



Friends of the Great Swamp



FrOGS
PO Box 373, Pawling, NY 12564
Phone: (845) 855-1917

Volume 10, Issue 3
Fall 2009
www.frogs-ny.org

Great Swamp Art Exhibit & Celebration



NANCY CLARK
FROGS

Saturday, Oct. 24, 11am-5pm
Sunday, Oct. 25, Noon to 4pm

What FrOGS Did Last Summer

Thanks to our dedicated Board Members

April and May Events



Canoe Trips organized by Evelyn Chairito with Laurie Lewis on tee shirt sales and almost all of our board members acting as trip naturalists. An all day **Ecological Safari** led by FrOGS chairman Dr. Jim Utter. **FrOGS Information Tables and Displays** set up and manned by Edie Keasbey and Laurie Lewis at Green Chimneys' "Birds of Prey Day", Earth Day at Dover High School and Mistover Farms Horse Show. **Road Cleanup** along the FrOGS' sponsored section of Route 22 organized by Liz Cowan.

May 9th International Migratory Bird Day Celebration co-sponsored with the Putnam County Land Trust. A committee made up of Lauri Taylor, Janet Robinson, Laurie Wallace, Beth Herr and Judy Kelley-Moberg developed a family program based at the Patterson Library.



The role of birds in culture was this year's theme. Native American drum songs and bird myths were part of the program. Children created bird masks with feathers and paper and learned the basics of building a bird nest. A lively migration game of threats and survival

ran all around the room. Bird walks and a bird banding demonstration were planned for the Patterson Environmental Park

June and July Events



The Nature Explorers Club of the Beardsley Zoo Visit the Great Swamp. The educational department of the Beardsley Zoo in Bridgeport, Connecticut, sponsors a high school Nature Explorers Club. Jim Knox, their educational advisor brought them on a trip to the Great Swamp. About 18 students and counselors arrived by bus at the Green Chimneys launch. Jim Utter, Judy Kelley-Moberg and Mike Purcell took the group on a morning canoe trip where they learned about the unique ecology of the swamp. After lunch the students cheerfully put on work gloves and helped clear trails for the opening day of the new Slocum-Mostachetti Preserve in Wingdale.

June 14th The Slocum-Mostachetti Preserve Opening. Chris Wood, head of the Oblong Land Conservancy and FrOGS board member gave the opening speech. Jim Utter talked about the history of the acquisition of the preserve with funding from the NAWCA Grant, Iroquois Funds, the New York State Partnership Program and money from The Oblong Conservancy and FrOGS. Leo Mostachetti cut the ribbon on what was once his wife's (Helen Slocum) family farm. There was a bird walk led by Angela Dimmitt, a butterfly walk by Billy Wallace and a botanical walk led by ecologist Chris Mangels.

For the time being the trails will be open on a restricted basis. It's best to call ahead at

845-855-5993. Visit the NEW Oblong web site at www.oblongland.org for information about OLC and its projects.

The Putnam County 4-H Fair. This year the fair was bigger and better than ever with more events, animals, plants and exhibits. FrOGS exhibit featured a wood turtle information board created by Michael Musnick. It described his ongoing wood turtle research in the Great Swamp watershed. One of the radio transmitters used to track the turtles was on display as well as information on how to identify individual turtles by age, sex, and the patterns on their under-shells. Michael also places a pattern of tiny identifying notches on the edge of each turtle shell. Next year we plan to give tracking demonstrations with the help of kids at the fair. The fair is a great way to educate people about the Great Swamp and catch up with old friends. By Edie Keasbey

July 11th A Celebration of Dutchess County Watershed Awareness Month (WAM) FrOGS helped celebrate the first Dutchess County Watershed Awareness Month at Murrow Park in Pawling. The goal of WAM is to raise the awareness of our watersheds through education and the exploration of watershed ecosystems.



FrOGS led two teams of enthusiastic school children in collecting samples of macro-invertebrates from the creek in Murrow Park. "Macros" are the larval stage of insects found in our area streams, lakes, ponds and the Great Swamp.

Mayflies, stoneflies and caddis flies represent three families of insects that lay their eggs in area streams. After the eggs hatch, the larvae go through a series of molts or "instars". You may have seen an empty shell or molt in the folds of

a rough barked streamside tree. The larvae must eat to provide energy for these molts or instars. Some mayfly larvae may molt as many as six times before emerging from the stream as an adult. The larvae can be predators, scrapers or filter feeders and they play an important role in the food chain and the health of the watershed. Collecting and identifying the macro-invertebrates in a stream enables scientists to calculate the stream's biotic index. This is a way of determining the water quality of the stream. The greater the variety and number of individuals in the three families of macro-invertebrates (mayflies=Ephemeroptera, stoneflies=Plecoptera and caddis flies=Trichoptera) or the EPT index, the better the water quality of the stream. The stream in Murrow Park contained a healthy and diverse population of all three families indicating the water quality is most likely good.

With a little help from the children, Dr. Utter collected stream samples in a kick net. Rocks and cobbles in the streambed were overturned and brushed off into the water flowing through the kick net. At first it appeared that only pebbles and small twigs and debris were in the net. But when the contents were placed in a collection tray little six legged creatures darted about. The children were delighted when we instructed them to capture the larval insects with spoons and eyedroppers. Several large and quick Dobson Fly larvae or "hellgrammites" kept scurrying from the trays and had to be recaptured.

Judy Kelley-Moberg and Mike Purcell helped the children identify the insects as they were placed in plastic petri dishes on top of a large-scale identification key. The children learned to identify the key characteristics of the three families of macro-invertebrates. They also enjoyed looking at them under the microscopes. The "macros" were then returned to the stream.

FrOGS would like to thank the Pawling Planning Department, the Pawling Town Board, the Pawling Conservation Advisory, the Oblong Land Conservancy and Pace University for helping make the day a huge success for our area school children and their parents.—By Mike Purcell

(Mike has attended workshops on stream studies and is involved in studies of the Swamp River in the north flow of the Great Swamp.)

Beaver and Environmental Change in the Great Swamp

Thousands of years before Henry Hudson sailed up the river that bears his name, a dense forest canopy of hemlock, chestnut, hickory, oak and maple covered the state. It shaded the mountains and streams, providing little sunlight for undergrowth plants or open spaces for meadows.

The beaver, "nature's engineer," and the largest rodent in North America, plays an important role in opening up a forest environment and increasing biodiversity. These 50 to 60 pound mammals respond to the rate of water flow and available food resources when choosing spots to build their dams. They cut, drag and float small trees into position and anchor them into the streambed with the branches facing upstream to catch more twigs and debris. Using their webbed paws (not their tails) they dredge up mud and pat it on the downstream side of the developing dam.

The dams create ponds that surround the beaver's lodge with a watery moat to discourage predators, and to provide a water highway for floating in supplies. Trees begin to drown and die as the water level rises behind the dam. The sunlit ponds encourage the growth of new plant species and are attractive to amphibians, fish, turtles, snakes, birds and waterfowl. When the beaver pond has reached its maximum level and nearby food sources (they prefer the inner bark of cottonwood and willow) are exhausted, the beaver move on. The abandoned ponds slowly silt into marshes that will eventually become wet meadows then shrub-land before growing back to forest again. As the environment changes some plant and animal species will thrive and others die out.

A Dutch treaty made in the 1600's mentions the "excellent" beaver in the Great Swamp. A European craze for beaver hats made beaver

skins the major "cash" export from New Amsterdam. Beaver pelts as well as wampum served as currency. Because of their trade value, the local Algonquian tribes had trapped the beaver out of our area by the end of the seventeenth century. In the 1700's colonial farmers in the Patterson area mention the presence of "ancient" beaver dams in the Great Swamp. Throughout the 1800's fenced farm fields dominated the landscape. The swamp was the farmer's dump, woodlot, hunting and fishing spot, and trapping was still a local pastime.

Beaver and even deer were not that common and there were no wild turkeys. The farms started to decline after WW II and were almost all gone by the 1960's. The unattended farm fields have had about 50 to 60 years to grow back into forest.

The re-growth of the hardwood forest has contributed to changes in the wildlife population. In the last 10 years beaver have returned to the Great Swamp, ravens have established themselves, fisher sightings have increased, coyotes are everywhere, deer have become a nuisance and wild turkeys are abundant. There are no large natural predators (bear, mountain lion, and wolf) to keep the beaver and deer population in check. Otter, bobcat, and coyote may take an occasional beaver kit. Commercial trapping has all but ceased in suburban Putnam County. Live trapping and relocation is no longer an option due to the exploding beaver population.

Beaver are in the process of changing the ecology of the Great Swamp. As their dams pond up the river and its tributaries they slow down the flow of water. A slower flow means higher water temperatures, less dissolved oxygen and increased silting. Ash and red and silver maples that shade the waterways survive seasonal





flooding but will drown under continual high water. The swamp north of Route 22 looks dramatically different this year. It's beginning to resemble a vast sunlit marsh filled with dead or dying mid-sized trees. The unusual wet weather and the ash disease may have contributed to the die-off but many of the dead trees never even produced leaves this year, indicating the process started before the wet weather pattern.

Beaver have not been this abundant in the Great Swamp since the 1600's. When beaver flooding affects homeowners and public transportation, the state, local municipalities and Metro-North carry out "spot interventions" such as pulling out dams, installing wire mesh culvert guards and trapping. FrOGS board member Rick Saracelli tries to keep sections of the river near Pine Island passable by removing downed trees that block the channel. Breaks in the beaver dams, high water, and portaging has allowed boaters to continue to pass through the swamp.

Twelve years ago The Nature Conservancy made an inventory of the communities of plants and animals in the Great Swamp. This data might be a useful baseline for a scientific study of the swamp today. Is there a maximum size for the beaver population in the Great Swamp? What are the limiting factors? If there is a pattern for beaver populations, what is the time frame between active populations, abandonment, and resettlement? Which plant and animal species will decline in the changing environment and which will flourish?

As stewards of the Great Swamp should we look for artificial means to keep the beaver population in check and try to prevent major changes in the ecology of the swamp or let nature take its course? Without any observations and data how will we be able to make informed decisions about the impact of these changes on the wild and human communities that call the Great Swamp Watershed their home?

Bird of the Bayou Found in the Great Swamp



Gliding in a canoe through the silent water, deep among the giant silver maples and red maples of our Great Swamp, you may feel you've been transported 2000 miles south into the South Carolina or Alabama bottomland swamps. A southern warbler of the deep bayous must feel that way too, since Dr. Utter spotted a pair of bayou loving *Prothonotary Warblers* on the June 13th canoe trip. The male, a small yellow bird with a deeper yellow hood and grey wings was perched on a

stump not ten feet in front of the canoe. Jim also identified his call and realized that only moments earlier the duller female had been spotted and described close to the same spot in the river.

The prothonotary is unique among eastern warblers, in that it nests in holes or cavities in trees above slow moving or standing water. Flying out from low hanging branches they glean insects from over the surface of the water (mayflies are a favorite) or they may move up and down a large streamside silver maple like a nuthatch.

Their range has extended up into New Jersey and occasional birds have been seen in Rockland and Orange County. *This pair is the first we have noted in the Great Swamp.* The 1998 Nature Conservancy Study of the Swamp and the 2002 Audubon Society Important Bird Area check list does not note their presence.

—Laurie Wallace

Calendar of Events September thru November 2009

SEPTEMBER

Saturday, September 26th
Artists "Plein Air" Paint Out Day In The Great Swamp (see *Great Swamp Art Show* article)

OCTOBER

Saturday, October 17th
Two Hikes to Choose from or do both!

1. Where the Wild Things Are: the Woods of Fred Dill Park, off Fair Street in Carmel, from 3 to 5 PM, sponsored by the Putnam County Land Trust. A light hike to explore the reforestation of this park that was once a fairgrounds, race track and pig farm. Now it's a source of plentiful forest and wildlife renewal! On this guided trek we will learn about what animals live here and how park habitat accommodates them. There will be a light picnic under a pavilion, which will include a poetry reading, reflections on the hike and story telling for all ages to appreciate. The event is \$5 a person, free for Land Trust members, and children under five. All are welcome. For questions and information call (845)-278-2808.

2. A Ramble Along the Appalachian Trail to Nuclear Lake in Pawling, sponsored by FrOGS and led by Judy Kelley-Moberg and Lauri Taylor. We'll meet at 9:30 AM in the lower parking lot and bus hikers up to the Appalachian Trail. This moderate hike (about 2-3 miles) wanders through rich upland forest along the

well traveled Appalachian Trail and then out to the fields around Nuclear Lake. We'll talk about the flora and fauna you'll see along the way. Bring your binoculars, cameras and a bag lunch. After lunch on top of the large grass covered dam, a short walk down an old roadbed will bring us back to the parking area. There is no charge, but we're limiting the number of hikers to around 15, so you must call (845)-878-7740 to reserve a space and get directions to the site.

Saturday, October 24th
The Great Swamp Art Show and Celebration from 11 am to 5 pm and the "Plein Air" Art Auction from 5 pm to 7 pm. At The Thomas Center Of Christ Church On Quaker Hill In Pawling. See the Art Show article for a description of the events and directions.

Sunday, October 25th
The Great Swamp Art Show Continues from Noon TO 4 pm.

NOVEMBER

Sunday, November 8th
FrOGS Annual Meeting
see www.frogs-ny.org for information on location, time and program.

Sunday, November 29th
FrOGS Road Cleanup on Route 22
call Liz Cowan at (845)-878-6104 to volunteer. This is a tough section of road and we can use the help!

Saturday, Oct. 24 **FrOGS Annual Great Swamp**
11am-5pm **Art Show and Celebration**

Sunday, Oct. 25
Noon to 4pm

We invite all our old friends and those that we hope to become enthusiasts to come to the show that celebrates the wonders of the Great Swamp with live exhibits, art and song.

There is something in the show to engage the whole family. Paintings, drawings, collage, pottery and photography from local artists will be on display and for sale. The swamp and all its creatures as seen through the eyes of our area school children will charm you. The amazing talent of high school artists will be highlighted in the Peter Dunlop Art Competition as well as viewing entries to the student Duck Stamp competition.

The Nature of Things will bring their educators and live animals. Jim Eyring, will engage us with his knowledge of birds of prey and thrill visitors when he flies his birds outside. The Chucky Goodnight Foundation teaches children about wetland ecology through stories and crafts. This year the children will be making clay beavers. Visitors can enjoy the music of the Great Blue Singers. Educational exhibits by the local Land Trusts and conservation organizations will be set up in the lobby. FrOGS tee shirts and hats will be for sale. Norm McGrath's swamp slide show is a delight and show goers always enjoy the Hamilton's flavorful food spread in the lounge.

This Year FrOGS is Sponsoring a "Plein Air" Paint Out and Auction. On Saturday, September 26th, artists of all kinds will be taking their sketchbooks, pencils, paints and cameras into the Great Swamp. On sites of their choosing they'll capture a vision of the swamp and its inhabitants. The red maples are in high color,

migrating birds and waterfowl are passing through and fall wildflowers still linger in the fields. The images captured by the artists on the "paint out" day will be on exhibit at the Art Show and auctioned off by Ivan Cohen (auctioneer extraordinaire) at a benefit auction from 5 to 7 PM on Saturday evening at the Art Show.

Since many of the participating artists are part of the **Annual Art East Studio Tour** given the same weekend as the Great Swamp Art Show, we are joining the Art East Studio Tour as a "gallery location". The tour is a great opportunity to visit the studios of local artists who attract your attention at the FrOGS Show, or to expand your enjoyment of a fall weekend of art in the country. Brochures with directions to the tour locations will be available at the art show and at locations throughout Putnam and Dutchess County.

Volunteers are needed to help set up the show on Thursday, October 22nd from 2 to 9 PM., to work in the kitchen and man the exhibits on the show days, to assist with the reception and auction on Saturday evening, and to clean up on Sunday. To volunteer call Laurie Lewis at (845)-878-4299. To donate cookies, cakes and harvest breads, please call Bill Hamilton at (845) 878-4352

Saturday, October 24th from 11 AM to 5 PM followed by a "Plein Air" reception and art auction at 5 PM and Sunday, October 25th from noon to 4PM at the Thomas Memorial Center, Christ Church in Pawling. More information at www.frogs-ny.org. Directions: take Quaker Hill Road from the light on Route 22 in Pawling. At the top of the hill turn right on Church Street and follow it to the Thomas Center located behind Christ Church.

Friends of the Great Swamp is an organization dedicated to **Preserving the Great Swamp** through educational programs, scientific projects and special events and making all aware of this wonderful resource in our midst.

The generosity of our members and supporters extends FrOGS reach and effectiveness. Contributions support the efforts of the Education Committee, research and this newsletter.

Suggested Contributions: *(All Contributions are tax deductible)*

- Supporter \$25
- Friend \$100
- Sponsor \$500
- Contributor \$50
- Patron \$250
- Benefactor \$1,000

Send your contribution to: **Friends of the Great Swamp**
P.O. Box 373, Pawling, NY 12564

Name _____
 Address _____
 Phone Day _____ Night _____
 E-Mail Address _____

WE NEED HELP

If you can lend a hand with any of the following, please check off the box and we will call you.

- Spring Celebration
- Canoe Trips
- Other
- Educational Activities
- Art Show
- Mailings

