



Friends of the Great Swamp



FrOGS

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Birds of the Great Swamp

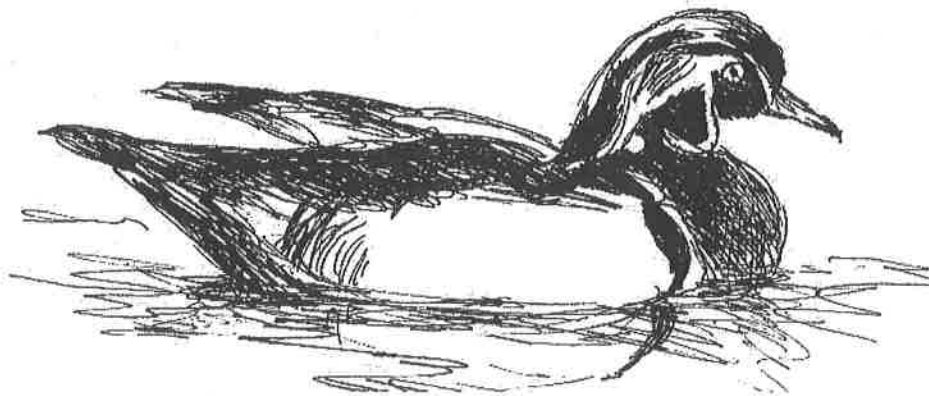
by Jim Utter

Among all of the wildlife we encounter in our daily activities, birds are the most diverse and entertaining. They are colorful, active, vocal, and share our most active time and space. Bird watching is the fastest growing outdoor activity, and the economic investments in books, binoculars, clothing and lodging associated with this activity rivals the money spent on hunting.

The Great Swamp offers us excellent birding opportunities and a chance to enjoy a very diverse avifauna all year long. This amazing wetland provides breeding, overwintering, and migration stopover habitats for a large number of bird species. During the past four years, Bill Wallace and I have been surveying the birds in the Great Swamp and have recorded over 180 species, with about 100 species breeding in the swamp. Some of these species, like the red-winged blackbird are widespread, while others like the marsh wren and sora rail are extremely localized and not often seen. This diversity of species, and the concentration of particular species, such as the wood duck and solitary sandpipers seen during migration, led to the unanimous endorsement of The Great Swamp as one of National Audubon Society's Important Bird Areas in New York State (1998). Our work builds on decades of birding activity by such local experts as Sibyll Gilbert, Tom Morgan, John McElwaine, and members of the Waterman Bird Club.

See page 4 for a list of "tried and true" Great Swamp birding spots.

As you are reading this, the fall migration season is underway. About 70% of our summer breeding birds are in the process of moving to the south for the winter. They are being



joined by other birds that breed to the north and northwest of our area in a mass movement that is one of the most amazing phenomena of the natural world. Moving in loose

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Bronx Highschool Students Study The Great Swamp

Focusing on the question "What is the source of New York City water?" twenty-five Bronx students from Roosevelt High School, WINGS Academy, and the Career Education Center spent two weeks studying Environmental Science and New Media at Purchase College. While exploring the Croton Watershed System, the Environmental Science students learned basic field and laboratory techniques and conducted field investigations of the Great Swamp as a case study of New York City's water supply.

Starting with a hike down Cranberry Mountain (Merritt Park), the students followed a raindrop down the watershed to Haviland Hollow Brook, the Croton River and East Branch Reservoir. The students canoed down the river learning the value of wetlands and the dynamic nature of the river while appreciating the beauty of this unique resource. After conducting a battery of physical and chemical tests of the stream water, and sampling stream invertebrates, they began constructing a water quality index. They also investigated the wildlife in the watershed by banding birds and censusing butterflies.

At the college, the students worked in the computer lab entering their information and notes onto a web page constructed by the New Media students. This fall, the study will continue with more visits to the Great Swamp and comparisons with the Bronx River that flows near their schools.

This is the fourth year of the Science and Media Institute for Learning Enrichment (SMILE) under the

direction of Dr. Jim Utter and sponsored by Phipps Community Development Corporation of New York City. Purchase faculty members, Dr. Peter Ohring, Dr. Barbara Dexter, and Dr. Peter Corfield instructed students and were supported by six Purchase students, six teachers from the New York high schools, and Jan Melichar-Utter. Over the four years of this program, 110 students and twelve teachers from New York City have experienced the Great Swamp, learned about the ties between the city and the watersheds on which it depends, and changed their attitudes toward rural natural areas.

Hike on Cranberry Mt.

*As I walked through the woods of Cranberry
Mountain I saw many things.
I saw the glistening waterfalls,
listened to the wind rustle through the trees so
tall,
and heard the flow of the elegant streams.
I learned about all types of plants
from the Touch-Me-Nots to the ferns,
from the Maple trees to the Yellow Birch,
and from the Mountain Laurel to the Wild
Grape.
As we trooped together over the now deceased
leaves
We halted for a moment to heed the melodious
concert of the birds.
We followed the path of the liquid roads until
beautiful waterfalls were manifested.
I realized the beauty of nature and I enjoyed
myself.
I anticipate doing this again.*

Kishana Brunson SMILE 2000



Sheena's Journal Entry

It was an experience I will never forget. Twelve-hour days of nonstop work and adventurous trips yielded much learning and a rewarding piece of finished work. It was a new experience for me since I am a city girl.

The wilderness was not really a place for me. So coming to the SMILE Program was like trying a whole new life. I was a little worried about coming here because the city life was the only life I knew. Once I came to SUNY Purchase all of that changed. I started to see everything in a whole new way.

We did a lot of things while we were here. We went hiking, we gathered water samples from several streams that we tested in the lab, and we went on a canoe trip in a swamp. Some other places we visited were: Kensico Reservoir, Cranberry Mountain, Blind Brook, Smile Brook, Haviland Hollow Brook, the Great Swamp, Stamford Sewage Treatment Plant, and Long Island Sound. On each trip I learned a lot. I learned how to test water for different chemicals, how to process pictures, how to read contour lines on a map, and how to canoe to name a few. I didn't really like canoeing, but I got through it without shedding any tears.

The group of people I was working with was great. Like any other group we had our problems, but we got through them. These experiences prove that as a team, anything is possible. I am happy to say that all my fears of working in the wilderness are over! (I think!!)

Sheena Justiniano, SMILE 2000



Where to Go Birding in The Great Swamp

The following is a list of public access areas that are good birding sites and cover a variety of habitats:

Patterson Environmental Park. This Town Conservation Area off South Street in Patterson Village is one of the best places to see the variety of swamp forest birds and some of the shrub swamp species. Park on South Street and walk down the dirt road to the river. You will go through some open fields, past some swamp forest patches, through a shrub swamp, into an area of upland forest and finally reach the river edge. There is a network of trails off the dirt road that wind their way along the edge of the swamp. This is an excellent site at all seasons, but especially in spring and summer.

Dutcher Avenue Marsh. This is the most accessible marsh in the Great Swamp and is one of the largest. Owned by the Oblong Conservancy, it is located on the south edge of Pawling Village. Limited roadside parking is available at the north and south ends of the marsh on Dutcher Avenue. Do not park near the fire station.

Green Chimneys School. This popular access point for canoe trips provides some excellent opportunities to see swamp forest and wet meadow birds. The main parking area is located on the west side of Doansburg Road opposite the school. Walk past the pavilion to the river. The boardwalk gives you an elevated view

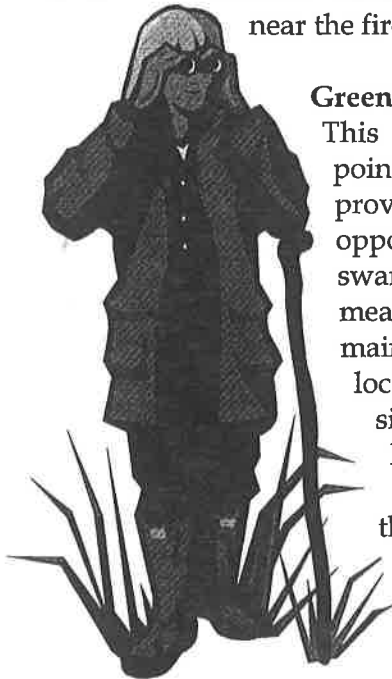
through the swamp. While at Green Chimneys, visit the raptor rehabilitation center and zoo on the main campus across the road from the parking lot. Several captive species of raptors there allow you to review their field marks up close and personal.

Ice Pond Conservation Area is accessed from Ice Pond Road via a steep dirt road down to Ice Pond, which can be scanned from the shore for waterfowl and swallows. The railroad tracks are active with Metro North commuter trains, so hiking along the tracks is not advisable.

Clough Preserve is located on the west side of Farm-to-Market Road north of Brewster High School. From the parking lot follow the trail through an upland forest with patches of hemlocks to the edge of the shrub swamp and on to Ice Pond. The tracks on this side of the pond are rarely used, so it is much safer to bird the pond from here.

Sharparoon. This 1800-acre reserve on Dover Furnace Road just off Route 22 is owned by the New York City Mission Society and used as a conference center and summer camp. Bordering the Swamp River, the property boasts a wide range of habitats from marsh and swamp to lake and steep mountain ridge. Over 100 species have been recorded here. Permission is needed to bird at Sharparoon, so call ahead ((845) 832-6151) to make arrangements.

River Road crosses the Great Swamp between Route 22 and West Dover Road just north of Pawling Village. Park along the road near the bridge across Swamp River.



All Donations to FrOGS are Tax Deductible

Friends of the Great Swamp is a successful organization, and the generosity of our members and supporters extends FrOGS's reach and effectiveness. Contributions support our special events, educational programs, scientific projects, and this newsletter. Donations also help ensure that membership remains free to all.

Please consider a tax deductible gift to FrOGS. Simply forward your gift in the envelope enclosed in this newsletter. Or, send your gift to:

*Friends of the Great Swamp
PO Box 373, Pawling, NY 12564
(914) 855-1917*

Thanks for your generous support!



Welcome to FrOGS' Newest Board Members



Please join us in welcoming Jodie Von Gal and Hunter Pollock as FrOGS' newest Directors. Jodie is a resident of Whaley Lake and is excited to be helping the organization grow and prosper. Hunter is performing double-duty as a FrOGS Director and the President of Putnam County Land Trust. The hard work and expertise of these folks, and our other dedicated Directors and members, will help carry FrOGS to new levels of success in our mission to preserve and protect the Great Swamp.



FrOGS thanks
Bruce Cunningham of Pawling Computers
for generously donating his time and expertise
to fix the FrOGS computer.

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groups, most of the birds travel during the night, using stars, magnetic fields, topography, and perhaps odors to find their way to specific wintering sites in the southern United States, the Caribbean, Central America or South America. About half of the birds, those hatched this summer, have never made the trip before and yet most still find their way to appropriate places. No, we really don't know how they do it. The capability and "instructions" for the process seem to develop in the bird without any obvious learning, so we call it "innate" or "instinctive." The young birds of many species migrate before their parents and may even move further south. The adults often winter in the same location in South America that they used the previous year, and then return in the spring to the same specific section of the Great Swamp to breed again.

During the fall and spring migrations, the birds that fly during the night land in the early morning to rest and feed. The trip is energetically very demanding and refueling in transit is critical. Stopover places need to provide cover and a good source of food - insects, fruit, nectar, and seeds. The Great Swamp has proven to be one of the valuable stopover sites for a large variety of species including flycatchers, warblers, tanagers, and swallows. This provides an opportunity to see a variety of birds, but with a higher "degree of difficulty" (to use Olympic terms) for identification than in the spring. The diverse colorful breeding birds

About half of the birds have never made the trip before, and yet most still find their way

are less conspicuous now than they were during the breeding season. Some of the species actually

change to a new color pattern in the fall and look like a different species.

A variety of species will be moving through the Great Swamp in large numbers from now into November. The largest influx of birds will appear the morning after the passage of a cold front because the winds come out of the north and give the birds a boost. Somehow they "know" this and fly on those nights.

You can help build the database on bird use of the Great Swamp track see,

by keeping of what you when and where you see it, and some rough measure of the numbers seen. Forward copies of your observations to me at the FrOGS

address.

Much of our College work Great possible support of Heineman Foundation. We thank them for this funding.

SUNY-Purchase on the birds of the Swamp has been due to the two grants from The

Jim Utter is Assistant Professor of Environmental Science at SUNY-Purchase and an accomplished ornithologist. Jim and his students have been studying the Great Swamp for many years.

The drawings in this story were done and donated for use in this newsletter by Jean Hannon Douglas.

