

The NATURE of Nature

Film delivers a moving ecological portrait of the Hudson Valley

BY SARAH HACKER

Hudson River Estuary Program biologist Laura Heady had a specific goal: to celebrate the incredible variety of plants, animals, and habitats of the estuary watershed, and the people working to protect them. The result is a stunning collaboration with Flicker Filmworks called *The Nature of Nature: Biodiversity in the Hudson Valley*, a 30-minute documentary that explores “the living fabric of the region’s unique landscape.”

The film premiered late last year at the Rosendale Theatre and continues to awe audiences on a multi-leg tour. Startling close-ups and sweeping drone shots provide a rare perspective of the region, leaving audiences with a profound connection to the habitats captured by the filmmakers. Heady takes viewers on an expedition to six locations in the Hudson Valley, guided on screen by fellow conservation experts, including renowned wildlife biologist Carl Herzog.

For Heady, whose work typically focuses on helping municipalities and land trusts with conservation planning, this project was intended to reach beyond those partners. “*The Nature of Nature* film is for everybody,” she says.

Go behind the scenes with Heady as she shares her insights about the filmmaking process.

What sparked the idea for *The Nature of Nature*?

I wanted to create a film to celebrate the incredible biodiversity we have in the Hudson Valley and raise awareness, in hopes that audiences might find shared values through a common understanding of why nature matters. The film serves as a reminder that we’re part of a complex and wonderful natural system. I hope that it will inspire people to learn more, to support conservation initiatives in their communities, and maybe even get involved in protecting Hudson Valley biodiversity.

How did you decide where to film and what stories to highlight?

Lucky us, we had a lot of options for both beautiful places and amazing partners! The locations were chosen based on several factors. I wanted to bring attention to the Significant Biodiversity Areas (SBAs) identified in the *Hudson River Estuary Wildlife and Habitat Conservation Framework*, developed by Cornell University and DEC in 2006. Rather than include familiar places, like the Catskills and Hudson Highlands, we highlighted lesser-known SBAs that could introduce key concepts, such as genetic diversity and habitat connectivity, while also showcasing conservation values and partners who are working to protect them. It was also critical to add the human dimension, including the importance of equitable access to nature.

Scan to
watch the
film on
YouTube.





Heady shows viewers the Hudson Valley through a unique lens.

The Nature of Nature: Biodiversity in the Hudson Valley, Directed by Laura Healey, Flicker Filmworks, 2025, Still image.

Was there a moment during filming that stayed with you or deepened your understanding of nature?

I've had the privilege of working on biodiversity conservation in the Hudson Valley for more than 25 years and every time I'm in nature, I am still awed and surprised! One such moment in the film was when Gretchen Stevens, from Hudsonia Ltd., introduced me to an aquatic species of bladderwort, a fascinating carnivorous plant that consumes small invertebrates in the water. I think it's so important to remain curious and, as Gretchen mentions in the film, keep our eyes open—there's always something new to learn.

What was the biggest challenge in turning real-world moments into a finished film?

I think traditional nature documentaries have huge budgets and lots of time for cinematographers to wait for the perfect shot. That certainly was not the case for us. We wanted to showcase an ecological landscape—in essence, make the Hudson Valley the lead character! That required a different approach and, thanks to the generous collaboration and creativity of Flicker Filmworks, we were able to tell that story through drone and handheld camera footage. Still images and additional video from local photographers brought some of the finer details to life.

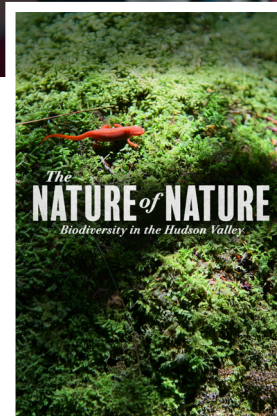
What are your hopes for the film going forward?

Once we realized this project was going to be longer than our traditional five-minute videos, we were intentional about keeping the film to 30 minutes. My hope was that communities, land trusts, and schools could pair a screening of the short film with a panel discussion or community dialogue about biodiversity and conservation. And I'm thrilled to see this is already happening!

I'll feel like we achieved our goal if audiences leave feeling hopeful and more deeply aware that they live in a remarkable place, where everyone can have a role in taking care of nature.

The film was produced by Flicker Filmworks and the Hudson River Estuary Program, with funding by DEC through the New York State Environmental Protection Fund, in partnership with NEIWPC. 🗣️

The Nature of Nature is available to watch free on YouTube.



← While only a small part of New York, the Hudson Valley contains 85% of the bird, mammal, reptile, and amphibian species found in the state.



Sarah Hacker is a contributing editor to *Conservationist*.