRG’s mission is to share our conservation ethic and expertise with the community. For our ecological research and education program, this means disseminating our findings and sharing our knowledge with other professionals in the field and with the public at large.

Rod Christie | EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

- Presented at the 2023 “The Power of Trees” forum sponsored by **Bedford 2030** at Fox Lane High School
- Co-led the Bedford Wildlife Corridor Mapping project with Chris Nagy, Ph.D., and the **Town of Bedford Conservation Board**
- Explored potential partnership with “Plant it Wild” for habitat restoration projects
- Led three walks at MRG for **The Nature Conservancy** staff and major donors
- Founding member of steering committee on **Hudson-to-Housatonic Regional Conservation Partnership** (H2H RCP)
- Member of H2H RCP land working group
- Partnered with **Bedford Garden Club** and other groups to provide seed stock for potentially growing local ecotype wildflowers for habitat restoration projects
- Led public spring thematic walk on “History of the Land” on MRG property
- Led public fall thematic walk exploring MRG’s “Twin Lakes Ridgetop”
- Member of the **Westchester County Advisory Committee** for the NYS Open Space Plan
- Conducted wildlife and habitat consultations on local landowners’ properties
- Led walk for MRG special event volunteers



▲ Rod Christie leads a public walk at Twin Lakes



Chris Nagy | DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH & EDUCATION

- Gave a talk on “The Gotham Coyote Project: 12 years of studying coyotes in NYC” at a **Western Connecticut State University** symposium
- Presented a talk on the “Distribution and relatedness of coyotes in NYC and Long Island, 2011–2022” at the **Blackrock Forest Research Symposium**
- Delivered two oral presentations at the 2023 **Northeast Natural History Conference**, Burlington, VT: “A Comparison of the Understory Vegetation Community in a Remnant Old-growth Hemlock Forest and Adjacent Second-growth Hardwood Forest” and “Recent Range Expansion of the Eastern Coyote in NYC and Long Island”
- Led nighttime owl walks to look for / listen to Eastern Screech Owls, Great-horned Owls, and Barred Owls in Mianus River Gorge Preserve
- Co-led the Bedford Wildlife Corridor Mapping project with Executive Director Rod Christie and the **Town of Bedford Conservation Board**

◀ Chris Nagy presenting at the Northeast Natural History Conference



Lectures and Presentations

continued



Budd Veverka speaking at the Bedford Playhouse

Budd Veverka | DIRECTOR OF LAND MANAGEMENT

- Served as president of the Northeast Section of **The Wildlife Society** (TWS)
- Served on the steering committee of the **Lower Hudson Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management** (PRISM)
- Panelist for screening of “Uninvited: The Spread of Invasive Species” (**Bedford 2030 Environmental Film Series**)
- Taught a spring course on invasive species biology and management at **Western Connecticut State University**
- Presented on invasive species control methods at the 2023 **NYS Invasive Species Expo** and the winter meeting of **LIISMA**
- Presented on black bears at **Greenwich Land Trust** and **Pound Ridge Library**
- Presented on HWA biology and management for **Aton Forest Inc.** in Norfolk, CT
- Presented HWA management data at the **NYS Hemlock Initiative Managers** meeting at **Letchworth State Park**
- Authored an article on invasive species control methods for the **St. Lawrence River & Eastern Lake Ontario PRISM**
- Spoke to wildlife students at **SUNY ESF**
- Represented MRG at New York meeting of **TWS** in Syracuse and the National TWS conference in Louisville, KY
- Led public walks on birds of the Mianus River Gorge and winter tree identification
- Led workshop on invasive species identification and management at MRG

Public Programs and Outreach

Mianus River Gorge is grateful to the volunteers who joined us on opening day in the Preserve to ensure the trails were in tip-top shape for the season. Others attended the always-popular events that in 2023 explored the historical and geological roots of the landscape; identified invasive plants and animals; looked for the Eastern Screech Owl, Great Horned Owl and Barred Owl – three year-round residents of the Preserve; and challenged us to identify trees in the wintertime. MRG added a new “Family Nighttime Exploration” event to discover the

creatures that come alive after the sun goes down. Participants observed iridescent beetles, bats, an array of moths, sparkling green spider eyes in the woods, and fluorescent crayfish in the streams.

As part of Mianus River Gorge’s partnership with the Bedford Garden Club, MRG staff held a workshop for property managers and landscapers to demonstrate proper identification, removal, and disposal of harmful invasive species on private property. MRG staff continued to help property owners identify invasive species, provide information about control, and make next-step recommendations.





Restoring Native Biodiversity to a Mesic Meadow and Adjacent Wet Meadow

Mianus River Gorge embarked on an ecological restoration project to restore the function of two adjacent meadows to re-establish a diverse native composition of plants and shrubs and create a meadow complex that supports birds, pollinators, and other wildlife. Healthy native meadows contribute to the protection of Mianus River Gorge Preserve's adjacent habitats including forest, wetlands, and steep slopes.

Thanks to a grant from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation / Land Trust Alliance, MRG contracted with J. Mortara Landscape & Design to pull out well-established invasive shrubs and vines and several small stands of mature tree-of-heaven and black locust trees. Both species are invasive.

The project will continue in 2024 when MRG will re-introduce wet meadow species such as sedges, rushes, and tall meadow rue. We will plant butterfly weed, wild bergamot,



and mountain mint in the mesic (dry sites) meadow. These species attract pollinators that are essential for plant reproduction and contribute to genetic diversity in the plants they pollinate.

◀ *Meadow before*

▼ *Meadow after*



Late-stage nymph of spotted lanternfly



Adult spotted lanternfly

Spotted Lanternfly

Unfortunately, the spotted lanternfly made its way to Mianus River Gorge in 2023. To help educate the community about this destructive invasive insect, Mianus River Gorge shared information about spotted lanternfly biology and current strategies for helping to control this pest. MRG also employed a range of tactics throughout the Preserve, including removing tree-of-heaven (another problematic invasive species and the insect's preferred food source), setting traps, scraping egg masses, and simply vacuuming them up.



Scientific Papers Published

MRG staff published several research papers in 2023:

Cortese AM, Horton TR. Islands in the shade: scattered ectomycorrhizal trees influence soil inoculum and heterospecific seedling response in a northeastern secondary forest. *Mycorrhiza*. 2023 Mar;33(1-2):33-44.

Nicholas J. Dietschler, Tonya D. Bittner, Nina G. Devine, Albert Mayfield III, Carrie Preston, Ryan S. Crandall, James Parkman, Zachary Simek, Biff Thompson, Matthew E. Lonsdale, Budd Veverka, Joseph S. Elkinton, Scott M. Salom, Mark C. Whitmore. 2023. Overwintering diapause and survival of western *Leucotaraxis argenticollis*, a promising biological control agent for *Adelges tsugae*, in the eastern United States, *Biological Control*, Volume 182.

Gajewski Z, Johnson LR, Medina D, Crainer WW, Nagy CM, Belden LK. 2023. Skin bacterial community differences among three species of co-occurring Ranid frogs. *PeerJ* 11:e15556

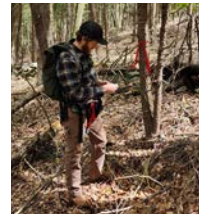
Click on the MRG Publications tab in the Research and Education section of our website, www.mianus.org, to learn more and access copies of the papers.



Research Assistantship Program

MRG's Research Assistantship Program (RAP) awards grants to graduate students in ecology, environmental science, and conservation who are doing field studies for their M.S. or Ph.D. In 2023, MRG had two Ph.D. students in the program – Andy Cortese (SUNY ESF) and Nicholas Dietschler (Cornell University). Thank you to AE Family Foundation for their generous support of the RAP program.

Andy completed his study of mycorrhizal fungi, the large group of fungi that forms symbiotic relationships with tree roots. His work looked at how the proximity of an older tree, which has extensive mycorrhizal connections, might impact the growth of a smaller, younger seedling, specifically in terms of growth rates, foliar nutrient levels, and greater fungal connections. His findings are important for MRG's land management as post-agricultural soils have a different mycorrhizal diversity than old-growth forests – and we have both!



Andy Cortese

Nick's research focuses on eastern hemlock trees and the control of an invasive pest, the hemlock woolly adelgid (HWA) that parasitizes them and is causing massive die-offs across the eastern hemlock's range. With the help of the NYS Hemlock Initiative, MRG has used a basal bark pesticide spray to protect our hemlocks since 2016 and has seen good success. Nick's research is looking at whether there is movement of these chemicals from one hemlock tree to another, meaning that an untreated hemlock may receive some protection if another hemlock near it was treated.



Nicholas Dietschler

Wildlife Technician Program

The Wildlife Technician Program (WTP) is a competitive internship program offering high school students the opportunity to undertake a three-year research project in the natural sciences. Our innovative and far-reaching program is the first of its kind in the New York Metropolitan area offering an extra-curricular high school program in ecological research. Our students conduct hands-on field experiments, learn first-hand about the complexities of natural systems and receive expert guidance from Mianus River Gorge staff.



MRG welcomed a new cadre of Wildlife Technician Program students: Kaitlin Furu (Carmel HS), Adriana DiGiacomo (Somers HS), Kayleigh Harney (Carmel HS), Rohan Shah (Dalton School), and Holden Skaggs (Dobbs Ferry HS). Kaitlin began her work on analyzing camera trap data from NYC and MRG to make predictions about species' habitat selection and activity. Adriana is studying changes in phenology (seasonal timings) of native plant species from old records from the 1950s compared to now. Kayleigh is collecting water samples for eDNA analysis to determine amphibian species composition in several of MRG's vernal pools. Rohan and Holden helped Director of Research and Education Chris Nagy build wildlife corridor models for different species in and around the Town of Bedford.

2023 Financial Summary

OPERATING PUBLIC SUPPORT AND REVENUE

Contributions	\$371,990	31%
Grants	\$151,409	12%
Special Events	\$114,135	9%
Consulting	\$9,602	.8%
Other income / in-kind	\$3,672	.2%
Investment return, net	\$587,418	47%
Total Operating Public Support and Revenue	\$949,413	100%

OPERATING EXPENSES

Program expenses	\$715,499	73%
Administrative expenses	\$126,831	13%
Fundraising expenses	\$133,159	14%
Total Operating Expenses	\$975,489	100%
Increase (decrease) in Net Assets	\$262,737	

Annual Giving

2023

Annual Giving is comprised of generous support to our annual fund and special projects here at Mianus River Gorge, Inc.



LEADERSHIP LEVEL (\$25,000 +)

AE Family Foundation *
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New York State Department of Environmental Conservation/Land Trust Alliance
New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation

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HELP KEEP THE GORGE GOING STRONG!

Your donation to Mianus River Gorge helps us fulfill our mission to preserve, protect and promote appreciation of the natural heritage of the Mianus River watershed through land acquisition and conservation, scientific research and public education throughout the region.

To donate, please visit our web site,
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or send your check to:
167 Mianus River Road
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Thank you!

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