

SUMMER SWAMP SHIFTS

**Shifting: berries into food, light though the canopy, to Gen Z leaders,
perceptions of “weeds” to helpful plants**



Plantain (plantago), a good weed by Sharon Nakazato



Sketch by Sharon Nakazato

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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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KEN'S KORNER

Recent Summer Severe Storms by Ken Luhman

Recent storms have impacted us with their severity, high winds, and substantial rainfall. These storms can have both beneficial and detrimental impacts on wetlands and swamps. The effects depend on how strong the storm is, how long it lasts, and the ecosystem's pre-existing health.

Positive impacts include replenishing water supplies, as heavy rain refills wetlands, marshes, and swamps, aiding plants and animals during dry spells. Floodwaters can also deliver nutrient-rich sediments that boost plant growth and create new habitats, such as channels and temporary ponds, which benefit aquatic and bird species. Additionally, water seeping into the ground helps recharge aquifers linked to wetlands.

Negative impacts involve flooding and erosion, which can wash away soil, uproot vegetation, and change wetland shapes. Pollution from runoff carrying fertilizers, pesticides, oil, sewage, plastics, and other contaminants can degrade water quality. Strong winds and floods may destroy nesting sites and vegetation and displace wildlife. Floodwaters can also introduce invasive plants and animals, outcompeting native species.

Recent storms have become more intense in many areas, resulting in extended flooding that can drown plants unadapted to long submersion. Some wetlands experience increased sediment buildup, while others suffer erosion. There's also more pollution from urban and agricultural runoff, along with changes in water chemistry, such as reduced oxygen levels and increased nutrients, which can lead to algal blooms.

Long-term, repeated severe storms can cause lasting changes in wetlands by altering water flow, shifting which species can survive, and transforming freshwater wetlands into brackish ones. They may also impair the natural flood-protection functions of wetlands if vegetation and soil are severely damaged.

Despite these challenges, healthy wetlands are quite resilient. Their plants help slow floodwaters, soils store large amounts of water, and they effectively filter pollutants. Protecting and restoring wetlands promotes faster recovery after storms and helps reduce flood risks to nearby communities.

Unfortunately, one of the minor impacts that affects us the most is the high winds taking down the trees that grow around the canopy along The Great Swamp's central rivers. Most areas where we launch for our paddles have been devastated by trees, which have hampered our paddling schedule, but we are slowly clearing them, and hopefully we'll be out on the river to enjoy these water levels soon.

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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.



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

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

☐ Fall Celebration	☐ Trail Work	☐ Booth Staffing
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SIGHTINGS IN THE SWAMP

ELDERBERRY JAMBOREE

By Melanie Taverner



Summer is surely the season to enjoy fresh berries. One of my family's favorite children's books, *Jamberry*, lists blueberries, strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, and even "razzamatazz-berries." But there is no mention of elderberries. Elderberries are an often-forgotten summer berry despite their rich history in healing and folklore, as well as their significance as a food source for many creatures.

The common elderberry (*Sambucus canadensis*) is also called the American black or Canada elderberry. The plants are shrubs that typically grow 5 to 12 feet tall. Their native range spans from southeast Canada through most of the contiguous states in the US. The plants are typically found growing in edge habitats and prefer sunny to partially shaded areas and moist soil. They produce small white flowers in early to mid-summer, with their dark purple fruit ripening in late summer to early fall. A second native elderberry, the red elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*), shares a similar profile with the exception that it produces bright red berries.

Raw and unripe berries and parts of the shrub such as the leaves and stem should not be consumed uncooked as they can cause severe gastrointestinal upset. The plants contain high levels of cyanogenic glycosides as a defense mechanism, which when converted during digestion, release cyanide into the bloodstreams of humans and some other mammals. Birds and reptiles are not affected. These risks are fully mitigated once the berries are cooked or fermented.

Cooked elderberry syrups, elixirs, and supplements are regularly hailed as beneficial to the immune system and in easing inflammation. While evidence is mixed, there have been some studies to suggest the efficacy of elderberry in decreasing length and severity of sickness.

The uses of the common elderberry and the closely-related European elderberry (*Sambucus nigra*) in North America and in Europe can be traced back thousands of years to ancient civilizations. Native Americans, for example, used tonics of elderberry for pain and for any number of ailments from stomach to skin. They also used the wood to make crafts, tools, and instruments. Further, elderberry has held an important role in folklore and storytelling. Its power to hurt and heal has engendered much respect and mystery. One such tale from northern Europe tells of the importance of the Elder Mother, who guards and protects the elder trees and who visits adversity on those who cut from her without properly requesting permission.

The rich history of the elderberries carries on today, and there are added benefits to preserving this native plant. According to Connecticut Audubon, both elderberry species are regularly frequented by "35 species of moths and butterflies, native bees, hummingbirds, over 100 species of songbirds, and many mammals." This summer, let's accord some special attention to the valuable and storied elderberry. Plant a shrub or two in your yard!

Harvest tip: pick the entire berry cluster and freeze on cookie sheets. The berries will then easily fall off the stems. If you are fortunate enough to have an elderberry source, try these recipes:

Elderberry Jam

- Bring 4 cups of fresh elderberries, 3 cups of granulated sugar, and 2 tablespoons of lemon juice to a boil, stirring until sugar dissolves. (No pectin needed!)
- Continue boiling, stirring occasionally until it reaches 220 degrees (about 20 minutes).
- Pour into 4 clean half-pint jelly jars and seal.

Notes: Whole elderberries will impart a little crunch to the jam due to the seeds and many prefer a jelly. Modern guidance suggests that elderberry jams and jellies cannot be safely stored even when using approved canning methods and should therefore be stored frozen.

Elderberry Jelly

- Boil elderberries and crush with a masher till softened; strain through cheesecloth or sieve to collect 3 cups juice (need 6 qt or 3 lb of berries)
- Boil juice, 4 tbsp lemon juice, and 6 tbsp pectin, and then add 4.5 cups sugar and process according to standard jelly making procedures (bring to rolling boil plus 1 min) .
- Pour into 4 clean half-pint jelly jars and seal.

Elderberries are also great in upside-down cakes (use 1 cup berries instead of pineapple plus ¼ cup in batter).

Make ice cream and smoothies from the syrup.



Large elderberry shrub with ripening berries. Photo by Paul Andrews.



Elderberry flute by Sharon Nakazato.

SUNLIGHT

By Hunter Nigey

Imagine you are walking through a grove of thick trees in The Great Swamp. The air is cool and quiet, and the only sounds you hear are birds singing and leaves rustling in the breeze. As you continue down the winding trail, you notice rays of sunlight shining through the branches above. The light slips between the leaves, creating bright spots that cover the ground like a patchwork quilt.

If you stop for a moment and look around, you will see that not every part of the forest is lit by the sun. Some places are bright, while others are covered in cool, dark shadows. This happens because light travels in straight lines. When a tree trunk, branch, or leaf blocks the sunlight, the light cannot reach the ground behind it. The area where the light is blocked becomes a shadow.



Photo by Kathryn Jaliman

The forest is always changing throughout the day. In the early morning, the sun is low in the sky, so the trees cast long shadows across the trail. Around midday, when the sun is high overhead, the shadows become shorter. As evening approaches, the shadows stretch out once again. Even a gentle breeze can make the leaves move, causing the patches of sunlight and shade to shift across the ground. It almost looks as if the forest floor is alive.

These patterns of light and shadow are more than just beautiful; they also help create different habitats within the Swamp. Some plants grow best in bright sunlight, while others thrive in the cooler, shaded areas beneath the trees. Animals also use

these shaded places to stay cool and protected during warm days.



Photo by Sharon Nakazato

Every beam of sunlight and every shadow tells the story of light traveling from the sun until something in its path blocks it. A walk through The Great Swamp is peaceful and inspiring if you open your eyes to the exquisite surroundings. The next time you visit The Great Swamp, take a moment to look at the ground beneath your feet. The changing patterns of light and shadow are a beautiful example of the nuances of nature all around us.

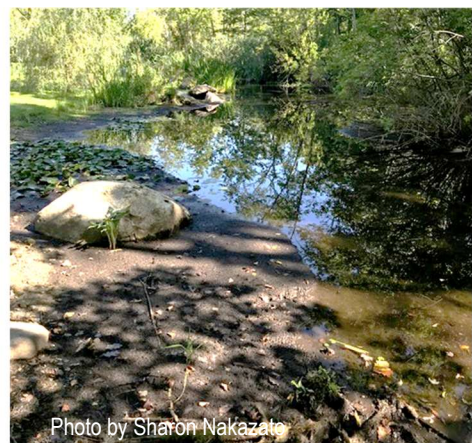


Photo by Sharon Nakazato

PASSING THE BATON TO THE NEXT GENERATION: INTERNS IN THE SWAMP

By Emily Gerstle, Maggie Faloon and Lucas Bertone

We are excited to be interning this summer for FrOGS, developing critical environmental science skills and giving back to our community. We have been spending time at Cricket Hill Preserve and the Gordon Douglas Preserve removing invasive plants and planting natives, monitoring endangered wildlife, and aiding in conservation and preserve management.



Hello! My name is Emily Gerstle and I am an incoming senior at Marist University in Poughkeepsie, New York. My major is in environmental science, and I am most interested in ecology and conservation in the Hudson Valley. While at school, I do research with Dr. Katherine Weiss on the campus camera project which studies the impacts of small “pocket preserves” on wildlife biodiversity. I also had the opportunity to intern for the Hudson River eel project which monitors the population of glass eels that migrate each year from the Sargasso Sea into the Hudson and its tributaries. When I first saw an ad for the FrOGS internship I was immediately excited by the opportunity. It sounded right up my alley! I have loved getting to work more with plants and learn new techniques for monitoring invasive species populations. We are very lucky to get to work with people who have an incredible wealth of knowledge and support our learning on the job.

I’m Lucas Bertone, a Biochemistry major going into my senior year at Binghamton University. I’ve had a love for the outdoors from a very young age, going hiking and camping nearly every weekend with the Boy Scouts. As I grew and pursued biochemistry, I grew restless with the consistent indoor settings and was drawn towards field work. I was directed to the FrOGS internship by a mentor from my scouting days, and was eager to broaden my horizons. I am gaining experience in conservation and land management, working to remove invasive species, and foster the growth of native ones. I’ve greatly enjoyed the work we’ve done so far, specifically our projects tracking and recording populations of native animal species. This internship has helped reignite my passion for science, and has piqued my interest in conservation biology, which I plan on pursuing back at Binghamton in the Fall alongside my degree in biochemistry.

Hi! My name is Maggie Faloon and I am an incoming junior at the University of Maryland studying Environmental Science and Policy. Additionally, I am an undergraduate research assistant in the Wetland Ecology lab in the department of Environmental Science and Tech, and an ambassador for the Office of Sustainability on campus. I wanted to intern for FrOGS to grow my knowledge on wetland ecosystems and conservation, as well as conservation methods and monitoring techniques. In our various projects so far, I have been able to use knowledge and skills gained in my classes and in my lab work that have helped me understand more complicated statistics and scientific analysis. My favorite part of the internship so far has been monitoring wildlife species. I love working with animals such as the box turtle, taking measurements and learning how to ID each individual. While wetlands are a core interest of mine, I am also curious about aquatic ecosystems, especially coastal environments and marshlands. I hope to one day work in conservation, and in a space where I can either assist policy makers or be directly involved in environmental policy creation alongside doing hands-on science.

DON'T JUDGE A WEED BY ITS COVER

By Maggie Faloon

The perfect garden, yard, or lawn is usually associated with straight veggie rows, manicured grass, and beautiful flowers. When we see a weed intrude in our carefully curated design it is removed immediately. But what if they are better left alone? The Great Swamp is home to many common weeds that are actually beneficial to have in a yard or garden. Common weeds such as dandelion (*Taraxacum officinale*) and chickweed (*Stellaria media*) have tap roots that bring nutrients deep in the soil to the surface which help other plants, and improve poor soil quality. You can let them grow and die naturally or keep them tidy by cutting the leaves every month.

Dandelion leaves are full of essential vitamins such as K, A, and C, as well as magnesium and potassium. Consuming the leaves and even the flowers could help reduce high cholesterol and support a healthy immune system. Another important common weed is native plantain (*Plantago rugelii*). This plant is abundant across North America and is found where pesticides are not used. Therefore, they are an indicator of a healthy and chemical-free yard or garden. Chickweed does something similar, and loves fertile soil. Seeing it in your garden and growing lushly is an indicator that your soil is rich and healthy.



Dandelion by Sharon Nakazato

Plantain has also been known to have many health benefits such as being naturally antiseptic. The crushed leaves can be applied to skin to stop bleeding, and can even neutralize mosquito bites and poison ivy, reducing itch and inflammation and promoting healing. If this plant is allowed to grow and flourish in your yard or garden, it can help in times of need.

Another “weed” is wild violet (*Viola sororia*). Many see these perennials as needing to be removed,

but they are beautiful, extremely hardy, and create natural carpets that can replace cut grass to benefit the local environment. They can thrive in unsuitable conditions such as poor or acidic soil, deep shade, and can handle spaces with exposed tree roots. They are also key pollinator plants, providing early spring nourishment for native



Wild violet by Sharon Nakazato

bees and early emerging butterflies, as well as being host plants for many fritillary butterfly species. Wild violets are especially good for providing ground cover and do not need to be mowed, creating a beautiful and ecologically important addition to any yard or garden. Keeping these plants around your garden will act as a home for butterfly larvae and a food source for many essential insects.

It is important to prioritize the natural ecology of your environment and home. What grows naturally supports native wildlife, can reveal your soil quality, and even supports the health of you and your family. Next time, think again before uprooting or poisoning these important plants and visualize a way to fit them into your yard or garden design!



Chickweed by Sharon Nakazato

WHERE ARE THE WHIP-POOR-WILLS?

By Paul Andrews

I fondly remember the call of the whip-poor-wills. When I was a kid, in the good old days, my grandfather would take us perch fishing at dusk on our lake in Downeast Maine. Under a sky aglow with the Milky Way, with loons mocking us with their crazy laughter and mournful wails, and a shoreline now turned to inky blackness, the whip-poor-wills would start their calls. My grandfather would whistle back to them "whip-poor-will" as if they needed any encouragement. Long after the perch had stopped biting, we would drift silently listening to their chorus, spotting shooting stars, with bats swooping through the swarm of mosquitoes above our heads, immersed in the natural world. I have not heard a whip-poor-will in a long time and I miss their presence. I whistle for them like Grampy after sunset, but alas I get no reply. Where have they gone?

The Eastern whip-poor-will (*Antrostomus vociferus*) is one of North America's most fascinating nocturnal birds. Named for its distinctive three-note call that sounds like "whip-poor-will", this secretive bird spends most of its life hidden among leaf litter in forests with open understories. Because it is active primarily at dusk and throughout the night, many people hear its haunting song long before they ever catch a glimpse of one.

Whip-poor-wills are masters of camouflage. Their mottled gray, brown, and black feathers blend perfectly with fallen leaves and tree bark, making them nearly invisible during the day. Adults measure about 8 to 10 inches long and have large, dark eyes that help them see in low light. Like other members of their family, the nightjars, they have a remarkably wide mouth surrounded by stiff, whisker-like feathers called rictal bristles. These specialized feathers help funnel flying insects into the bird's mouth while it hunts. Instead of building nests in trees, whip-poor-wills simply lay their eggs directly on the forest floor, relying on their camouflage to keep both adults and chicks hidden from predators.

These birds are expert aerial insect hunters. Shortly after sunset, they patrol forest edges, clearings, and open woodlands, catching moths, beetles, mosquitoes, and other flying insects in midair. Whip-poor-wills are especially active on bright, moonlit nights, when they can see insects more easily and spend more time feeding. During the breeding season, males often sing repeatedly for hours to

attract mates and defend their territory, sometimes calling hundreds or even thousands of times in a single night.

Whip-poor-wills usually lay two eggs in late spring or early summer. Both parents share incubation duties, which last about three weeks. After hatching, the chicks grow quickly and are able to make short flights within a few weeks. Interestingly, whip-poor-wills often time their nesting so that the chicks hatch during periods of brighter moonlight, when parents can catch more insects and provide more food.

Unfortunately, whip-poor-will populations have declined significantly over the past several decades. One major reason is habitat loss, as forests are fragmented by roads, housing developments, and agriculture and understories are clogged with invasive plants. Another important factor is the widespread decline of flying insects caused by pesticide use, light pollution, bug zappers, and environmental changes, leaving the birds with less food. Vehicle collisions are also common because whip-poor-wills often forage along roads at night. Climate change may further affect their migration patterns and alter the seasonal availability of insects. Although The Great Swamp seems like ideal habitat, the biodiversity survey conducted by The Nature Conservancy in 1999 did not list whip-poor-wills even though their breeding range extends through out the northeast. Have you heard one in The Great Swamp?

Protecting large forests, reducing pesticide use, limiting nighttime light pollution, and conserving healthy insect populations can all help these remarkable birds. Although their unforgettable call is heard less often than it once was, conservation efforts offer hope that future generations will continue to experience the mysterious song of the whip-poor-will echoing through the woods, lakes, and swamps on warm summer nights, hopefully in the company of a grandparent.



Whip-poor-will hiding in leaves. Note the bristles around its mouth. By Sharon Nakazato.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bedford Audubon (Katonah, NY)

Most Months:

First Wednesday's Bird Walk

Third Thursday's Bird Walk

August 8, Saturday (10:00 – 1:00) Dragonfly and Damselfly Workshop

Check calendar for times and locations

<https://bedfordaudubon.org/program-calendar/>

Come Meet the Goats!

August 8 – 16 (10:00 – 5:00) Cricket Hill Road, Dover Plains, NY

FrOGS has hired a herd of goats to improve the young forest habitat in our Cricket Hill Preserve. This habitat is essential for the survival of the New England cottontail, our only native rabbit, and more than 70 other wildlife species whose populations are declining as this habitat disappears.

If you would like a guided tour of their munching on invasive plants and our conservation efforts, contact Astri Teal (astri1875@comcast.net) or Maryanne Brown (marlbro@comcast.net).

Bring your family!

FrOGS Plein Air Dates

July 29, Wednesday (10:30 – 5:00) Patterson Library. Host: Sharon Nakazato 845-612-1046

August 2, Sunday (from 4:30) Brewster various sites. Host: Sharon Nakazato 845-612-1046

August 7, Friday (10:00 – 2:00) Donna Castelluccio's house on Ravine Rd in Pawling, Host: Donna Castelluccio 845-416-6942

August 13, Thursday (10:00 – Noon) The Sheperds' house on Haviland Hollow Road, (rain date August 20). Host: Sharon Nakazato 845-612-1046

Note: Prior registration is required for all Plein Air events on private land or at the Library. Please contact the host if you plan to attend.

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

Great Swamp Celebration and Art Show

October 17 – 18, Saturday – Sunday
At Christ Church on Quaker Hill. Premier Art Show, raptor flying, educational exhibits, games for children, swamp animals, kayak raffle. Fun for all ages!

Audubon Deer Pond Farm Events (Sherman, CT)

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

August 7, Friday (9:00 – 11:00) First Friday Hike

August 12, Wednesday (9:00 – 11:00 Noon) Birding by Tree class & walk

September 4 Friday (10:00 – Noon) First Friday Hike

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

October 2, Friday 10:00 Noon) First Friday Hike

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