



ANIMALS of the SWAMP



Section of the Mural Created by Students in the First and Second Grade Classes of Matthew Patterson Elementary School. The Mural illustrates some of the many mammals, birds, reptiles, amphibians and fish that can be found at the student's "back door", the Great Swamp.

Visions of Animals in Putnam's Past, Present

by Judy Kelley-Moberg

Spring "rattlesnake roundups" and mandatory "wolf pit" maintenance were written into the Community code of the Town of Pelham in the late 1600's. The Tax Records of Dutchess County (Putnam was the South Ward of Dutchess) in the early 1700's shows outlays of money to pay bounties on wolves.

Although the shape of the land and the climate remains basically the same from 1600 to present, the flora and the fauna do not.



Grey Wolf

The native peoples and early European settlers lived in an ancient forest environment where the canopy of branches blocked out sunlight and the undergrowth was sparse. Many mammals (especially deer) and birds found few food sources in a climax forest. Open areas created by beaver ponds, deadfalls of ancient trees and grassy marsh areas encouraged the growth of greater diversity of plant food sources. Native peoples often used controlled burns to open up the forest for new growth. Early Dutch settlers avoided the interior and tended to cling to the Hudson River or navigable tributaries like the Croton River and Wappinger's Creek.

In the 1740's large Manors were granted from the Hudson inland to the contested border with Connecticut. Settlers from New England, Westchester and Long Island began to carve their homesteads out of the wilderness. Many of these farmers had negotiated land grants from



the Wappinger Confederacy and were considered squatters by the new Lords of the Manor. The New York Courts extinguished the Wappinger's land rights and most settlers resigned themselves to become tenant farmers.

The image of the yeoman farmer taming the land with hard work and determination prevailed up until the early 1800's. Throughout this period the forests were heavily logged for building materials, for charcoal making and as a cash crop for the farmer. Dams for grist and lumber mills were thrown up along the streams and the landscape became a vast pasture, bounded by stone walls with a scattering of shade trees. Extremely rocky areas, steep slopes and wetlands became the farmer's woodlots. Unconnected patches of woodlots and swamps contained the only forests left.

The Great Swamp was one of the largest of these "woodlot" patches. Fox, bobcat and the remaining forest creatures found refuge in the Swamp as did the infamous counterfeiters of the "Oblong Gang"

There was little biodiversity except along the edges of woodlots and wetlands. Deer found few tender twigs to browse on and wolves and mountain lions were rare. Coyotes, fox, bobcat and weasel were pests to be shot or poisoned at will. Trapping mink, otter and beaver was a source of cash for the farmer. Wild Turkey became scarce and the passenger pigeon was hunted to extinction.

and Future

As pasture (grasslands) dominated the landscape and woodlands disappeared, the number and species of mammals in Putnam County declined. Photos taken as late as 1950 amaze us with images of tree-less hills and valleys sprinkled with grazing cattle.

Beginning in the early 1900's many farms began to fail. Dairying was no longer as profitable. Pasture, first the rocky and steepest fields were "let go" and shrubs and trees began to cover the landscape. By the second half of the century farmers found it more profitable to sell their farms to developers and Putnam became a bedroom community.

Some of the abandoned fields now woodlands are 80 to 100 years old, the younger woodlands in their 30th year. The land becomes more and more wooded. The new growth attracts deer and the oaks wild turkey. Wetlands are still mainly untouched as they are poor Home-site areas and beaver return to flood the Metro-North tracks.

Otter and mink use the wetlands. Coyote numbers increase and there is still a resident population of red fox and bobcat. Northern species like The raven and the fisher seem to be moving their range southward as the forest growth returns. Reports of black bear wandering out of the Berkshires to raid local birdfeeders have become common.



Fishers are seen in the Swamp now.

As the diversity of wildlife increase, so do the number of new homes. Natural animal habitat shrinks in size and becomes more fragmented. White-tailed deer multiply as homeowners plant shrubs and lawns. Racoons and crows are numerous.

The presence of bear, bobcat, fisher, otter and mink Indicate that there are still large wild areas connected by wooded travel-ways or corridors. Local, county and state parks across Putnam provide some relief to mammals under pressure but there has to be a larger vision or increasing development will push these mammals out.

The "Greenway Plan" the "highlands Coalition", the Putnam and Oblong Land Trusts and FrOGS all see the need to protect or develop wildlife corridors to connect these larger areas of wildlife habitat (Parklands) The Great Swamp with adjoining uplands or buffer zones is the largest and most diverse wildlife habitat in the Eastern section of the Hudson Highlands.

The Swamp is a " safe place" from human Pressure for mammals as well as an interconnected travel corridor from Dutchess County through Putnam. A "safe place" for animals to escape being crowded or paved in can easily be translated into a "sanctuary" for mankind from the pressures of urban life. A place for quiet contemplation and wandering, seasoned with a dash of expectation.

Perhaps you'll see a flash of red fox in the distance, or impossible ice castles in the brook. You might hear thrush melodies in the forest or wood duck chatter in the marsh or perhaps just the wind in the trees. The air smells of rich earth and leaves and you know you are in a different world. *continued p.7*

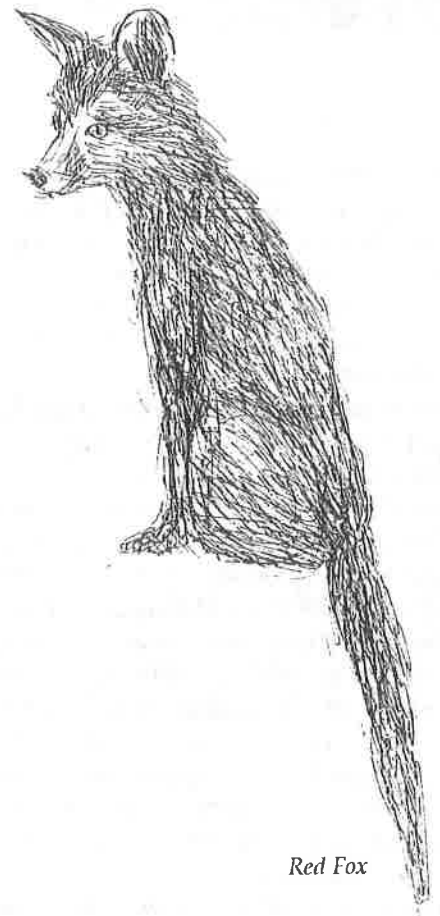
Trekking and Tracking the Frozen Swamp

Stepping into the snow covered landscape of the Winter SWAMP, one can feel the quiet of the landscape and be filled with a sense of expectation and adventure about what is to be discovered around the next clump of trees.

The GREAT SWAMP in winter is a quiet place....much of the life we look for in Spring is hibernating beneath the ice and snow. There are no huge feathery ferns, no leafed trees, no mosses or wildflowers. Stripped of their foliage, the Silver Maples stand as silent grouped sentinels overlooking a frozen river. The frozen surface allows us to walk deep within the SWAMP not just skirt around its edges.

Stepping around a clump of sedge, we encounter our first sign of life. A set of tracks---of a rabbit---cross our trail. Rabbits are active in this area all winter. If you follow the track for a few feet you may discover a group of twigs cut off from the ground about a foot high. The twigs of a small shrub like this make an excellent meal for the rabbit.

Another set of tracks! These more recent and dog-like....bend down and look more closely....they have the claws showing, not a cat, but too small for most dogs that would brave this snow. Do we see the flash of a tail in the distance a quarter-mile or so away? Perhaps we have just scared off a red fox who was checking on the trail of our rabbit.



Red Fox



Flooded Swamp

The thrill of hiking through this frozen serene wilderness is the expectation of encountering the unexpected in nature and perhaps something wonderful.



We have reached the edge of Pine Island. The gnarled lumps of granite that make up this unique island contrast with the flat of the frozen river. Hemlocks dominate the steep slopes and we will have to climb and stretch to reach the heights of the rocky crag. We pass the site of the Hawks Rest Cabin and rest too. We look for bobcat sign here, but find no sign of a den. The wily cat has found a more hidden spot and we will not discover it today.

We have reached the other side and stare at three white-tailed deer through the silence. We are trespassing in their world. Will they continue to stare until we have passed by or kick up their heels and their tails and disappear in the snow.

We need to watch and locate Muddy Brook as we will follow the Brook back toward the RR tracks. Muddy Brook is often flowing more swiftly than the nearby river here and we will have to be sure where we step is frozen. As we near the end of our hike, the silence is broken by the tap, tap, tap of a downy woodpecker, just a soft sound in the SWAMP.

Hike the Winter Swamp

with

Judy Moberg and Rick Saracelli

On Sunday, January 30th

12:30 to 4:00 PM

if the Swamp is Frozen

This will be a strenuous hike

Call Judy 878-7740 or

Rick 87806486 to be sure the Swamp

Is frozen enough to hike and

For the meeting place. If too

Warm, hike could be postponed to

February 6th

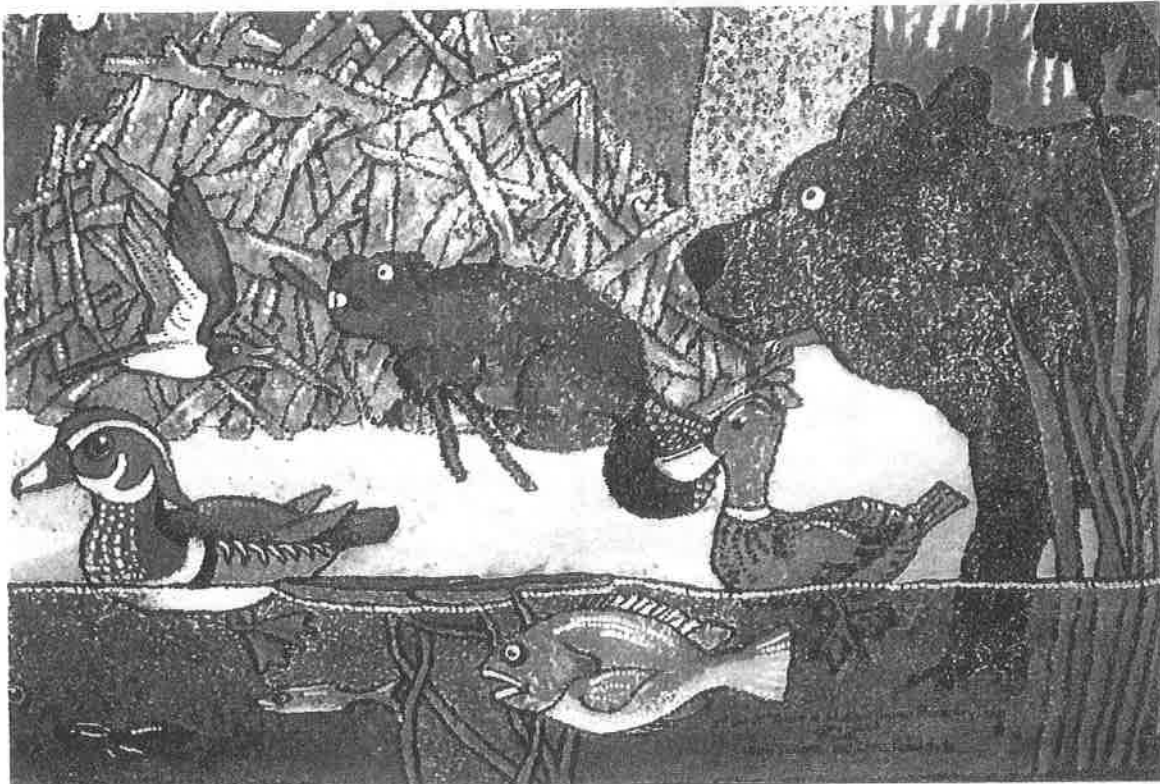
FROGS would like to Thank Judy Moberg for her article, Jean Hannon for her animal illustrations and Gordon Douglas for his photos.

Art Celebrating the SWAMP

Students from twelve schools in the Great Swamp Watershed including Pawling, Dover, Patterson and Carmel exhibited their works alongside fifty three adult artists. Carmel Middle School students participating in the Federal Duck Stamp competition brought their paintings and Mizzentop's "Creature of the Swamp" was also exhibited.

Wildlife artist, Vincent Bihn, exhibited a new hawk painting and Hal Wiesel returned with his bird carvings. Several artists who accompanied FrOGS on a special artists canoe trip through the Swamp this summer brought the works they created from that trip.

Painters from the first and second grade art class created a twenty foot long, eight feet high mural of all the animals in the Swamp. They used the "pointillism" technique of filling in the areas of the mammals, birds, amphibians and fish bodies with thousands of dots of color. They used Q-tips to apply the paint and each artist had one or two animals and some swamp background to paint. They were guided by art teacher, Margie Picciano and artist in residence, Chris Rowlands.



Another Section of the Great Swamp Mural

Young and older visitors alike were treated to the soaring Falcons of Jim Eyring and the smaller live animals brought by The Nature of Things. Cherie Ingraham joined in the celebration this year giving young artist the opportunity to create a work of art right at the Art Show under the careful eye of Chuckie Goodnight, resident environmental teacher.

All were treated to the wonderful food prepared by Bill Hamilton and his crew.

This year, for the first time, FrOGS served coffee on Sunday morning for the members of Christ Church and held a Special Tour of the Exhibit for those who joined us that day. The exhibit was open all afternoon to give many more people the opportunity to view the show!

Nature Conservancy Gives Patterson Funds for Trails

The Nature Conservancy surprised Patterson Supervisor, Michael Griffin with a gift of \$ 10,000 to the Town to be used for creating trails and educational displays on the Town's recently acquired 63-acre tract in the Great Swamp adjacent to the Patterson Environmental Park.

Mark King, land protection director for the Nature Conservancy, handed Supervisor Griffin the check at the FrOGS Annual Meeting on November nineteenth. The funds were donated to the Town to help make the new parcel more user-friendly. Some of the possible uses are to create a boardwalk and also a handicap-accessible trail.

"This will allow people to see it" stated Dr. James Utter, Chairman of FrOGS. "Portions of this new section added To the Patterson Environmental Park contain some uplands and some transition areas that are valuable to wildlife and well suited to trails. Some of the wetland area acquired borders the East Branch Croton River as well. It is not just a matter of acquiring land. It is a matter of bringing people on to it.

The funds will allow the Town to make more use of the land acquired. The new parcel is only a block away from the Matthew Patterson Elementary school and can be used as an outdoor laboratory for science classes as well.

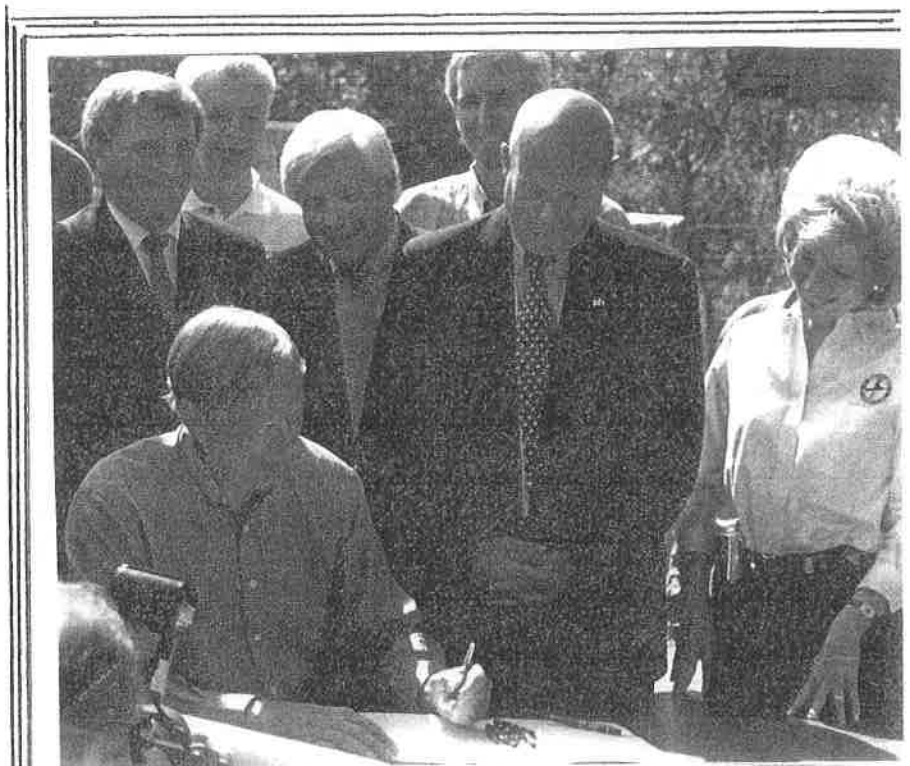
Visions of Animals *cont.*

We need a connection to the remaining wild places as much as the animals we would like to protect. The "Great Swamp Mural" from the children of Matthew Patterson Elementary School shared their vision of the diversity and the vibrant life found in the Swamp. Can we create a landscape where there is room for both people and wildlife so future generations of children will be just as excited.

FrOGS continues to honor our mission to preserve the integrity of the Great Swamp as one large interconnected region by using the North American Wetlands Conservation Grant to acquire land in the "Heart of The Great Swamp".

The Federal Government, The State of New York, The Nature Conservancy, The Putnam and Oblong Land Trusts, concerned land owners, the County and the Town of Patterson have played an important part in our successes.

We hope to increase public awareness of the threats to the narrow animal corridors like Haviland Hollow Brook and Muddy Brook That connect the large parklands and preserves to the main body of the great Swamp as well as extending our efforts to the "North Flow" and Swamp River sections.



Important News for Open Space Preservation !

Governor George Pataki signs the bill that will allow the State to pay property taxes on State lands in Putnam County. State Senator, Vincent Leibell, Assemblyman, Willis Stephens and Bernadette Castro look on.

FrOGS was one of the many organizations that supported this legislation as it will facilitate the acquisition of open space throughout Putnam as well as in the Great Swamp and still allow the towns and school districts to retain their tax revenue.