THE GREAT SWAMP NEWSLETTER

RESEARCH • EDUCATION • CONSERVATION

NATURE AWAKENS

Lady's slipper orchid by Sharon Nakazato

Woodcock and nest by Sharon Nakazato

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Contributors: Paul Andrews, Kathryn Jaliman, Judy Kelley-Moberg, Ted Kozlowski, Ken Luhman, Melanie Taverner, Sharon Nakazato

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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KEN'S KORNER

Environmental Loss versus Profit by Ken Luhman

The prioritization of profit often comes at the expense of environmental protection and the safeguarding of our water resources, which are vital for our health and communities.

Could changes in policy impact The Great Swamp and other watersheds, threatening the ecosystems and communities that depend on them? We sure hope not. It's a shame that the environmental protections we put in place are now being ignored and pushed aside.

The current administration has weakened Clean Water Act protections by rolling back the Waters of the United States (WOTUS) regulations. This has left wetlands, streams, and waterways more vulnerable, prompting us to stay alert.

Additionally, there have been delays or rollbacks in regulations concerning toxic substances, including per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), lead, and other emerging contaminants. A reduced focus on climate initiatives has increased the risks of long-term drought, extreme precipitation, and instability in water supply. Funding for water infrastructure, sewage treatment upgrades, and lead remediation programs has been cut or limited. As a consequence, we may witness the loss of wetlands and headwater streams due to these rollbacks. We hope this will not be the case, and that friends and neighbors will not allow it to happen. The degradation of these areas, which naturally filter and store water, poses significant environmental risks. Protectors of the environment will need your support now more than ever, as protective policies are being reduced, rewritten, or removed. Lawmakers are fighting hard to reverse these changes that would allow people who have no respect for our environment to pollute our waterways, which we fought so hard to protect. So, please support your local environmental groups, and if you see something concerning, speak up. It doesn't take much to harm a habitat or a water source, and once it's polluted or contaminated, it could take many decades to recover.

FrOGS Needs *Your* Help!

JOIN ~ VOLUNTEER ~ DONATE

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

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

Please fill out and return this form or visit frogs-ny.org

DONATION

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

☐ Supporter $35 ☐ Couple $60 ☐ Friend $100
☐ Patron $250 ☐ Sponsor $500 ☐ Benefactor $1,000

Please use my donation for: _____

VOLUNTEER

We can always use another helping hand! Let us know which activities you're interested in helping with.

☐ Fall Celebration ☐ Trail Work ☐ Booth Staffing
☐ Habitat Restoration ☐ Animal Surveys ☐ Event Registration

Suggest an activity: _____

So we know whom to thank...

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY, STATE, ZIP _____

CONTACT PHONE _____

EMAIL _____

SIGHTINGS IN THE SWAMP

The Tumbling Timberdoodle

By Judy Kelley-Moberg

I was introduced to this unusual bird at dusk in an old farm field above The Great Swamp. We stood quietly and listened until we heard nasal "peents" then a chipping trill as the dark shape of a chunky robin-sized bird flew up in larger and larger circles hundreds of feet into the sky, and then a bubbly twittering sound as it tumbled erratically back down to the ground.

We were watching the amazing aerial mating display of the male American Woodcock (*Scolopax minor*). The female watched from a protected spot on the ground. Several males displayed during the evening. How does the female choose?

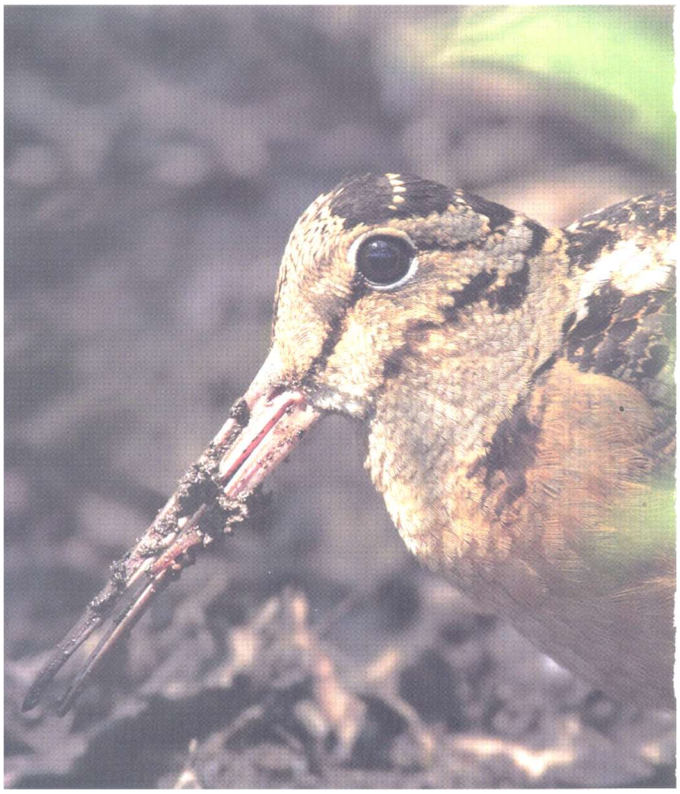
A group of woodcocks is called a fall.

The American Woodcock or "timberdoodle" is a small (11-inch) shore bird that abandoned sandy seaside beaches to spend its time in moist woods, brushy swamps, and wet thickets near the "displaying grounds" found in old fields and pastures.

Woodcocks are shy, secretive birds with a patterned plumage of blacks, tans, and whites that mimic dead leaves and twigs. This small stocky bird with a big head and almost no neck has some interesting adaptations that help it feast on the earthworms that make up 60% of its diet. The unusually large eyes are set back on its head, giving it a great over-and-behind-itself view as well as keeping the mud out when the bill is inserted all the way into the soil. It stamps to disturb the worms and then probes for them in the soil with the moveable tip of its long prehensile bill.

The female lays four buff-colored eggs near the displaying area in a shallow cup-like depression lined with dead leaves. The chicks are born in about 3 weeks fully feathered and mobile. Several days later the hen teaches them how to probe for their dinner. In about 28 days they can fly and are ready for their fall migration south to hopefully return again to the same fields next spring.

One wonders if their population has suffered from the regrowth of all the abandoned farm fields.



The woodcock's prehensile bill with a hinged tip packed with nerve endings is ideally suited for detecting and grabbing worms in soft wet soil.

Woodcock Oddities

- Have 360° vision
- Their brains are upside down
- Ears are located below its eyes, unlike other birds
- Goofy wobbly walk used to vibrate the soil and trick earthworms into moving
- The slowest sustained flight of any bird at 5 mph
- Nicknames include bogsucker, mud snipe, Labrador twister, night partridge, hokumpoke
- Can eat their weight in worms in a day

THE EDIE KEASBEY AWARD RECIPIENT IS OLIVER FIGUEROA LOPEZ

By Kathryn Jaliman

Friends of the Great Swamp announce that the 2026 Edie Keasbey Award goes to Oliver Figueroa Lopez. He was chosen for being someone with future aspirations towards the causes core to FrOGS's mission, and for caring about and being an advocate for his local environs. Oliver will graduate from Carmel High School in June, and will attend Baruch College as a Marketing major in the fall. He intends to pursue a digital marketing career to support nonprofits and businesses.

Oliver was born in Mount Kisco and moved to Patterson in the beginning of middle school. He lived very close to the Patterson Environmental Park then, and loved canoeing and taking walks along the trails. He fondly remembers being with his older brother and having wonderful conversations about life under the cool canopy of the trees. The Great Swamp provided a haven for Oliver, a place to relax and just be. "Having a place that is peaceful is important to me. It is one of the things I appreciate about The Great Swamp. Most of what I do in the rest of my life is very fast paced, so to spend time in nature is very restorative for me. Being in the Swamp creates a slower pace and a peaceful setting. Surrounded by nature is very calming for me, and probably everyone! Many memorable times with my family include paddling, walking, and talking in The Great Swamp."

In high school, Oliver has been very active in FBLA (Future Business Leaders of America) both in their public speaking competitions and as the treasurer. He used the challenge of public speaking to develop discipline by practicing everyday with his advisor, and now supports the new club members with their talks. His experience of receiving support from the communities in which he has lived inspires him to pay it forward. Oliver is an active volunteer for the Food Pantry, a church that provides free shoes for those in need, and the Patterson Rotary Club. The Rotary Club's motto is: Service Above Self. "I appreciate this and have it as a motto for myself. I try to help others no matter what the situation, both in my business and volunteering."

According to Oliver, The Great Swamp is a 6,000-acre ecological powerhouse. Some caring people (like FrOGS) appreciate this ecosystem and dedicate time to taking care of it. His vision for The Great Swamp as a digital marketing advisor would be to tell a compelling story about the history and creation of The Great Swamp that connects with the community's values. One could illustrate how this ecosystem should be treated with care and highlight its role as providing a safe space for many native species, and for the human visitors, too. This could shift public perception from indifference to stewardship.

"Receiving the Edie Keasbey award is a motivation for me to keep helping others. Even if I am not getting paid or financially rewarded for what I am doing, I don't mind. I want to continue to do what I value and give it freely to the organizations that I believe in. That's a mission for me. The Edie Keasbey Award honors giving to one's community passionately. This award will remind me to keep doing this throughout my whole life!" Congratulations, Oliver. We wish you all the best in the future: your studies, business, and all the ways you are a force for good.

THE SEARCH FOR THE GREAT PUMPKIN ASH

By Ted Kozlowski, Forester and Patterson Environmental Conservation Inspector

Pumpkin Ash (*Fraxinus profunda*) is one of four ash tree species native to New York State. White ash, green ash, and black ash are the other three. Sometimes referred to as red ash, pumpkin ash is named after its bulbous base, somewhat resembling a pumpkin when mature. Pumpkin ash is primarily found in wetlands, such as swamps, floodplains, and riparian areas. It is not as ubiquitous as white and green ashes and its range is broken into three general areas of the United States, which is along the eastern sections of states bordering the Mississippi River, swampy areas in the upper midwestern states, and the eastern sections of the southern states. Strange as it may sound, pumpkin ash is found in Central Park and Van Cortland Park in New York City. There are two small locations in central New York State where several pumpkin ash reside and a very small population in extreme southern Ontario in Canada, where it is listed as critically endangered. In New York, the Natural Heritage Program ranks pumpkin ash as S1 (Critically Imperiled). The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) ranks pumpkin ash as Critically Endangered. Yet it is reported that approximately 300 pumpkin ash exist in the Jerome Wetland Area at Van Cortland Park in the middle of the Bronx. How can this be?

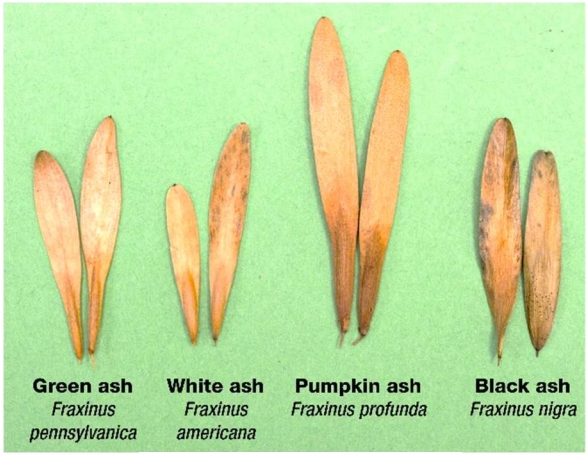
Bulbous, buttressed base of the pumpkin ash.

Both Central Park and Van Cortland Park were developed in 1858 and 1888 respectively, when New York City had farms and woodlands and lots of wetland. Some of those wetland areas were saved for the parks and pumpkin ash must have been part of those ecosystems. Development, ash yellow disease, and now emerald ash borer are likely some of the factors in the loss of pumpkin ash in our state but I bet there is another factor in play. Ash trees are a bit challenging to identify, especially immature ones. Since pumpkin ash is specific to wetlands, just how many people actually traverse through thick swampy areas where they may be hiding? Most of us paddle the waterways or hike on established trails and boardwalks. The wetland zones left in New York City are small and well documented. I will bet that The Great Swamp, being the second largest wetland in New York State, is home to at least a few pumpkin ash trees because if 300 pumpkin ash are growing in an 89-acre Bronx wetland, then the odds are fairly good that some exist within a 6000-acre wetland just to the north.

Besides the buttressing of the base of a mature pumpkin ash, the best way to differentiate it from the other ash trees is to understand that white ash will not grow in hydric, mucky soils and black ash is a wetland tree fairly common to wetlands in New York but not documented in Putnam County. Green ash is very common in The Great Swamp but it does not have pubescence (tiny hairs) on its stems and under its leaves (pumpkin ash does). The margins on the leaves of pumpkin ash are smooth, while the margins on green ash are finely toothed. Pumpkin ash has the largest seed of any ash species in New York, which exceeds 2 inches while green ash seed are less than 2 inches long.

Pumpkin ash leaf. The underside is fuzzy and the margins are smooth, unlike the finely-toothed green ash leaf. From tree-guide.com.

If pumpkin ash is growing in the wetlands of New York City, then it must be in The Great Swamp. Let's go find it (and maybe a black ash as well) before the emerald ash borers do.



Comparison of ash seeds.

SAY "NO" TO NEONICOTINOIDS

By Melanie Taverner

On one of those surprisingly warm days in March, I was enjoying the return of green life until I heard the familiar buzz of a mosquito in my ear. Mosquitoes are a ubiquitous sign of warm weather that most of us work to ward off. As annoying as they may be, there are ways to responsibly manage this persistent blood-sucker. As with most eco-conscious management, informed decision making is key to develop an environment comfortable for us humans while resulting in the least effect on our ecosystem.

Mosquitoes play an important role in our food chain. Mosquito eggs, larvae, and adults are eaten by anything from fish to dragonflies, bats, birds, spiders, and lizards, along with many other predators. They additionally feed on plant nectar, serving as a pollinator source. Interestingly, certain plants emit scents that are just as attractive to mosquitoes as carbon dioxide; one example of this is the blunt leaf orchid. Of course, mosquitoes are also a vector for terrible diseases to humans, pets, and livestock. As our climate changes, we are experiencing longer mosquito seasons. Climate Central reports an average of 129 "mosquito days" here in the Northeast.

Mosquitoes are active in temperatures above 50°F and thrive in warm, humid weather. They are crepuscular, meaning they are most active at dawn and dusk. Recent research out of Columbia University explored the circadian rhythm of mosquitoes and suggests future control could relate to altering these neuronal signals. Currently, the primary mechanism of managing mosquitoes is by spraying broad spectrum pesticides.

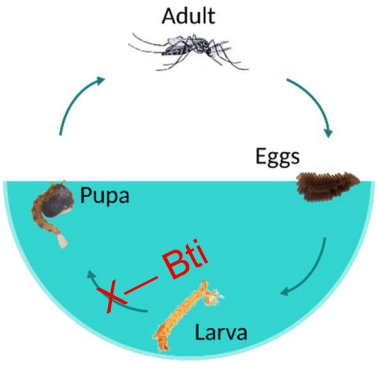
Neonicotinoids (neonics) are the most commonly used class of insecticides in the world. They are chemically similar to nicotine where they work to excite nerve cells and can cause tremors, paralysis, and death. Broad-spectrum insecticide use on plants and soil is indiscriminate of who and what it attacks. Neonics have been linked to mass deaths in birds, fish, and many other species. Much advocacy has been done regarding their role in the decline of bee populations. Once these chemicals are applied to a plant, even as a seed, they remain in the plant and its flowers and fruit for years. Bees who feed off the contaminated nectar then die. Further, the fruit that is produced by these treated plants contain neonics embedded within. Treated soil remains affected for years and runoff then enters our waterways. Unsurprisingly, neonicotinoid exposure has made its way up the food chain to humans and has been linked to a host of developmental and hormonal disruptions in children and adults.

Currently, there is no federal regulation regarding neonicotinoids. Some states have passed laws to control certain elements of neonicotinoid use. In 2024, New York was the first state to ban neonicotinoid-treated corn, soybean, and wheat seeds (beginning in 2029) and prohibits the use of neonics on lawns, gardens, and golf courses (beginning in 2027). As such, it is paramount that consumers research the active ingredients in the products they choose to use in their homes and communities, in order to make educated choices.

Mosquito Bucket Challenge

One pesticide-free method of managing mosquitoes in your backyard is to make a mosquito trap. The Homegrown National Park movement outlines the steps to using a product called Mosquito Dunks inside of a bucket. The active ingredient in this product is Bti (*Bacillus thuringiensis* subspecies *israelensis)*, a bacteria that naturally occurs in dirt and is toxic to mosquito, fungus gnat, and blackfly larvae. The trap is an enticing environment for mosquitoes to lay their eggs. The presence of Bti prevents the hatched larvae from becoming viable adults.

Join the Mosquito Bucket Challenge at: https://homegrownnationalpark.org/build-**mosquito**-bucket/.



THE LADY'S SLIPPER ORCHID

By Paul Andrews

Lady's slipper orchids are among the most fascinating and distinctive wildflowers in the plant kingdom. Found in forests, wetlands, and mountain regions across North America, Europe, and Asia, lady's slipper orchids (*Cypripedium)* have captivated botanists and nature lovers for centuries because of their rare beauty, specialized growing habits, and remarkable survival strategies.

The most recognizable feature of a lady's slipper orchid, also called the moccasin flower, is its inflated lower petal, called the "labellum." This pouch acts like a trap for insects. Bees and other pollinators are lured inside by color, scent, or nectar-like markings. Once inside, the insect cannot easily escape through the entrance and must crawl through a narrow passage that forces it to brush against the flower's pollen structures. In this way, the orchid ensures pollination while providing little or no nectar reward. This clever adaptation makes the plant highly efficient at reproduction.

Lady's slipper orchids are also notable for their striking variety of colors and patterns. There are four varieties and multiple hybrids. Some species display brilliant pink petals, while others bloom in shades of yellow, white, purple, or deep burgundy. Their leaves are often broad and pleated, growing low to the ground in elegant clusters. The flowers themselves may appear delicate, but many species are surprisingly long-lived, with some plants surviving for decades in undisturbed habitats.

Another unique characteristic is the orchid's relationship with soil fungi. Like many orchids, lady's slippers produce extremely tiny seeds that contain almost no stored nutrients. To germinate successfully, the seeds must connect with specific fungi in the soil that supply essential nutrients during early growth. Because of this dependence, lady's slipper orchids are very difficult to transplant or cultivate outside their natural environment; attempts to do so will ultimately fail and may damage fragile ecosystems. Digging up or damaging lady's slippers is illegal on all Federal lands and all public land in New York State. A lady's slipper orchid seed can take years just to become a tiny plant, and even longer to bloom. If you want some for your yard, get them from a reputable nursery.

Lady's slipper orchid. Sharon Nakazato

These orchids are also highly sensitive to environmental change. They thrive only in precise conditions involving soil moisture, shade, temperature, and fungal balance. Deforestation, habitat destruction, and illegal collection have caused populations of many species to decline. Their rarity has increased their mystique and made sightings in the wild especially treasured experiences for hikers and botanists alike.

In addition to their ecological importance, lady's slipper orchids hold cultural significance in many regions. Indigenous peoples of North America incorporated them into legends and traditional medicine, while European folklore often associated the flowers with elegance, mystery, and femininity. Their unusual appearance has inspired artists, gardeners, and photographers for generations.

Lady's slipper orchids stand out not only because of their beauty, but also because of the intricate biological relationships that sustain them. Their slipper-shaped blooms, sophisticated pollination methods, dependence on fungi, and sensitivity to habitat make them one of nature's most extraordinary plants. If you come across lady's slippers in The Great Swamp, admire them but do not touch! Protecting these rare orchids ensures that future generations will continue to marvel at their remarkable uniqueness in the wild.

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CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bedford Audubon - Migration Madness Bird Walk
May 26, Tuesday (7:00 – 9:00 am)

Join Naturalist Tait Johansson for a bird walk on the Maybrook Trailway at Tonetta Lake, 146 Pumphouse Rd in Brewster. The Trailway encompasses a mosaic of habitats — open water at Tonetta Lake, Atlantic white cedar swamp, marsh edges, and upland woodlands. The walkers will be on the lookout for Brown Creeper, Northern Waterthrush, Blackpoll Warbler, and other birds.

Please email Susan to register: info@bedfordaudubon.org.

North Flow Paddle (FrOGS)
June 14, Sunday (9:30 – Noon)

We will depart from the DEC launch site on Wheeler Road in Wingdale. We will paddle up river (south) on the Swamp River and then back north to visit the Great Blue Heron rookery. No children under 16 allowed. Bring your own kayak or use our canoes. Paddle is dependent on weather and a good water level. Please email Ken Luhman at frogspaddle22@gmail.com.

FrOGS Plein Air Dates

Date TBD. As soon as the yellow irises come out, Private Home right on the River in Wingdale. Hosted by Doreen O'Connor

June 3, Wednesday (9:00 – 1:00) Private Home in Dover Plains. Hosted by Doreen O'Connor (Rain date: June 10)

June 15, Monday (9:00 – 1:00) Private Home back yard right on the Swamp in Brewster. Hosted by Sharon Nakazato

June 30, Tuesday (9:00 – 1:00) Private Farm with animals in Brewster. Hosted by Doreen O'Connor

July 20, Monday (10:00 -2:00) Akin Library. Hosted by Sharon Nakazato

July 29, Wednesday (10:15 start) Patterson Library

Note: Prior registration is required for all Events on private land or at the Library.
Contact: Sharon Nakazato 845-612-1046
Doreen O'Connor 914-588-4182

Other events are still being scheduled throughout the summer; make sure you are on the Artists Mailing List for updates and changes.

Audubon Deer Pond Events (Sherman, CT)

June 5, Friday (10:00 – Noon) First Friday Hike

June 6, Saturday (10:00 – Noon) CT Trails Day at Deer Pond Farm

June 11, Thursday (10:00 – Noon) Adaptive Nature Hike for persons with limited mobility

June 14, Sunday (10:00 – Noon) Pileated Woodpeckers and Forest Birds class & walk

June 24, Wednesday (7:00 – 8:00) Fun Facts on Forestry (by Zoom)

July 10, Friday (10:00 – Noon) Forestry Hike

July 16, Thursday (3:00 – 5:00) Adaptive Nature Hike for persons with limited mobility

July 29, Wednesday (9:00 – 11:00) Summer Bird Behaviors class & walk

For details, see: https://www.ctaudubon.org/deer-pond-farm-programs-classes/