

RESEARCH ♦ EDUCATION ♦ CONSERVATION

## Babies of the Great Swamp



Volume 21, Issue 1 Spring 2023

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*Friends of the Great Swamp was founded in 1990, as a non-profit volunteer organization. Our mission is to preserve and protect the health of the Great Swamp watershed through research, education and conservation.*

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# Welcome to the New Chairman of the Board!

Ken Luhman has been an active Board member for 6 years. He contributes his heart and soul, chainsaw and cameras, and endless hours tending to the Great Swamp's waterways, trails and the FrOGS Board of directors he now leads. His enthusiasm for his "backyard" (which literally is the Great Swamp), shines through all he does.

Ken is the facilities manager for a country club in Greenwich, CT during the work week. Most of his free time is spent in the Great Swamp. It helps him relax and connect to the wonders of nature. "My favorite thing in the world is to photograph all the wildlife, follow their patterns, and wait for their offspring to be born. I love getting to know them in their natural environment." The photos and videos from his 50 well-placed cameras reveal much about the flora and fauna of the swamp. "I stick them in the oddest places and get the shot of a lifetime."

Wisdom of the natural world comes from spending most of his life outdoors. Ken is committed to deepening his understanding about all aspects of FrOGS: the science, the history, and expanding its reach to a wider audience. "I remember the day Jim (James Utter, previous Chairman) came up to my front door and told me about FrOGS. I thought this was the best thing in the world! I believe FrOGS is a great organization. Protecting and focusing attention on our natural resources is very satisfying and rewarding. If it brings joy to people, whether it's a paddle, a hike, or learning something new about the Great Swamp, then I am happy."



"Spring is an amazing time in the Great Swamp! Everything is so green and full of life. I always look forward to the wildflowers, butterflies and dragonflies." Ken's vision of being a caretaker of the Great Swamp for future generations is expressed in the many canoe trips he takes with his grandchildren, nurturing their appreciation of this beautiful resource, and in his new position as FrOGS Chairman of the Board.

## FrOGS Board of Directors 2023

Ken Luhman, Chairman

Laurie Wallace, Secretary/Treasurer

Jim Utter, Ex Officio Chairman

Paul Andrews, Vice Chairman

Kirk Edleman • Kathryn Jaliman • Judy Kelley-Moberg  
Sharon Nakazato • Ron Pascale • Jenny Pirc • Mac Rand  
Mary Rice • Astri Teal • Lisa Toohey • Julie Toscano

## FrOGS Needs Your Help!

### JOIN ~ VOLUNTEER ~ DONATE

The generosity of our members and supporters extends FrOGS reach and effectiveness.

**Fill out and return this form or visit [frogs-ny.org](http://frogs-ny.org)**

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

**DONATION** Remember your donations are tax deductible! Send yours to:  
**Friends of The Great Swamp, P.O. Box 373, Pawling, NY 12564**

- ☐ Supporter \$25   ☐ Contributor \$50   ☐ Friend \$100  
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**VOLUNTEER** We can always use another helping hand! Let us know which activities you're interested in helping with. You can pick more than one.

- ☐ Research & Conservation   ☐ Canoe Trips   ☐ Hikes  
☐ Educational Activities   ☐ Art Show   ☐ Trail Work  
☐ Suggest an activity: \_\_\_\_\_

*So we know whom to thank...*

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# Flying Monkeys in the Great Swamp!

Have you ever been called a bird brain? Did you know that crows have been called flying monkeys because they are so smart? Members of the Corvid family of birds (which includes crows, ravens, magpies, and jays), parrots, and owls are known to be especially smart. They can count, communicate with humans, remember faces for years, recognize themselves in a mirror, make tools, and solve complex mechanical problems to get food (check out some YouTube videos and be amazed—search for crow intelligence). Crows have been claimed to be as smart as a 7-year old child. How can they be so intelligent when their brains are so small?

Neurons are the specialized cells in our bodies that are responsible for receiving input from our senses about the external world, for sending commands to our muscles to move, and for transforming and relaying the electrical signals in our brains that let us think. In addition to neurons, the brain also contains various types of cells called glia that provide structure and neuronal support (like a pit crew in a car race), as well as immune system cells that protect against microbial infection. In 2005, Dr. Suzana Herculano-Houzel and her research team in Brazil developed techniques for counting the total number of cells in homogenized brains as well as the neurons only. Their work challenged the dogma of the time that there were over 100 billion neurons in human brains and that the number of glial cells was 10-fold greater. They found that the human brain contains approximately equal numbers of neurons and glial cells at 85 billion each.

Applying their technique to bird brains has revealed that the total number of neurons in some birds' brains are greater than the number of neurons in many monkey brains! For example, although the raven's brain is only one fourth the weight of a capuchin monkey's brain, they have slightly more total neurons, 1.2 billion versus 1.1 billion neurons (see table). The blue-and-yellow macaw (a parrot) has a brain that weighs one fifth that of a macaque monkey, but has 1.9 billion neurons versus the macaque's 1.7 billion neurons. Obviously, this means a bird's neurons are smaller and much more tightly packed

than a monkey's. The number of brain neurons explains why birds are as smart as monkeys despite their much smaller brains. So next time someone calls you are a bird brain, take that as a compliment because birds are smart!

The crow and raven population in the Great Swamp and the Northeast collapsed in the early 2000s due to a West Nile virus outbreak. They have been making a comeback and are now readily seen around the Great Swamp. Ravens love to nest in bridges and cell towers; there is currently a raven rookery in the trestle bridge along the Maybrook Trailway just south of Rt 164. Have you seen any crows or ravens nearby? Now when you see a crow or raven flying by in the Great Swamp cawing or cr-r-rucking at you, just think "Well, there goes a flying monkey!"

Hey monkey, I have more neurons!



Species	Brain Weight (grams)	Brain Neurons (billion)
Eurasian jay	2.9	0.5
Owl monkey	10.6	0.4
Raven	10.2	1.2
Capuchin monkey	38.2	1.1
Macaw	14.3	1.9
Macaque monkey	69.8	1.7

From Olkowicz S, et al. Proc Natl Acad Sci USA. 2016;113:7255-60.

## Strange Corvid Facts

- A group of crows is called a "murder", whereas a group of ravens is called an "unkindness" or "conspiracy"
- Adolescent ravens leave home and live in teenage gangs until they pair off and mate when 3 to 4 years old
- Crows call others in and hold a wake when they find a dead crow; this behavior probably means they are surveying the area to learn about potential threats to their lives. Smart!

# A Nature Reserve in Pawling Dedicated to Gordon Douglas

On May 7, 2023 FrOGS formally dedicated a 194-acre property along the north flow of the Great Swamp as The Gordon Douglas Nature Reserve.



## THE MAN

Gordon has been an environmental activist in his own backyard, the embodiment of the motto "think globally and act locally." In 1990, after buying his country home in Pawling, he was part of an Advisory Committee to the Regional Plan Associations' *The Great Swamp Conservation Plan*. FrOGS was created at that time and Gordon helped define its mission and gain non-profit status. In 1997, he started writing a column for the Pawling News Chronicle, called "On the Wild Side." For 11 years he researched and wrote about the environment from backyard bears to global warming. The same year he helped start FrOGS' Great Swamp Art Show at Christ Church on Quaker Hill. He has served as chairman and vice chairman of FrOGS, forayed out on rainy evenings to monitor nesting turtles, and shared his wisdom and enthusiasm as a Board member until earning emeritus status in 2018. His

focus has always been finding ways to connect the public to the wonder and value of the natural world and our duty to protect it. FrOGS wished to honor his work by naming our amazingly diverse property The Gordon Douglas Nature Reserve.

## THE RESERVE

The Reserve gathers the rain that falls on the tree-tops on the eastern side of Corbin Hill as it flows down the forested slope over rocky outcrops with views of the valley, past bobcat dens and the Appalachian Trail on the way to the valley floor. Crossing an old roadbed shadowed by a grove of towering hemlocks, the rain seeps into the shrubby edge of the cattail marsh that surrounds the Swamp River. The river takes the water north to the Ten Mile



View of Corbin Hill from the Swamp River flowing through The Gordon Douglas Nature Reserve

River, then east to the Housatonic River and down to Long Island Sound, where it flows out to sea, evaporates, and returns as rain in an endless cycle.

East of the Swamp River, the Reserve contains a low marble ridge adjacent to the Metro-North Railroad tracks next to Route 22 in Pawling. FrOGS' new chairman, Ken Luhman, has taken charge of developing a trail system on the ridge with views of the river, the marsh and sunsets over Corbin Hill. Besides the wide variety of habitats and vegetation



Gordon Douglas and Ken Luhman at sign unveiling

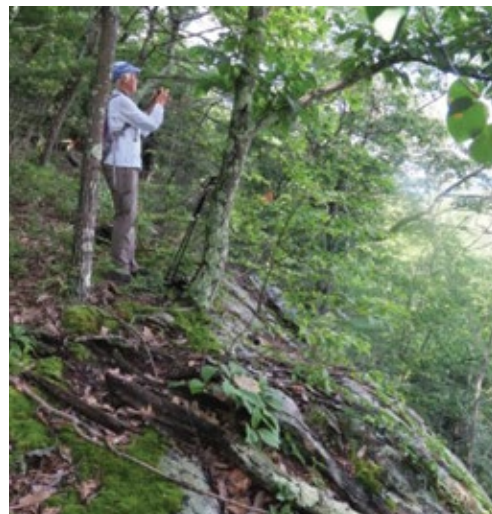


found from ridgetop to river, trail-cams have revealed its importance to wildlife. Ducks, heron, otter and beaver live and move through its wetlands; den sites make it a nursery for the bobcat, fox and coyote that use the river bank as a highway; and bears like to scratch their backs on the trees. This dedication is a fitting tribute to a passionate environmentalist, may it stay forever wild.

*Note: Access to The Gordon Douglas Nature Reserve is restricted to programmed field trips led by FrOGS.*



Bear claw marks on beech tree in the Nature Reserve

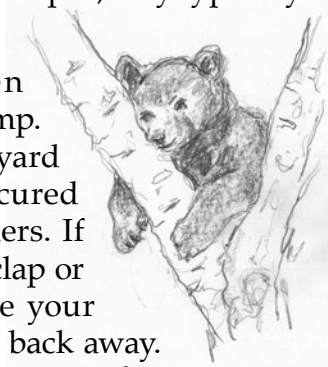


Corbin Hill viewpoint in Nature Reserve

## Sightings in the Swamp

Spring in the Great Swamp means baby animals are everywhere! One of the earliest to arrive are bear cubs, born during the winter denning period, usually between mid-January and early February. At birth, cubs weigh less than half a pound and are hairless. A mother bear (sow) will typically give birth to one to three cubs at a time and, contrary to myth, is not hibernating but awake at the time of delivery. When cubs emerge from their dens with their mother in March to April, they typically weigh around 5 pounds.

Black bears are seen throughout the Great Swamp. To avoid encounters in your yard be sure your garbage is secured and remove your bird feeders. If you encounter a bear: yell, clap or bang metallic objects; wave your arms; stay calm; and slowly back away. Mother bears are very protective of their cubs. If you come across bear cubs in the Great Swamp, cautiously leave the area.



Bear in the Gordon Douglas Nature Reserve

and another cub were found dead near the tracks, likely killed by a passing train.

As you ramble and paddle about the watershed, keep your eyes open for the many babies of the Great Swamp.

Species	Birth Time	Baby Name
bear	January–February	cub
bobcat	April–May	kitten
deer	May–June	fawn
coyote	April–May	pup
otters	March–April	kit
rabbits	March–September	kit or kitten
raccoons	early summer	kit or cub
opossum	February–July	joey
wood ducks	April–May	duckling
wood turtles	mid-August	hatchling
frogs	April	tadpole

On March 31, two motherless bear cubs were spotted along the train tracks in Pawling. An Environmental Control Officer from the DEC was able to capture the frisky cubs and transfer them to 'Friends of the Feathered and Furry Wildlife Center' in the Catskills where they will be nurtured and released in the fall. The cubs were only 5 pounds when captured, which indicated they had just emerged from their den. Sadly, the cubs' mother

# A Tale of Two Species: Cattails versus Phragmites

## CATTAILS (TYPHA)

Many who remember swaths of cattails in wetland areas are saddened to see them gone and replaced by invasive Phragmites. So, cattails are good, Phragmites are bad. Right? The truth, however, is not as clear cut as that. Invasive plants are those that outcompete or overshadow other plants that have been growing in an area.

To begin with there are three varieties of cattails in North America: two native and one non-native, as well as a hybrid that has developed over the years. All of them are considered invasive when they are completely taking over a wetland. However, the non-native variety seems to be no more invasive than the native ones.

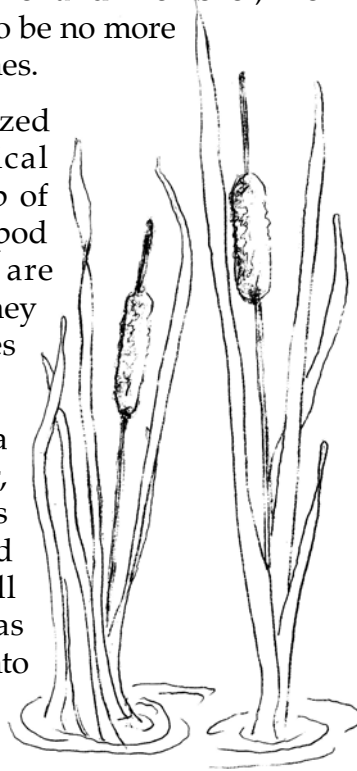
They are easily recognized by the brown cylindrical flowering spike at the top of the stems. In the fall this pod opens and fluffy seeds are dispersed by the wind. They can also spread by rhizomes underground.

Cattails can be part of a healthy wetland; however, plants form dense stands in aquatic ecosystems and can easily take over small ponds. Human activity has increased nutrient runoff into aquatic environments and this has contributed to more rapid spread.

Wetland plants like cattails are effective in filtering runoff and purifying the water they live in. They also provide habitat for marsh birds like the red-winged blackbird, as well as fish, insects, and water loving animals like muskrat.

Most parts of the cattail are edible if harvested at the proper time. The rhizomes can be a starchy potato substitute and can also be ground into flour.

Cattails were used by many Indigenous people for medicinal purposes, including wounds, kidney stones, respiratory illness, and diarrhea. The reeds and leaves were also used to weave baskets, mats, and roofing.



## COMMON REED (PHRAGMITES)

In North America there are several species and subspecies of Phragmites, only one of which is native. The non-native species were introduced from Europe, most likely unintentionally, in ballast or shipping crates. All species of Phragmites are considered extremely invasive.

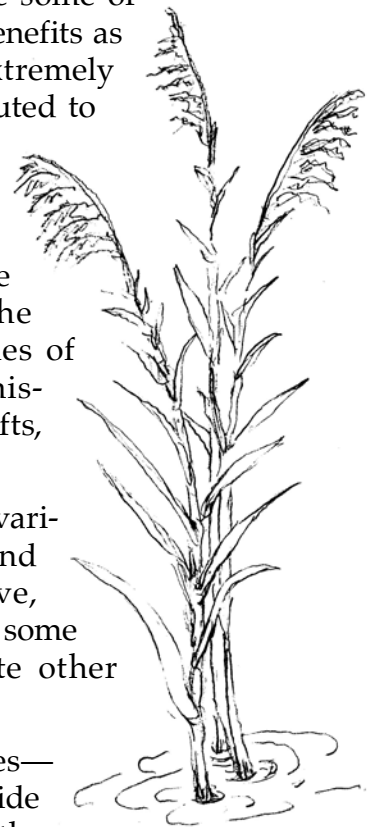
Phragmites can be easily distinguished from cattails because they lack a distinctive brown cylindrical seed pod. Instead, the flowers form branching clusters, often arching to the side, appearing much like a very tall field of wheat. Seeds are produced but rarely mature, and plants spread mostly by underground rhizomes. All species of Phragmites easily outcompete both native and non-native cattails.

Phragmites can provide some of the same water filtering benefits as cattails, however, their extremely rapid growth has contributed to restricted tidal flows and increased brackish conditions in tidal marshes.

Indigenous people also found uses for the native, pre-colonial species of Phragmites, including whistles, pipestems, arrow shafts, and matting.

So, it seems that all the varieties of both cattails and Phragmites are invasive, whether native or not, and some invasives can outcompete other invasives.

In general, native species—even invasive ones—provide a more suitable habitat for the native flora and fauna that evolved with them. Non-native imports can upset a long-established ecological balance in an environment.





# Everything You've Been Meaning to Ask About Plein Air Events!

## What is this "Plein Air" thing anyway?

Ever since the early 19th century, when western European painters began traipsing the fields and mountains to draw and paint "en plein air," French for "in the open air," painters have sought to capture something of the awesome mystery and beauty or even the terror of live nature by working outdoors. It comes as a surprise to some that landscape (or seascape or mountainscape or riverscape) painting was not always so. In fact, the métier of art before then was always an indoors job. In any case, with the Impressionists like Monet and moderns like Van Gogh landscape artists were outside for good.

## Only for painters?

By no means. As painters were joined by photographers with the development of photography through the 19th and into the 20th century, the two informed and inspired one another. That is even more true today. Many artists work in both media.

## Outside from start to finish?

Not necessarily. Many sketchers, painters, and photographers try to record their impressions in the field and then finish or work up the final piece in the studio. No pressure; work as you like!

## What is the allure of Plein Air?

There are many perks to joining a Plein Air event. You are outdoors in beautiful settings with the time to appreciate all the sounds and scents and visual delights of nature. Unlike hiking, the space is there to fully take in all that's around you. It's a perfect environment to blend meditation, mindfulness, and art.

And then, if you want to be social there are other nature lovers around you many of whom are gracious with sharing information and support. If you prefer to be quiet it is also the perfect setting for a date with yourself.

## Will I need to spend a lot for art supplies?

While you can equip yourself for a week in the mountain wilds, all you need initially is a (camera) phone and/or something to draw with and something to draw on. (More about this paraphernalia



question in the next newsletter.) You are encouraged to only make as big of a deal of the day as makes you comfortable.

## What is special about FrOGS Plein Air events?

First of all, FrOGS offers opportunities to draw, paint, and photograph at sites within the Great Swamp watershed that are intimate, spectacular, moving, full of suggestive moments. A number of the most exciting of these sites are on private lands and made available only for FrOGS Plein Air participants.

Secondly, all art from these sites is qualified to apply for the Great Swamp Fall Celebration and Art Show, which only accepts subject matter from within the Great Swamp watershed.

## How do I join in?

Beginner? Wouldn't know where to start? Mmm, a little bit of experience? Been photographing or painting since you were 12? All are welcome!! Keep your eye on the Event Calendar on the FrOGS web-site and get on the artists list email by contacting me. By all means come out and give it a try.

I am happy to answer questions,  
help you get started, or get involved.

**Sharon Nakazato**  
**845-612-1046**

**sharon\_nakazato@comcast.net**

P.O. Box 373 • Pawling, NY 12564

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## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

### Checking on the Rookery Paddle

*Sunday May 28 (9:00am & 11:30am)*

On the North Flow of the Great Swamp. Launching from Wheeler Road in Wingdale, a 2-hour paddle south and back upriver north to the Rookery. Launch times are 9:00am and 11:30am (16 paddler max). Bring your own kayak or use our canoes. Paddle is rain or shine.

### Master Gardener Hikes

*Saturday May 20 10:00am-2:30pm*

*Saturday June 17 10:00am-2:30pm*

*Saturday July 15 10:00am-noon*

These Cornell Cooperative Extension volunteer-guided hikes will explore Putnam County's natural beauty, ecological history, and threats from invasive species. Location provided upon registration at [putnam.cce.cornell.edu/events](http://putnam.cce.cornell.edu/events)

### Plein Air Dates

*Thursday, May 25 (9:00am-12:00pm)*

*Great Hollow*

*Tuesday, June 6 (4:00 pm)*

*Great Hollow*

*Thursday, June 15 (9:00am-12:00pm)*

*Deer Pond Farm*

More coming! Contact: Sharon Nakazato for meeting point and more information at 845-612-1046, [sharon\\_nakazato@comcast.net](mailto:sharon_nakazato@comcast.net)

### Late Spring Hike— Michael Cialola Conservation Area

*Saturday, June 17 (9:30am)*

A 6.6-mile hike loop located on Haviland Hollow Rd, Patterson, NY. Considered a moderate hike, great views, and a beautiful waterfall. Hike will start at 9:30am.

### Gordon Douglas

#### Nature Reserve (west) Hike

*Sunday, July 23 (9:00am)*

Branching off the AT we will walk roughly 6.3 miles/4 hours through the reserve using very few trails. This is considered a difficult/challenging hike for experienced hikers. Exploring rocky cliffs, passing a large glacial erratic and hiking diverse terrain to the mountain top for a spectacular view. Packing lunch is recommended along with plenty of water. Meet at the Metro-North Appalachian Trail parking lot off Route 22 at 9:00am.

### Maybrook Trailway Bike Ride

*Sunday, August 13 (9:30am)*

FrOGS-sponsored Bike Ride on the Maybrook Trailway trail. We will meet at 9:30am in Holmes at the Trailway parking lot off of Route 292. A 1.5-hour ride south passing through areas of The Great Swamp. Rain date will be August 21.

### North Flow Paddle

*Sunday, September 10 (10:00am)*

At Wheeler Road in Wingdale. Launch time 10:00am. 2-hour paddle South and back upriver to the Rookery (16 paddler max). Bring your own kayak or use our canoes. Paddle is weather permitting and a good water level.

### Pawling Nature Preserve Hike

*Sunday, September 24 (9:00am)*

A moderately challenging line for the first 1/4 mile, rest of hike is random terrain with beautiful views. 9:00am start from Sprague Road entrance to trails in Wingdale, NY. Rain date is October 1st.

### Last Hurrah Fall Paddle

*Sunday, October 8 (9:00am & 11:30am)*

At Wheeler Road in Wingdale. Launch times 9:00am and 11:30am. 2-hour paddle South and back upriver to the Rookery (16 paddler max). Bring your own kayak or use our canoes. Paddle is rain or shine.

The most up-to-date list of events can always be found on our Facebook page: [facebook.com/FrOGS.NY](https://facebook.com/FrOGS.NY)

You can also sign up for email updates via our website: [frogs-ny.org](http://frogs-ny.org)