



FrOGS

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Saving the SWAMP

The Nature Conservancy in partnership with FrOGS and our other Great Swamp conservation partners announce the preservation of an important area in the "Heart of the Swamp". A conservation easement on 124 acres includes Red Maple Swamp habitat, wet meadow, lands along the East Branch Croton River and upland woodland.



A Section of the Great Swamp . Photo provided by TNC Mark King



The old saying that adversity can lead to opportunity has proven true when conserving the Great Swamp. The Nature Conservancy, working with FrOGS and other Great Swamp conservation partners, is thrilled to announce the protection of a key 124-acre property in the "Heart" of the Great Swamp.

Conservation interest in this property began almost two years ago when the Briar Hollow Farm was listed for sale by a local realtor. The listing led to an unsuccessful scramble to try and purchase what was potentially a very expensive piece of real estate.

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Wet Meadows Are Home to Many Swamp Dwelling Birds and Animals

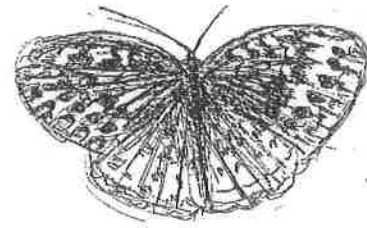
Wet meadows are among the rarest of wetland habitats. In the Great Swamp the wet meadow habitat is found in a few scattered areas. These meadows provide homes for many species that are not to be found in other areas of the Swamp, adding to its biodiversity.

During the winter and early spring, these meadow habitats are frequently covered with water. Some sections along the East Branch Croton River flood annually during the spring snow melt. The waters recede in late May and the grasses reappear. The soils remain saturated just below the surface.



Upon closer examination the "grasses" are not really grasses at all but sedges mixed with rushes and, often, sensitive ferns. Grasses have hollow stems. Sedges have "edges". That is the stems of sedges are triangular. When feeling the stem of a sedge, one can recognize their triangular rather than circular shape.

Sedges, rushes and other wetland plants found in a wet meadow have adapted to the cycle of flood and dryer seasons.

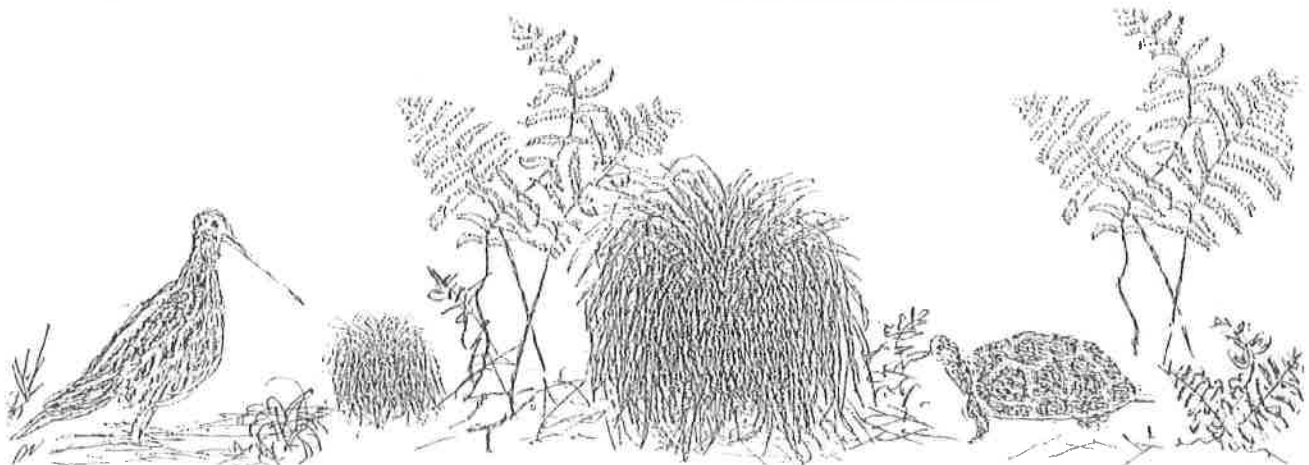


Some sedge grows on top of the hummock of last years growth and from large tussocks in areas where it is especially wet.

Many ground foraging birds find sedge meadows as safe feeding and nesting areas. The Virginia Rail, which we searched for last year on a FrOGS hike through the wet meadow at Green Chimneys, hides in the deep recesses of matted reeds, rushes, and sedges. Grouse also hide in the cover of the sedge, as does the Swamp Sparrow. Insects drawn to these plants attract other birds such as the Common Snipe and swallows. Snipe and rails are rarely found anywhere else in the Swamp.

Wildflowers, that are also adapted to the cycle of wet and dry, like the swamp milkweed, marsh bellflower, golden ragwort, blueflag, among others, attract butterflies, as these insects need both sun and flowers in their habitat.

Leopard Frogs hibernate in the deeper recesses of pools created by the river in winter. They emerge and dwell beneath the tussock sedge in summer. Small voles and mice hide in the sedges and travel between them through tunnels they have carved in the vegetation. Red Tailed Hawks keep a sharp eye out for a vole that is not carefully hidden.



Conservation Easement *continued*

When the property was sold to a private owner the prospects for protecting the land looked dim, but instead a conservation opportunity arose. The realtor listing the property let the new owners know of the efforts to preserve The Great Swamp including this property. The new owner turned out to have strong conservation interests. He offered to donate a conservation easement on the property.

In another stroke of good fortune the donor's legal representation shared similar conservation interests and patiently worked through the many details involved in the transaction. In its final form the easement divides the property into three conservation zones with varying degrees of restriction. A development zone includes the existing historic house/barn complex and allows the option of eventually constructing an additional home. An agricultural zone which permits the grazing of animals and other traditional farm activities, while eliminating residential development. The remaining area or about 2/3 of the property is in a conservation zone, limiting any activity incompatible with conservation. This conservation area may also be subdivided and sold for conservation purposes (i.e. government, land trust, etc.) should this or future owners desire. The conservation area includes beautiful red maple swamp habitat, forested uplands, and extensive frontage along the East Branch Croton River.

The Nature Conservancy will eventually transfer responsibilities for the easement and the endowment, generously provided by the landowner, to the Putnam County Land Trust.



The project sets an outstanding example of private conservation leadership and the benefits a conservation easement can provide.

The easement maintains private ownership, keeps the property on local tax roles, and has the flexibility to meet the landowners' aspirations for his property and conservation goals for the Great Swamp. Many thanks to the landowner and the others involved who helped complete this great first step in preserving the "Heart" of The Great Swamp.

Dykeman's Donate Red Maple Swamp Parcel

Mort and Gloria Dykeman have donated a key parcel of Red Maple Swamp Forest along Muddy Brook to the Nature Conservancy.

The parcel of about five acres is a pristine section of the Swamp Forest in the widest part of the "Heart" of the Swamp. This is the area of the swamp most important to breeding success of "area sensitive" neotropical migrants like the Scarlet Tanager and the Wood Thrush. Ostrich Ferns and Royal Ferns as well as Cardinal Flowers carpet the under story of the mature Red Maples.



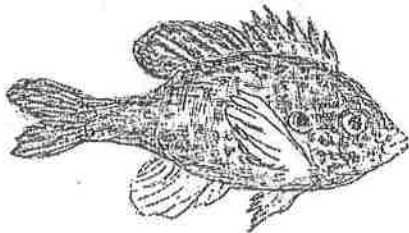
Red Maples in the Dykeman Parcel.

This parcel was one of the many "woodlot" parcels owned by farmers who farmed their larger upland farms in areas bordering the Swamp. As they were deep in the Swamp, these woodlot parcels were only accessible by man and oxen when they were deeply frozen in the winter. Area farmers would cut the families' wood from then during the coldest winter months.

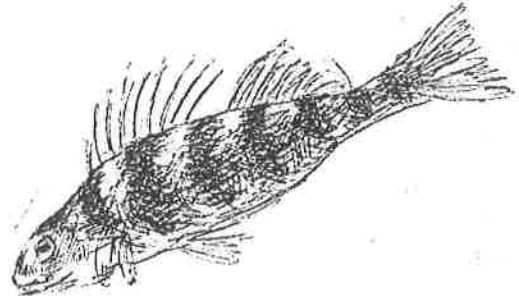
FISHING the East Branch Croton and Haviland Hollow Brook

For many fishermen "getting away for a day" means taking rod and reel and maybe a canoe and heading for the East Branch Croton in the SWAMP or trying out the Putnam County owned section of Haviland Hollow Brook. There are many fish in the East Branch Croton; Large Mouth and Small Mouth Bass, Sunnies, Yellow Perch, Bullheads and Carp, to name a few. The DEC stocks brown trout. Most of the deeper pools lie south of the bridge over Route 22. The wide area on the river known as the "lake" is a favorite spot.

Hunter Pollack, President of the Putnam County Land Trust, talks of three generations of his family that have fished these areas.



His father, James Pollack, who will be 87, began fishing the East Branch Croton when he was 8 or 9 years old. He was warned not to fish too close to areas where the water undercut the bank of the river as the current was thought to be too swift there. He fished for Sunnies, Yellow Perch, Suckers, Bullheads, and Carp. He never caught Bass there at that time. He recalls a 35lb Carp he dragged home one day. His mother would have nothing to do with it smelled so badly. Even his cat would not get near his "prize". Many times while fishing along the banks he had to keep an eye on the cows grazing in the nearby fields to make sure a bull was not amongst them. His favorite place was the bridge over the "old" Route 22, a spot now changed by a newer road. There were two more bridge sites across the river south of that spot that supported old farm roads. There is little sign of them now. He recalls catching Brookies at a tributary north of the bridge area that flowed down off of the steep hillside east of the river and the Swamp. Students could find not one in that area on recent surveys from SUNY.



Hunter recalls fishing with his brother when they came up to visit their grandmother. They reached the river by following the cow trails through the woods and brush. The river was shallow in many areas just south of the Route 22 crossing but there were five or six deeper pools that were excellent. These could be fished from the banks. Each was unique, you never knew what you would catch in each one. He and his brother would fish for a while, then race down the riverbank to be the first at the next pool. There were always fish. You never knew what you would pull in.

Hunter's son Brandon is the third generation of the family to fish this area. He prefers the upper reaches of Haviland Hollow Brook. This area is quieter and often supports trout.



A Brown Trout Caught by Students

WATER QUALITY Important for Fish and Other Wildlife

By Carol Stepczuk

Wetlands like the Great Swamp are regarded as valuable resources to those communities fortunate enough to have them as part of their watershed. They provide biological communities as well as recreational and educational opportunities for residents. Equally important is the contribution that wetlands make to water and water quality.

Wetlands act as sponges. They hold water and maintain stream and aquifer volumes during wet and dry times. Stream flow and ground water are supplemented by wetlands in times when rain and snowfall are low.



Dr. Jim Utter and Students from Syracuse and SUNY Purchase Studying Fish in Muddy Brook.

Flood protection is given to developed areas during high runoff periods. During last years drought, the Great Swamp's ability to hold the large amounts of water it received during the winter months and in previous seasons, allowed the Swamp to maintain its aquifer and continue to release small amounts of water into the East Branch Croton River even in the driest months of summer. The Swamp soaked up the runoff from the heavy rains and there was no downstream flooding.

These water quality wetlands, like the Great Swamp, have the capability to filter water as it passes through, removing various pollutants and sediments.

The Great Swamp is but one part of an integrated network of lakes, ponds, streams, smaller wetlands and groundwater aquifers.

Much of the rain and snowfall that comes to the watershed each year travels through all these water bodies and eventually drains into the Great Swamp. As water moves through the watershed in the upland areas it picks up by-products such as nutrients, road salt, oil, pesticides, fertilizers, heavy metal and farm manure. When the water reaches the Great Swamp, water quality is improved through various biogeochemical transformations, as well as the physical removal of sediment from the water. The result is a reduction in water pollution.

Eighty percent of the Great Swamp is "south flowing" and is part of New York City's Croton Watershed. The future of this portion of the Great Swamp holds serious concerns because of current developmental pressures. With talk of filtering the Croton system by New York City it is feared that these pressures will become worse.

Much of the length of the Great Swamp is narrow and runs parallel to Route 22. The widest portion of the Swamp, or the "Heart" of the Swamp, located in Patterson is of particular concern for a variety of reasons. This section of the Swamp consists mainly of Red Maple hardwoods and is considered a valuable habitat area. Additionally, water quality data comparisons above and below this portion of the Swamp document the water purification capabilities of this central, wide area. It is the water purification abilities of the Swamp that allow minnows, crayfish, and the larger "game fish" like the brown trout to survive in the waters of the East Branch Croton River. Fishing as a sport would be curtailed if not ended if pollutants entering the Swamp are not minimized.

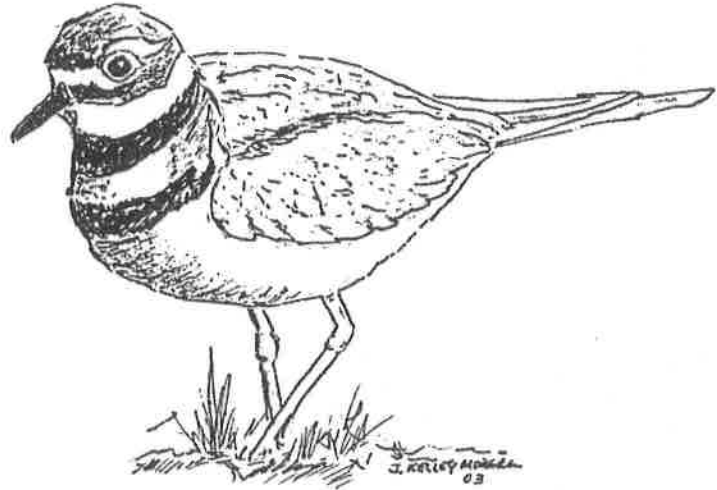
CHARADRUS VOCIFERUS

By Judy Kelley Moberg

The "vociferous" plover or the KILLDEER is the most commonly seen and heard inland Plover. Its raucous voice is hard to miss as it repeats "killdee-dee-dee" over and over again. This robin-sized plover inhabits large, wet, grassy areas like farm fields, athletic fields and the wet meadow of the Great Swamp.

The most obvious field marks of this brown above and white below plover are the two conspicuous black breast bands. In flight its long tail, reddish tan rump, and white wing stripes are good for identification.

When coming in for a landing, the Killdeer drops the lower edge of its long, pointed wings to act as a drag before its legs hit the ground. The Killdeer ducks his head and runs along the ground for a short distance, then bobs upright when it stops. It's quite common to see several birds all running along, their "stilt" legs bobbing up and pausing before they duck and run off in another direction.



The nest is simply a depression in the ground amidst the pebbles and odd pieces of sticks found at that location. The 3 to 5 buff colored eggs, blotched and speckled with brown, are so perfectly matched to the background they disappear among the pebbles. Despite their camouflage the eggs are sitting out in the open on bare ground and unprotected so the Killdeer has a unique protection plan. When the nest is approached the female flutters on the ground nearby making pitiful peeping sounds until the intruders attention is gained. Then she flutters away dragging her "injured" wing along the ground. The "bird in distress act" continues until the intruder is a safe distance away from the nest. The Killdeer quickly recovers and takes flight leaving the distracted and confused intruder behind.



The two breast bands and its unmistakable call make the Killdeer easy to identify in the field but locating its nest has made this bird's behavior its most outstanding feature.

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FrOGS Would Like To Thank:

The Patterson Fire Dept.- for their meeting room space.

Judy Moberg - for her drawings.

Jean Hannon - for her drawings

Karen O'Neill - for her editing

Charadrus Vociferus continued

Once the chicks are hatched they look like tiny brown and white fluff balls on stilts. They are able to run about almost immediately and learn to stay perfectly still or come when their parents call.

Watching baby Killdeer move about at dusk on a ball field and hearing their plaintive calls in the midst of memorable moments is remarkable.

Finding a Killdeer's nest among the pebbles or becoming the audience for its daring "injured bird" display is a truly once in a lifetime experience.



FrOGS Welcomes New Board Members

Carol Stepczuk

Carol Stepczuk is a recent retiree from NYCDEP's Division of Water Quality Control. She worked 8 years as the limnologist for the East-of Hudson reservoirs and 9 years in reservoir modeling. In this role she was able to facilitate the City's ability to use models to protect the Catskill/Delaware reservoirs for non-filtration status. She also managed a research contract to document and quantify sources of drinking water problems in the Croton system. Carol is now living quietly in Brewster and tending to the needs of her Golden Retriever.

Evelyn Chiarito

Evelyn Chiarito grew up on a farm in Ireland surrounded by lakes, rivers, bogs, swamps, and wildlife. When she moved to Dover, NY Evelyn joined the Town of Dover Conservation Advisory Commission in 1987 and served as Chairperson until 1996. As a member of CAC and the Dutchess County Environmental Management Council, she participated in land use, environmental and SEQRA seminars as well as the annual Association of Towns Seminars in NYC. Evelyn and her family have always enjoyed the opportunities that the local environment has to offer. She is committed to the protection of wetlands and is very pleased to be a board member of FrOGS.