



Friends of the Great Swamp



FrOGS

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WINTER SWAMP

The Great Swamp in Winter is a quiet place... much of the life we look for in the Spring and Summer is hibernating beneath the ice and snow. There are no huge feathery ferns, no leafed trees and mosses or wildflowers or chatter of birds.

Winter is still a perfect time to view the SWAMP.

Stripped of their foliage the Silver Maples stand assilent grouped sentinels over looking the frozen River. The frozen surface allows us, the hiker to walk deep within the SWAMP not just skirt around its edges.



Section of Muddy Brook in the SWAMP

WE do not walk far before we spot a beaver lodge at the edge of a ponded area. Beaver are both famous and infamous for building their dams and lodges. Their dams have created ponds where there were running streams and altered our landscape.

The pond provides protection for the lodge the beaver needs to house his young and to hide from predators. A beaver lodge is built by piling up a mound of sticks and mud. The Beaver then gnaws out a chamber inside and packs mud around the outside. If there is fresh mud, it is probably an active lodge. Once inside with his stored food the Beaver seldom needs to leave all winter.



Great Swamp Art Show and Celebration of the Swamp



Mae Greene, Chairman of the FrOGS Art Show with Peter Dunlop (Left) our Chef extraordinaire and State Senator, Vincent Leibell outside the Memorial Center

The Fifth Annual Great Swamp Art Show and Celebration of the Swamp was the most successful in the history of FrOGS thanks to the efforts and dedication of Mae Greene, Chairman of the Art Show Committee and her hard working committee.

Over 2000 people attended the show on Saturday, October 27th at the Frances Ryan Thomas Memorial Center at Christ Church on Quaker Hill in Pawling. Several hundred children from nearby schools came for a special children's environmental program the day before. The Art Show expanded this year to Celebrate the Swamp with other forms of exhibits and demonstrations.

Many hands helped with this year's Art Show and Celebration. Mae Greene, who has been the show's inspiration for many years, Chaired the expanded Show. Her committee members, Beth Coursen, Geneva Hamilton Tory Davis and Susan Roberts worked to arrange for the artists and to be sure that the exhibits were set up. Molly and Norman McGrath helped arrange for the participating artists.

The Celebration of the SWAMP was for children as well as adults. One of the most popular exhibits was

created by a class at Mizzenotop School. Each child created a paper mache model of an animal—a mammal, reptile, amphibian or a bird that you could find in the SWAMP. All the animals were placed in a canoe brought for this purpose by Rick Carr. Flying over all the other animals was a large Great Blue Heron! Many thanks to Amy Farrell, the teacher who inspired and coordinated this exhibit!

Other Highlights

James Eyring from Pace University Raptor Center brought several Hawks, Owls and Falcons. In mid-afternoon everyone followed Jim outdoors to watch him demonstrate with his birds.

Teachers from the Nature of Things brought live reptiles including snakes and turtles to demonstrate and explain the life habits of these animals. They could not bring native species from the SWAMP but brought along their "cousins" as these creatures function in many of the same ways the Swamp reptiles and amphibians do.

Swamp Celebration



Judy Kelley-Moberg with her Tracking exhibit showing a mink in light phase.

Jeff Hodges had prepared several videos of the Swamp and different sections from Wet Meadows to Otter swimming deep within the hidden river waters.

Beatrice Ardohain exhibited her water quality monitoring project. Hal Weisel, the woodcarver, came again to show his large wild turkey carved from wood. Hal's photo appeared in our Fall News. Marilyn Kelly and Judy Moberg-Kelley had exhibits on the swamp and its creatures. Charles Olson and Manuel Greer were our "stage managers" and set up the exhibits.

Refreshments were provided by the amazing Peter Dunlop who always had "something cooking" and delighted all with his treats.



Committee member, Geneva Claire Hamilton, with some of the Art displayed at the Show.

Frogs thanks the many others who made this a memorable day—and invites you—all back again next year.

FrOGS forms Education Committee

To reach out and help more people living around the Great Swamp understand its wonders and its ecological importance, FrOGS has formed an Education Committee. The Committee will develop and write educational materials for use by schools and other groups and will share the findings of FrOGS scientific efforts with the public.

One of the Committee's first efforts will be a **Spring Celebration of the Swamp**. Anyone interested in helping on the Committee or with the Spring Celebration please call Judy Moberg at 878-7740.



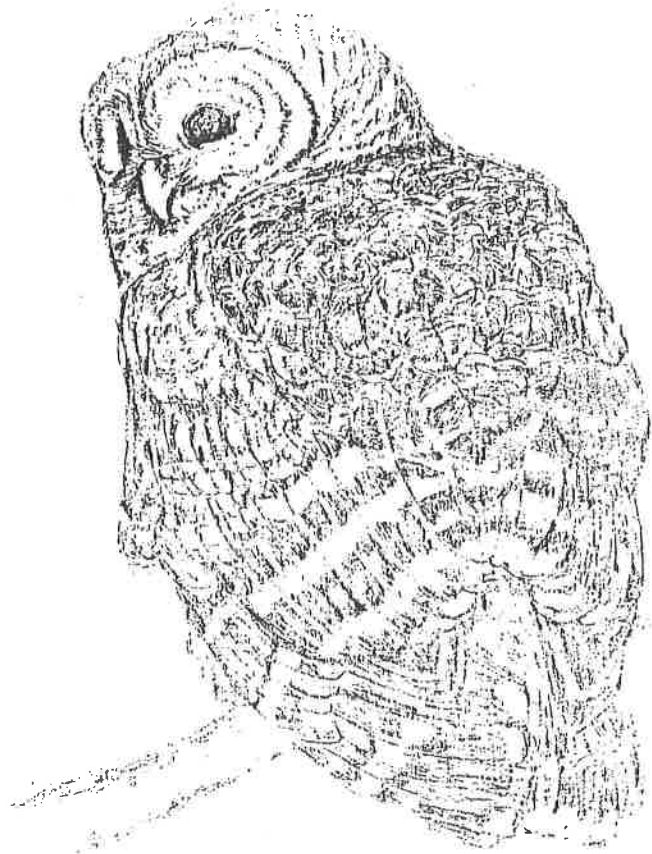
Ian Barnes from the Nature of Things explaining the life habits of a snake to two of the Celebration visitors.

OWLS of the SWAMP

The silent nights of January turn a birder's thoughts toward Owls. It seemed like the coldest night of the year, that February 21st, when I went on my first "Owl Prowl" with naturalist, Tom Morgan. It was about 10 degrees out and felt like 10 below when I got out of the car at the Putnam County Park to join Tom to seek out owls. What to my surprise to find more than fifty other people had come for the same purpose!

Owls are generally solitary except when seeking a mate and nesting. In January or early February owls begin to alter their calls to attract females. It is a good time to listen for them. Listening to their nighttime calls is a great way to know that owls are nearby.

Tom explained the differences in the calls of the three owls we might expect to find in Putnam in winter. He started with the Barred Owl, and owl of the deep woods and swamps. He imitates the "Who Cooks For You" call of the Barred. All is silent as we listen for the response from another owl. All is silent. He calls again, no answer. We must move on and try another owl.



Barred Owl



Large clump of maples in the Swamp

The GREAT SWAMP is a haunt for owls. They are nocturnal hunters but need cover, deep cover, to roost and sleep during the day away from their enemies. The deep recesses of the SWAMP, with many roosting places among the cavities of the tall silent silver maples or the hemlocks of Pine Island make excellent shelter for both Barred and Great Horned Owls. The cavities found in the dead trees or the snags of the large white oak make good hidden nesting spots too. We have seen the fledglings of both these owls in the SWAMP in the spring.

Owls Are Important Predators

Owls eat rodents, small mammals, birds, insects like caterpillars and crickets. Most important, because they eat so many mice, voles and other rodents, they keep the populations of these animals in check.

Owls hunt by night and have developed many special adaptations for nocturnal hunting. They will hunt in wet meadows, fields or shrub swamp areas near their daytime hiding areas. Our GREAT SWAMP affords them many nearby feeding locations as well as daytime cover.

How Can They See In The Dark?

Owls use a combination of sight and sound to locate prey but can often find their dinner by sound alone. The small bones in their ears are far more sensitive to the sound of the tiniest movement in the open areas below their perch. But their special advantage is that their ears are not symmetrical. One ear is set lower on their head than the other. This allows the sound of a mouse running through the meadow to be heard at slightly, "split second" different timing in one ear than in the other. The different timing of the sounds reaching its ears along with the owls ability to memorize noises allows it to calculate the exact location of its prey.

Owls Are Silent Hunters

Owls feathers are soft. Their comb-like edges are fuzzy on the upper surface. These special feathers muffle sound as the feathers move, allowing an owl to swoop in on their prey without a sound.



Screech Owl, smallest of Putnam's owls



Great Horned Owl and his meal

When owls hunt, they strike their prey with their sharp talons then lift the dead mouse, frog or squirrel toward their perch, and if the prey is small enough, eat it whole, bones and all. The undigested parts; the bones, skull, feathers and fur are compressed into a pellet and regurgitated. Finding owl pellets beneath a tree, is a good clue to an owl roosting place.

Owl Conservation

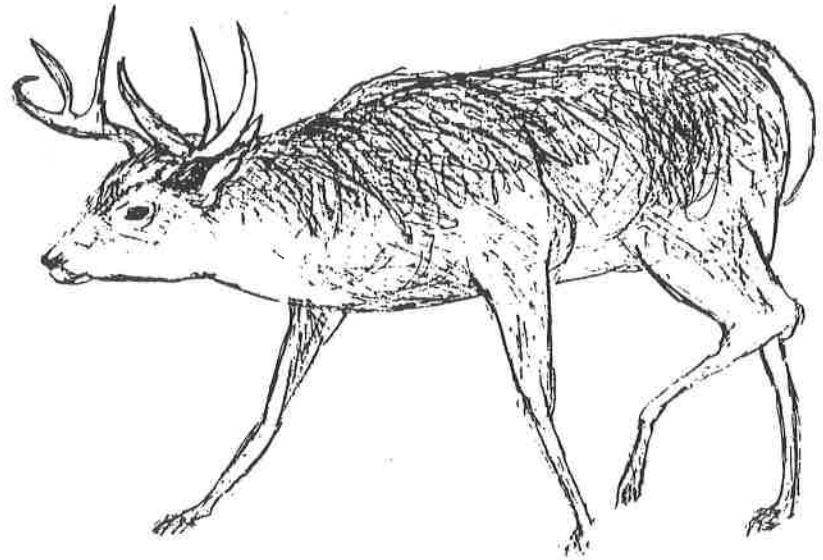
Large trees with nesting cavities, located in hidden areas deep within a wooded swamp are necessary for these cavity nesting birds. Owls need cavities to nest, or sometimes choose old stick nests abandoned by hawks if they are hidden enough. Habitat loss as we cut "dead" trees for wood or encroach upon our wooded swamps by filling and building in them has resulted in a decline in Barred and Great Horned Owl populations in the Northeast. The GREAT SWAMP and it nearby wooded uplands are haven for this "mysterious" but wonderful bird.

Winter Swamp cont.

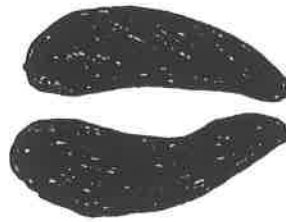
Stepping out on the trail through the wet meadow you can not walk far without encountering the first signs of life. A set of tracks—of a rabbit—cross the trail. Rabbits are active in this area all winter. If you follow the track for a few feet you may discover a group of twigs cut off from the ground about 1 foot high. The twigs of small shrubs at the edge of a wet meadow make an excellent meal for our rabbit.



A larger and more familiar track crosses our path. We easily recognize the hoof-print of the the white-tailed deer. Deer are found everywhere in our woods but find the grasses of the wet meadow and the young shrubs of the shrub swamp and excellent palce to brouse in winter. The wooded sections of the SWAMP are also places to hide during the day.



White-Tailed Deer



Poison Ivy

At the start of a walk in the SWAMP a hiker may not see or hear many birds. They don't expect you to wander into their refuge so they fall silent waiting for your next move. If you stop and listen, they will soon resume their activity.

Woodpeckers abound in the wooded sections of the SWAMP in both winter and summer. All six of our local woodpeckers can be found in abundance. Not only do they find great meals from the insects

hidden in the bark of the many trees in the wooded sections of the SWAMP, but the red maples and silver maples and the dead trees make the best nest sites for these cavity nesters. The largest of our local woodpeckers, the Pileated Woodpecker, finds both excellent nest sites and the solitude this bird needs to breed successfully.

Many of the songbirds that stay north in the winter congregate in the SWAMP. In the wet meadows and the shrub swamp areas they can find many plants with winter seeds as well as shrubs with berries that remain most of the winter.

Wetland shrubs like Black Alder provide seeds. Vines of wild



Loosetrife



Alder twig



Cattail

Winter Swamp cont.

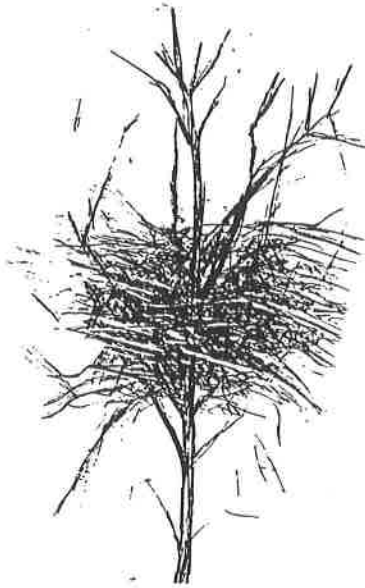
grape and bittersweet provide berries, although the grapes are usually eaten early in the season. A plant that humans scorn because of the itchy rash it may give us when we unintentionally brush against its leaves, provides an excellent source of berries for wintering birds. The poison ivy is one of the best berry providers. In sheltered areas in shrub swamp sections of the SWAMP as well as along the road through the Patterson Environmental Park, one can easily spot Robins and Bluebirds that have stayed the winter as well as song sparrows, swamp sparrows and golden-crowned kinglets. The kinglets are insect eaters too.

Bird nests, long abandoned by their builders and owners are also a find on a winter hike. Try to identify the former owner!

Join FrOGS on a hike through a section of the north flow of the Great Swamp adjoining the Swamp River at Sharperoon in Dover.

Date: Sunday, February 10th at 1PM

Please call Laurie Wallace 279-8858 or Judy Moberg 878-7740 for Reservations



Birds nest in Red Osier Dogwood

The Editors of the Newsletter would like to thank Jean Hannon and Judy Kelley Moberg for their wonderful drawings for this newsletter

DID YOU KNOW?

The Great SWAMP is listed in the New York State Open Space Plan as a priority project in the 2001 Plan that includes 132 Projects statewide.

NEWS FLASH!

Governor Pataki's recent designation of the Croton Watershed as Critical Resource Waters provides greater protection for the Great Swamp. It includes the SWAMP in the area requiring the Army Corps of Engineers to conduct a more far-reaching and public review of all project rather than their weaker Nationwide Permit Program.



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 supporter extends FrOGS reach and effectiveness Contributions support the efforts of Education Committee, the Spring Celebration and this newsletter

Please consider a tax deductible gift to FrOGS. Send your gift to

**Friends of the Great Swamp
P.O. Box 373, Pawling, NY 12564**

Name: _____
Address: _____
Phone Number: Day: _____
Evening: _____
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	_____ Publicity
_____ Education Committee	_____ Mailings
_____ Art Show	_____ Other