



# the Swamp Scene

friends of great swamp national wildlife refuge

ISSUE TWENTY SEVEN  
MAY 2008

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## FRIENDS OF SUPAWNA MEADOWS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE WORKDAY

By Laura Nally

On March 15, 2008 at roughly 7:00 am, thirteen Friends of Great Swamp NWR carpooled to Supawna Meadows NWR in Pennsville, NJ to show our support for the Refuge and do some much needed work. Supawna Meadows has the distinction of being the first Refuge to lose its entire Refuge staff due to budget cuts and has been complexed with Cape May NWR. This change has had a significant impact on ongoing maintenance and management projects at the refuge.

Despite the dire weather predictions, we had a beautiful sunny day for our trip. On arrival, we were greeted warmly by the Supawna Meadows Friends and the Refuge staff of Cape May NWR. We quickly went to work clearing trails and digging holes for fence posts and new signs. Working on the trails gave us the opportunity to view the Refuge close up. By the end of the day the improvement along the parking area and trails was remarkable.

In addition to volunteers from our Friends group, we were joined by Friends from Wallkill River Refuges, John Heinz NWR, Forsythe NWR, NJ Audubon Society, Littoral Society and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service regional staff, including Tony Leger, head of Region 5 (Great Swamp is in Region 5)—over 60 volunteers in all! Part of the goal of the day was to raise awareness for the impact of budget cuts on the Refuge system. Evan Hirsche of the National Wildlife Refuge Association invited several local politicians to the Refuge to see first hand how many people care about our Refuges and to learn how important the habitat is. Congressman Frank LoBiondo, R-2nd District, praised the efforts of volunteers, and statements were read from Senators Frank Lautenberg and Robert Mendoza thanking the various groups for their contributions to the Refuges.

At the end of the day the Friends of Supawna Meadows and the Cape May NWR staff were very grateful for all the work that was done. For the many volunteers and the entire National Wildlife Refuge System, it was a great day!



Friends of Great Swamp NWR volunteers (l to r): Jane Kendall, John Wilmot Sr., Rich Dufort, John Wilmot Jr., Susan Friedman, Judy Schmidt, Eloise Gorski, Nancy Felicito, Laura Nally, Carl Woodward, Joe Nally, Kathy Woodward, Dennis Branden. (Photo by Evan Hirsche)



## KEEPING UP WITH FRIENDS & THE REFUGE—NEWS, HIGHLIGHTS & UPDATES

### New Directors & New Officers for Friends Board

The Annual Member Meeting of the Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge was held on December 8, 2007. Forty-eight members enjoyed a pot luck dinner followed by a fascinating presentation by Dr. Len Hamilton on the history of the Great Swamp and the environmental challenges facing the area today.

Board members Judy Schmidt, Dorothy Smullen, Kathy Woodward, and Laurel Gould were re-elected for two year terms; Susan Garretson Friedman and Karen English were elected as new board members also for two year terms. Lisa Molinari did not stand for re-election; she was presented

with a gift and thanked for her many contributions over the years; she promised to stay involved with the group.

At the Board meeting following the annual meeting, the following officers were elected: President—Dennis Branden, Vice President—Laura Nally, Secretary—Kathy Woodward, Treasurer—Laurel Gould. “Retiring” president Judy Schmidt was commended for her leadership during the past four years and for the many accomplishments that were realized during her tenure, not least of which was being named Friends Group of the Year in 2006. Judy now settles back into her “day job” of Education chair.

**Introducing New Board Member: Susan Garretson Friedman:** I was born in New York City and grew up in Westchester County, New York where I enjoyed hiking in local parks and along the Hudson River with my family. I continued indulging my love of the outdoors in Ithaca, New York’s idyllic environment while attending Cornell University. I returned to New York City and for the next 11 years satisfied my enjoyment of the outdoors in Central Park and on vacation trips. During this time, my desire to work to preserve and help the green places and the animals that inhabit them grew. As I completed my Masters Degree in Marketing from NYU, I hoped to be able to use these skills to help meet my personal goals.

When I moved to New Jersey with my husband, a primary factor in our search for a home was the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, which we had been visiting for many years. We were fortunate to find a place in nearby Gillette. It didn’t take me long to find ways to contribute and help work and advocate for the Refuge that was now my backyard. I initially volunteered at the Friends Bookstore & Gift Shop, helped at the Fall Festival and contributed to various other volunteer efforts. A little over a year ago, I assumed responsibility for the Government Advocacy Committee of the Board. My husband and I have also become enthusiastic, if not particularly knowledgeable, birders.



Susan Garretson Friedman hones her birding skills

### Introducing New Board Member: Karen English

I joined Friends when I relocated from Ontario, Canada to Basking Ridge, New Jersey in 2005. Volunteering at the Wildlife Observation Center, participating in the work days, and taking advantage of the information events have been welcome opportunities to meet people with myriad backgrounds and interests. I grew up in Newfoundland, Canada where the topography and climate are very different from New Jersey. Initiation into the world of migratory bird watching, learning about other wildlife in the area, and understanding the local issues facing the Refuge are just a few of the things that have led to my joining the Board to support the Friends group.

I work for BASF Corporation. Like many companies, BASF has a program in place to support local community efforts and organizations. Friends of Great Swamp NWR received a donation in December 2007 to support the creation of our first garden at the new Helen C. Fenske Visitor Center—a bird feeding garden. It is being planned to provide sources of food, shelter and nesting materials for resident and migratory birds. It will be planted with native plant species—flowering plants, shrubs and grasses—and will include bird feeders and bird baths. This particular garden will be visible from inside the visitor center. The Friends GardenKeepers Committee is hard at work preparing for the upcoming spring activities and are thrilled to have received the support. BASF has supported Refuge programs in the past, most recently a study of turtles.



Karen English (left) and Bill Koch, Refuge Manager, accept donation check presented by Maureen Paukert of BASF.

I would encourage everyone to look into employer programs and take advantage of available funds to support both your own interests in the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge and those of the many visitors who come to this special place to learn and play.



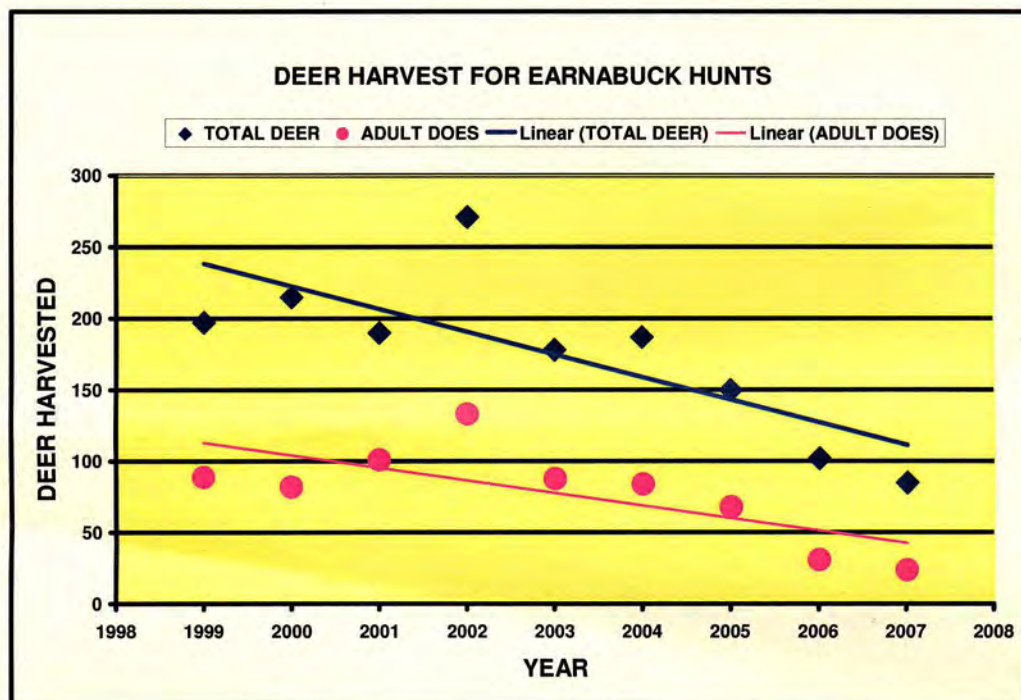
## NEW DEER HUNT OBJECTIVE IS SUSTAINABLE HARVEST

By Leo Hollein

The ninth Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge deer hunt conducted under earn-a-buck (EAB) rules was completed in November 2007. The deer and adult doe harvest totals are illustrated in the chart below. The 85 total deer harvested in the 2007 hunt was the lowest of the 34 annual refuge hunts. The 24 adult does harvested was also a record low. These results are consistent with the pre-hunt deer population surveys. The EAB rules that target antlerless deer have reduced the deer population to an acceptable level. The goal now is to have an annual sustainable deer harvest.

Several changes were implemented for the 2007 hunt to control the harvest. The main one was to limit each hunter to a total of two deer (only one could be a buck) for the duration of the four day hunt. In past EAB hunts there was no limit on the number of antlerless deer a hunter could take. A buck tag was earned after harvesting an antlerless deer.

Additional steps are under consideration for the 2008 hunt to control the harvest while maintaining a quality hunting experience.



## VOLUNTEERS DONATE RECORD 12,003 HOURS TO GSNWR

The fiscal year ending September 30, 2007 made Refuge history—a record 229 volunteers donated 12,003 hours to the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. That's the equivalent of six full-time employees! Volunteers were involved in a great variety of activities—from mowing to maintenance, from greeting visitors to removing invasive species, from banding geese to turtle surveys, from hosting public events to giving educational tours, and more!

Each year, volunteers are recognized at a Volunteer Recognition Event, cosponsored by the Friends and the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. On April 18, 2008 more than 100 volunteers, guests, and Refuge staff from both Great Swamp and Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuges enjoyed a festive evening at Dolce Basking Ridge.

**Award Presentations:** The following awards were presented to Great Swamp volunteers for their total cumulative hours contributed to the Refuge since first becoming a volunteer.



100 Hour Club Volunteers (l to r): Karen English, Nancy Felicito, Melinda Nye, Jane Kendall, Lillian O'Brien  
(Photo by Chuck Whitmore)

**100 Hour Club:** Ben Alexandro, Heather Barrett, Stephany Caraballo, Karen English, Nancy Felicito, Pete Formichella, Amy Gottfried, Buket Hakanoglu, Jane Kendall, Kathy Lawson, Paul Maurer, Melinda Nye, Lillian O'Brien, Adam Osborn, John Raab, Chris Stadtmueller, Mike Whitby.

**250 Hour Pin:** Ben Alexandro, Bill Ayres, Heather Barrett, Stephany Caraballo, Teri Catalano, Amy Gottfried, Buket Hakanoglu, George Helmke, Adam Osborn, Hanina Osborn, Gail Rapaport, Edythe Risberg, Mike Whitby, Chuck Whitmore.

**500 Hour Pin & Plaque:** Dennis Branden, Jennifer Czar, Pat Giaimo, Louis Pisane, Deb Scala, Nancy Schenck, Chuck

Whitmore, John Wilmot. Other awards included:

**1,500 Hour Pin:** Leo Hollein. **2,500 Hour Pin:** Laurel Gould. **3,000 Hour Pin:** Judy Schmidt.

Although she could not be at the event, Jean Sebesta was awarded a pin and a personalized Great Swamp NWR jacket for having achieved a cumulative volunteer career total of 5,000 hours.

(continued on page 4)



**VOLUNTEERS CELEBRATE** *(continued from page 3)*

Listed below are the active volunteers in Fiscal Year 2007 with the cumulative hours contributed to Great Swamp NWR since first becoming a volunteer through September 30, 2007.

Ben Alexandro (486)	Jim Detizio (650)	Chris Hildebrand (135.5)	Laura Mills (8)	Deb Scala (655)
George Apgar (3.5)	David Dietz (27)	Cody Hinds (4)	Lisa Molinari (690)	Joe Scala (98)
Joann Apgar (74.5)	Ray Dovadalski (4)	Michael Hoberman (90)	Ruth Morgan (6)	Nancy Schenck (590)
Pete Axelrod (196.5)	Rich Dufort (203.5)	Nancy Hochberg (24)	Alberta Mount (375.5)	Judy Schmidt (3,201)
Bill Ayres (301)	Holly Dunbar (7)	Bob Hofmann (89.5)	Bridget Mracek (27)	Jean Sebesta (5,058.5)
Brenda Ayres (200)	Roger Edwards (240)	Leo Hollein (1,629.5)	David Mracek (30)	Marvin Sebesta (920)
Heather Barrett (480)	Nancy Egan (4.5)	Ben Horner (4)	Roz Mytelka (193.5)	Mark Serafin (8)
Patrick Belardo (3.5)	Eunice Ellison (16.5)	Wayne Horner (16)	Joe Nally (65)	Willard Shearin (405)
Moir Blake (3)	Karen English (183.5)	Louise Jensen (180.5)	Laura Nally (456)	Gina Smith (57)
Matt Bocker (32)	Nancy Felicito (120.5)	Corey Johnson (30.5)	Melinda Nye (125)	Bill Smullen (96.5)
Dennis Branden (566.5)	Monica Felsing (13.5)	Ken Johnson (94)	Mark Nyhan (28.5)	Dorothy Smullen (1,365)
Bob Brandt (581)	Ian Feuer (4)	Bruce Jordan (9.5)	Lillian O'Brien (120.5)	George Solovay (874.5)
Bill Burress (69)	Tom Finan (24.5)	Susan Katz (64)	Edward Ortiz (8)	Christine Stadtmueller (107.5)
Nancy Burtnett (28)	Ralph Fischer (45)	Jane Kendall (181.5)	Adam Osborn (480)	Rich Stagnaro (4.5)
Linda Byland (163.5)	Paul Ford (38)	Terri Kenner (15)	Brian Osborn (21)	Robert Stanton (349)
Steve Byland (724.5)	Pete Formichella (192)	Marilyn Kitchell (669)	Claudia Osborn (40.5)	Mark Stapperferne (5)
Ray Cabrera (31.5)	Joanne Foster (10.5)	Neil Klingenburg (89.5)	Hanina Osborn (252)	Matt Steffens (81)
Stephany Caraballo (484)	Susan Friedman (180)	Lauretta Koch (92.5)	Peter Osborn (24.5)	Meredith Swenson (15)
Terry Carruthers (42.5)	Robert Furstner (300.5)	Ryan Koch (17.5)	Tom Ostrand (70)	Paul Thievon (4)
Shirlee Cashen (33)	Jane George (81.5)	Travis Koch (13)	Candace Paska (72)	Nancy Tworischuk (4.5)
Joe Casperino (8)	Spencer George (37.5)	John Kunkel (588.5)	Chris Petrillo (6)	Mary Jane Walsh (19.5)
Teri Catalano (260.5)	Pat Giaimo (693.5)	Lauren Kunkel (5)	Gail Petrillo (6)	Kevin Ward (23.5)
Helen Chandler (13.5)	Laurie Gneiding (8)	Bonnie Kushnerick (26)	Louis Pisane (667.5)	Matthew Ward (4.5)
Steve Conway (2.5)	Ellen Goldberg (65)	Ryan Lavererio (9.5)	Gabriel Price (4)	Esther Warner (77.5)
Charlie Cotton (4.5)	Eloise Gorski (45)	Kathy Lawson (111)	Grant Price (4)	Elaine Weyuker (50)
Joey Cowper (80)	Amy Gottfried (487.5)	Ruth Lloyd (4.5)	Lori Prosser (125.5)	Mike Whitby (482)
Mary Cowper (24)	Charlie Gould (124)	Ray Lord (151)	Rachel Prosser (1)	Justin Whitehurst (30)
Rich Cowper (68.5)	Laurel Gould (2,682.5)	Dennis Marchioni (8)	Sandra Pruzansky (63.5)	Barbara Whitmore (12.5)
Betsy Coyne (79)	Steve Gruber (183.5)	John Maroyka (3.5)	Lisa Quartararo (8)	Chuck Whitmore (568.5)
George Coyne (98.5)	Buket Hakanoglu (251.5)	Paul Mauer (180)	John Raab (214.5)	John Wilmot (539)
Emily Cullen (90)	Shirley Hamilton (98)	Giovanni Mauri (4)	Sandhya Rao (4)	Barbara Wingel (306)
Jim Cullen (549)	Joe Hands (9.5)	Kevin McCarthy (10)	Gail Rapaport (369)	Carl Woodward (232.5)
Liam Cummings (4.5)	George Helmke (374)	Ann McCord (52)	Shirley Richardson (63.5)	Kathy Woodward (1,417.5)
Rich Cummings (9)	Greg Henderson (60.5)	Don McCord (54)	Edythe Risberg (263)	Frances Wu (4)
Jonathan Curry (1.5)	Mayra Henry (3)	Bob McDonald (26)	Ashley Roberts (42)	Drew University Earth House (45)
Jen Czar (518)	Steve Henry (129.5)	Leslie McGlynn (4)	Bill Romaine (50.5)	Region Atlantic Capital (120)
Lee Delitzscher (30)	Mariana Hernandez (78.5)	Don McLellan (11)	Blaine Rothauser (124.5)	
Janene DePalo (40)	Jack Higgins (790)	Jeane McLellan (14)	Roz Rothman (4.5)	
Andy Desko (7)	Maryann Higgins (25.5)	Andrew Mills (4)	Mary Sanko (4.5)	
		Kathy Mills (4)		

**THANK YOU**

**D**onations are made to the Friends of Great Swamp NWR in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons. All donations are used to fund projects which benefit the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. Thank you to all who have donated...

- The Wildwood Foundation... for the third year in a row—thank you!
- Caren Cadra and William O. Watts for their contributions and their employer Johnson & Johnson's two-to-one match.
- David M. Beechner for his contribution and his employer Illinois Tool Works Foundation's three-for-one match.
- BASF for their contribution for the new bird feeding garden (see story on page 2).
- Skillman Doors for their donation of time and materials for repair of Refuge buildings.
- Thank you yet again to volunteers Leo Hollein, Jack Higgins, and Chuck Whitmore who directed donations from the ExxonMobil Foundation to Friends of Great Swamp. ExxonMobil recognizes volunteer hours through their Volunteer Involvement Program.
- Eloise Gorski: in celebration of Dennis Branden's birthday.

To all of you who added a donation to your membership renewals—thank you so much: Christine Brown & Family, Neil & Cathy Borman, Tom & Judy Honohan, Astrid Hesse, Shirley Chaplin, Marisa Wohl, Doug & Barbara Arbesfeld, Sindhu Xirasagar, Nancy Margolis, Holly Jean Dunbar, John Croot, Steve Henry, David & Lorilen Prosser, John C. Kozimbo, Ursula M. Sommer, Kathy Lyons, Robert W. Schwaneberg, Donna & John Raab, Paul Ford, Janet & Gene Bolla, Faith A. Robinson, Steve & Terry Burdick, Steve Gruber.



## FOREST SINGERS — WOOD THRUSH AND VEERY

Story and photos by Leo Hollein

Forest thrushes are predominately brown birds with spotted breasts that inhabit the forest understory. There is no difference in coloration between sexes. Forest thrushes are noted for their appealing songs that are sung persistently during the breeding season. It is much easier to recognize their distinctive songs and alarm calls than to see these shy passerines. Both the wood thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*) and the veery (*Catharus fuscescens*) are common nesters in the forested areas of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. The hermit, Swainson's, grey-cheeked and Bicknell's thrushes are also forest thrushes. They pass through the Refuge in the spring on their way to their more northern breeding grounds and in the fall as they return to their wintering grounds in Central and South America.

### Wood Thrushes Nest In Trees And Shrubs

Wood thrushes arrive in the Great Swamp in late April and begin nesting in May. The photo below shows a wood thrush singing from its typical perch in the understory of the forest. The wood thrush is the largest forest thrush and is slightly



smaller than the American robin. It has a bright reddish-brown head and nape, olive brown back, white underparts with large dark spots and a bright eye ring. Wood thrushes sing a distinctive flute-like song described as sounding like *ee-oh-lay*. It is heard from May until early August when the breeding season is finished. Wood thrushes also have a distinctive alarm call—*wik wik wik*.

On their wintering

grounds in southern Mexico and Central America, wood thrushes do not sing but do utter their alarm call; they are also more visible as they often forage in more open areas at this time.

Wood thrushes prefer to nest in the interior of deciduous or mixed forests in cool, moist sites near water, but will also nest in small wood lots in suburban areas. They build their nests on the lower limbs of a tree or shrub in a shady area usually about 8 to 15 feet above ground. Their nests consist of dead leaves, dried grasses, bark, mud and moss with a center cup lined with fine rootlets. The outline of the nest is normally broken by the addition of a piece of cloth, plastic or large leaves.

Wood thrushes typically lay four blue eggs with no markings. In the Refuge they can raise two clutches in a season. Wood thrushes sing in the vicinity of their nests and will alarm call as an intruder approaches. They will attempt to lead the intruder in a large loop around their territory by periodically stopping and singing.

### Cowbirds Lay Eggs In Wood Thrush Nests

Wood thrushes are subject to brood parasitism as illustrated below by the presence of a cowbird egg in the nest with four

blue wood thrush eggs. Cowbirds lay their eggs in the nests of many songbirds. In the case of the wood thrush, the cowbird egg and hatchling size are comparable in size to the host species. Therefore, the wood thrush parents can raise a mixed brood.



In the case of smaller birds such as warblers and sparrows a cowbird hatchling can out compete its smaller nest mates and may be the only hatchling to fledge. The cowbird hatchling gets a head start by hatching a day or two earlier than most host species eggs.

### Veeries Nest Close To The Ground

Veeries are uniformly reddish brown above. They have a white belly and buffy breast with less spotting than the other forest thrushes. Their song consists of a slurred series of downward notes that resembles its name—*vreeer vreeer vreeer*. The veery also has a distinctive call—*jernt jernt*. Veeries are long-distance migrants that winter in tropical forests in South America mostly in Bolivia and Brazil. The Refuge is at the southern end of their breeding range in New Jersey. Their arrival at the Refuge in the spring is a week or two later than for wood thrushes.

The veery breeds in deciduous forest and riparian habitats that have a dense understory. Veeries nest on or near the ground and need cover to conceal their nests. As with other ground nesting species, their nests are well hidden and difficult to spot. The nest consists of twigs and grasses on a base of dried leaves. Their nests are often concealed in a dense patch of barberries.

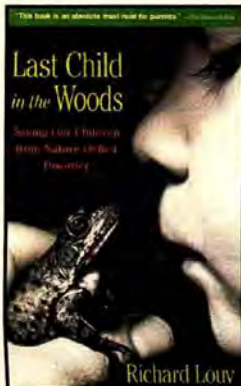
Veeries lay three to five unmarked blue eggs. As with the wood thrush, veery nests may also be used by cowbirds to deposit their eggs. Both wood thrushes and veeries forage on the ground for beetles, caterpillars, spiders, centipedes, slugs etc. In late summer and fall their diets include fruit such as spicebush, blueberries, blackberries and other fruits.



## CONNECTING CHILDREN WITH NATURE AT GSNWR

By Kathy Woodward

Whether you talk to our Friends volunteers, or to the birders that stand on the Pleasant Plains Road bridge, or to a Refuge staff member, a theme is repeated over and over—their fascination and concern about nature started when they were young children. Rachel Carson said that if she “*had influence with the good fairy... I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life.*”



However, studies indicate that children today are generally spending much less time outdoors exploring and learning. Richard Louv, in his book *Last Child In the Woods*, explores the negative impacts of this historic change. The Second Sunday program on December 12, 2007 was a discussion of this topic. Using Louv's book as a starting point, Friends discussed what we as parents and Friends can do to reverse the trend. The discussion group had praise for the Friends efforts to educate and involve children through guided tours for schools and youth groups, *Swamp in a Box* classroom kit, Discovery Den activities, Second Sunday programs and Boardwalk Bingo. One participant suggested we consider adding a Junior Refuge Manager program as another way to engage children and their families.

Never a group to rest on their laurels, the Education Committee and Friends board members, led by Judy Schmidt, are developing materials

for a program customized for children and for Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. Specially trained volunteers will provide support and encouragement to budding *Refuge Managers* at the Wildlife Observation Center on designated days. An outstanding introduction to the plants and animals of the Refuge, the program is being developed this spring and will be piloted in the Fall.

This effort supports a new U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service “*Children and Nature Initiative*”, a renewed focus on the importance of welcoming young people to national wildlife refuges nationwide with a central theme of environmental education.



Swamp in a Box educational classroom kit—available for loan to schools

## IN SEARCH OF “OLE REDLEGS”

Story and photos by Colin Osborn, Biological Technician, GSNWR

Slogging through the soft flowing water along the stony bottom of a brook somewhere within the boundaries of the swamp, two biologists carefully make their way upstream. Like hawks soaring over a field looking for prey, they search the riparian corridor slowly and deliberately. The object of their reconnaissance has become the virtual equivalent of a ghost on the refuge and it is their hope that through this mission, they might be able to bring it back from the dead. As they creep along, the brook meanders and reveals many distinct characteristics that awaken a strong sense of hope within them, leading them to believe that this is more than just another “*needle in a haystack*” biological survey. After all, they did not arrive at this spot by chance, but were directed there by Refuge Biologist Mike Horne who in his days growing up in central Pennsylvania was no stranger to the creature that they sought.

They notice a small clearing above the steep eroded bank up ahead and decide to take a closer look. The field is bar-

ren and looks like an old dump site for the farm that is now visible in the distance. Among the exposed, loose rocky soil lie piles of manure, mulch, and several mounds of seemingly excavated fill. The only vegetation growing is sparse clumps of Indian grass (*Sorghastrum nutans*) and mugwort (*Artemisia vulgaris*). They both agree that the site has all the right characteristics for an excellent potential nesting area for their target animal.

Leaving the field they carefully negotiate their way back down the steep bank and into the stream again. The banks are exposed, gravelly and low-lying in some areas, while in others they are sandy and rise above the water. The latter is caused by flood events in which silt is deposited and slowly collects along the inside bank on sharp bends. Where this occurs, the opposing outside banks are always steep and undercut, being held up by the extensive root systems of the trees and vegetation which compose the riparian corridor.

*Continued on page 7*



## OLE REDLEGS...

*Continued from previous page*

The trees here are the keepers of the waterway—their team consisting of green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), pin oak (*Quercus palustris*), red maple (*Acer rubrum*), American elm (*Ulmus americana*), American hornbeam (*Carpinus caroliniana*), red oak (*Quercus rubra*) and American beech (*Fagus grandifolia*). The roots of these trees not only hold the stream banks in place but also provide safe haven as winter hibernacula sites for their desired critter.

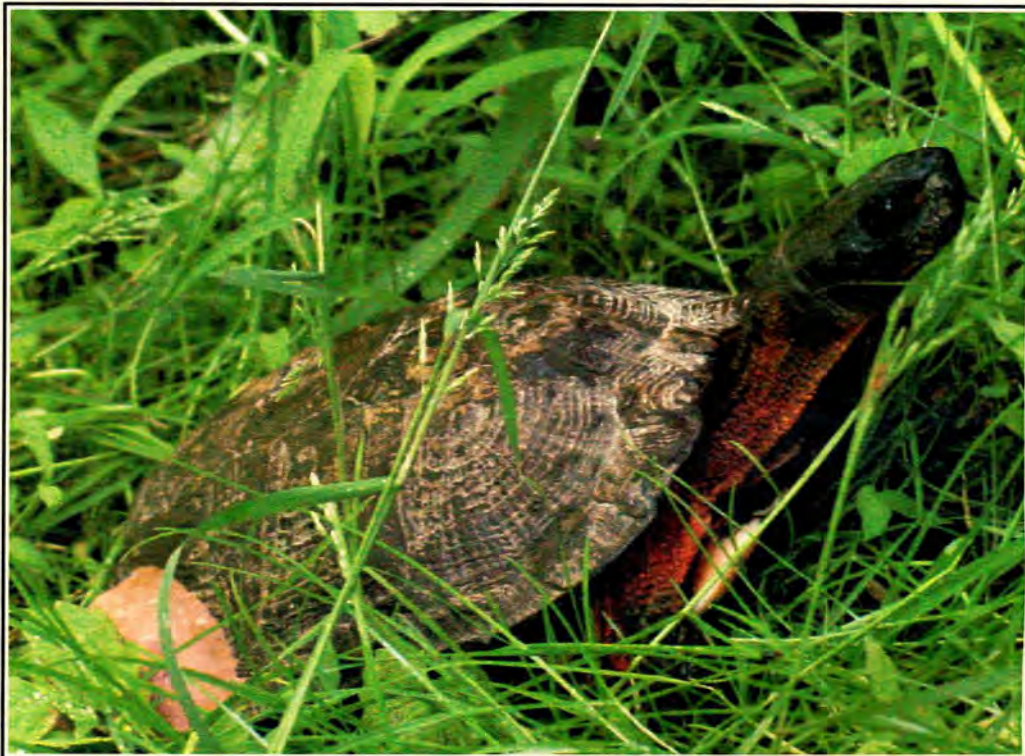
All that they've seen thus far while traversing the stream has reinforced Horne's notion that if it still exists on the Refuge, this is where their ghost will be resurrected. As they carry on, hoping to fulfill their mission, the late spring sun filters its way through the floodplain forest canopy above, creating a mix of sunlight and shade on the ground that is now making searching even more difficult. In the natural world many animals exhibit this type of broken-up light and dark pattern to blend into their surroundings; it is known as "*disruptive coloration*." On top of this, the creature that they are looking for is what is known as a "*landscape species*", meaning that it utilizes a diversity of habitats and thus can be quite difficult to locate—unless you have a good knowledge of the life history of the species. Luckily for these two biologists, one a doctorate in herpetology and the other a self-proclaimed "*herp nerd*," they have a small bit of this knowledge. However, in searches like this one, it often takes more than just a little life history information—it takes a whole lot of luck.

Up ahead, the shaded banks are littered with green vegetation still glistening with the morning dew. These are good spots to find slugs and worms and even better spots to find something feeding on them. Just a few feet from this promising slope, one of the biologists stops dead in his tracks, almost as if he's just seen a spirit. He softly calls to the other biologist and motions toward the bank. Their eyes focus on what at first appears to be nothing more than an 8-inch long oval brownish-gray rock, but then widen with amazement as they make out a head with a reddish-orange neck and then four legs of this same color. Upon closer inspection, the rock-like portion is patterned with many low pyramidal scutes and is so intricate that it looks like it could have been sculpted out of wood. It is one of the most beautiful things that either of them has ever witnessed. The creature slowly moves its head

to study the biologists and gives them a look as if to say "*What took you so long?*"

A long time it had been indeed. The date was May 26, 2006. The last sighting of a live wood turtle (*Glyptemys insculpta*) on the Refuge had been eleven years prior in 1995 when a graduate student was doing research on the reptiles and amphibians of the swamp. In 2005, a female wood turtle was found dead on Long Hill Road. She was likely en route to a historic nesting site to lay her clutch of eggs, an act which she had repeated each year in the late spring for many years. Unfortunately she never got to complete this important task and like so many other wood turtles in this state and across their range was fatally struck by an automobile. Coupled with loss of habitat, over-collection, and predation of nest sites, the wood turtle is a threatened species in New Jersey and is also protected in many other states. A sad sight it was to see the dead female on the road that day, yet it can be argued that its death was not in vain because it served as the catalyst to launch this pivotal search effort. As one of the two biologists present when the wood turtle was rediscovered and "*brought back to life*" at Great Swamp, I can tell you with complete certainty that her death was not in vain. Ever since that crucial day two years ago, when "*ole redlegs*" was confirmed to still exist here, the Refuge has never been the same.

Stay tuned for a follow-up article on the current status of wood turtles at Great Swamp and what the Refuge has been doing to help them.



"Ole Redlegs"—Wood turtle female eleven on day of capture.



## BIRD SIGHTINGS TALLY LOWER IN 2007

By Pat Gaiamo

For the second year in a row, the Friends recorded bird sightings reported by Refuge visitors, volunteers, and staff and we'd like to thank all of you who contributed sightings to the 2007 bird listing. A total of 188 different species were seen in 2007, down slightly from the 191 species reported in 2006. Some of the not-so-common birds seen in 2007 were the tundra swan, which is also appearing this year, the brant and the greater white-fronted goose.

Birds seen in 2006 but not reported again in 2007 included the snowy owl, lesser scaup, black rail, the wandering white-tailed hawk, and redhead. These were all rarities for the swamp.

A bird that excited people when first seen in 2007 was the bald eagle. As the year went along it was seen more and more often, and more

than one has been seen so far in 2008. All of the woodpeckers on the Great Swamp bird checklist were reported, as well as all the sparrows listed except for the grasshopper sparrow and snow bunting. They are the only two sparrows described as requiring meadows and fields and it may be that the Refuge habitat is no longer suitable. Of the 35 wood warblers listed, all but eight were reported. In 2006 all but seven were seen but interestingly, the golden-winged warbler, Cape May warbler, and yellow-throated warbler were the only ones not seen either year.

Remember to write your sightings on the bird logs at the Friends Bookstore & Gift Shop or at the Wildlife Observation Center—or stop by and tell us in person. Perhaps we can improve on our previous yearly totals and tally even more species in 2008.

## BIRDING INITIATIVE FOCUSES ON REFUGES

In 2006, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service launched a National Wildlife Refuge System Birding Initiative to help birders appreciate the value of refuges as birding hotspots—and to help refuges recognize the positive value of birders. Now the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has formally entered into a partnership with the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology to “promote birding, habitat conservation and citizen science”.

Great Swamp NWR has been supportive of birders for many years, giving special permission for the World Series of Birding teams to use the Management Area of the Refuge and supporting the annual Christmas Bird Count. The Friends have also become active in promoting the Refuge as a birding destination with the installation of two bird sightings logs, maintaining the annual Bird Sightings List, fielding a birding team for the World Series of Birding and hosting The Big Sit! last October.

Watch for further opportunities for birding and birders at Great Swamp and Refuges nationwide as this new birding initiative grows.

## FRIENDS MEMBER STEVE BYLAND WINS NATIONAL PHOTO CONTEST

By Kathy Woodward

Steve Byland's knowledge, observations and sense of humor make him an ideal guide for a walk at Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. Steve's skills are now recognized on a national level with the announcement of his second place award in the 2008 National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) digital photo contest. Selected from more than 2,000 images taken on Refuges throughout the United States, Steve's close-up picture of a garter snake highlights the beauty and wonder of an often overlooked resident of the Refuge.

Steve is an avid nature watcher. His determination to capture the images he sees through his binoculars and the excitement he feels in watching wildlife push him to spend increasing amounts of time photographing a range of subjects. He savors taking pictures of animals doing “something interesting”.



Capturing that special picture requires patience and continuous adjustments to the light, weather, movement and surroundings. For the winning picture, Steve lay on a path at the Wildlife Observation Center for several hours last May and took several hundred pictures until he got the snake with its tongue fully extended. Examining his pictures teaches Steve more about the creatures he photographs. He now knows the fine details of the wing movements of hummingbirds, a favorite subject, and the subtle colorations of hawk feathers.

Steve notes Great Swamp NWR is an “amazing place—so much diversity, snakes, birds, turtles, frogs, salamanders, bats, so close to home”. He recalls being at The Big Sit!, a Friends sponsored bird watching day in October, when an eagle flew over “almost close enough to touch”. His picture of a female harrier hovering over an open field won first place in Friends of Great Swamp's 2007 photo contest.

NWRA, a nationwide membership non-profit organization, works to protect, enhance and expand the Refuge System. For his prize, Steve received a photography package from Art Wolfe, renowned photo journalist, including a photo course offered at the Art Wolfe Digital Photography Center in Seattle, a signed and matted print from the Art Wolfe print collection and Art Wolfe Travels to the Edge DVD/Book Bundle. To see the winning photographs, visit [www.refugenet.org/contest/2008Winners.html](http://www.refugenet.org/contest/2008Winners.html).



## "RAPTOR ALLEY"

By Neil Nappe & Blaine Rothausen

Anyone who has traveled our state's highways over the past two decades would be hard pressed not to have noticed the steady increase in our red-tailed hawk populations. As they stand like proud sentries on trees, lampposts, and bridges, they are a visible testimony to one species' successful adaptation to man's increasing modification of their ancestral home.

At first glance, one might conclude that these serene, confident creatures have little regard or fear of us, considering their almost reckless proximity to our speeding vehicles as we mutually go about our respective business. But as anyone who has pulled over to have a closer look could testify, these are still very wild creatures, with a healthy fear of man, often taking flight at the mere rolling down of a car window. Not the case this year in the Swamp. I have routinely walked up to red-tailed hawks and pointed my long gun-barrel-shaped 500mm F4 lens at their face with barely even a flinch.

The hawk's indifference to our presence is a treat for those who've been spending time along Pleasant Plains Road in the Great Swamp this winter. Many believe this to be an irruption year for a number of raptor species. By that, we mean a surge or spike in the normal concentrations of these animals in a specific area. The causes are often complex, but almost always a testimony to the critical interplay between predators, prey, and climate. One thing is for certain. This winter the microtine (meadow vole) population has mushroomed, most likely a response to a relatively mild winter and past cycles which have bolstered the numbers of this prodigious rodent.

But whatever the cause, it is a magnificent sight to behold a female northern harrier gliding effortlessly over the fields surrounding the Friends bookstore, the sun illuminating the rich browns and golds of its spectacular plumage, ever vigilant for the slightest ripple of the earth's skin. In point of fact this species represents what we believe to be an intermediary evolutionary stage between a hawk and an owl. If you're lucky enough to get close, you can easily see the "disks" on its face, formed by feathers in nature's perfection of the parabolic dish (think satellite), amplifying and focusing the sounds of its prey on the harrier's ear opening. If that is not cool enough, these disks are asymmetrical, or offset from each other. This allows the bird to sort of "triangulate" the location of its prey (think GPS).

We have been doubly fortunate to have a number of individual birds that appear to be much tamer than would normally

be expected of this species. They have been observed hunting and perching at incredibly close range to those who are able to approach them in a respectful and non-threatening manner. Especially so for the rough-legged hawk, spotted this winter in our beloved swamp. This hawk is rarely seen up close and personal in the wild, but this particular individual seemed to almost delight in hamming it up for the camera, or at minimum, was simply oblivious to humans well within its turf. More likely this is a bird that spent the summer in a humanly deficient habitat. In the case of roughlegs this would more than likely be somewhere deep in the pene-



Red-tailed hawk with vole (Photo by Blaine Rothausen)

tralia of northern Canada's boreal forests. That might explain their tolerance of bipedal primates like us, who as a species have not historically done these birds any favors—shooting them for sport and fragmenting and poisoning their habitats. Refuge systems along the migratory paths of raptors have tried to offset these impairments through wildlife management initiatives. By crafting habitat conducive to small mammal production, i.e. the cutting of fields that bring them back to an early successional growth stage, wildlife biologists create the impetus for a stable winter food source that favors our raptorial compatriots.

The panoply of birds of prey festooned along Pleasant Plains Road has become a showcase to a guild that has taken top honors at the pinnacle of our swamp's food web. Merlin, American kestrel, and the occasional peregrine have represented the falcon association quite nicely this winter. Cooper's, sharp-shinned, rough-legged, red-shouldered, red-tailed, and northern harriers have rounded out the buteos and accipiters equally well. It is the wet meadows associated with our Refuge that have been rife with voles, mice, shrews and even an occasional frog that have rung the dinner gong triggering the raptorial feeding frenzy witnessed by so many.

This natural event has stirred camaraderie among birding enthusiasts who regularly flock up "Raptor Alley" to view, photograph and frolic with the taloned-ones. It has truly been a pleasure yapping with the same people immersed in the behaviors of the raptor *du jour*. Pondering the conduct of the kestrel caching its prey beneath the tussocks or why the "grey-ghost" (male harrier) seems to only show up at dusk, are just a snippet of our cogitations. This winter along Raptor Alley has been a true bonding time among people from different backgrounds, all walks of life and ages, brought together by the common thread of nature's messengers.



## WELCOMING SIGNS AROUND THE GREAT SWAMP—PART I

By Chuck Whitmore

The name "Great Swamp" can mean different things to different people. To this writer, it means the large area of wetlands, fields, and woodlands that suddenly levels out to the north and northwest from the base of Long Hill in the townships of Chatham and Long Hill. To the many people who spend time in volunteer work in the Great Swamp, there is no possibility of confusing this landform designation with the names of several public recreational and educational establishments that occupy lands in that and other parts of our watershed. But visitors who come less frequently may use the name more loosely and find themselves in one place when they intend to be in another.

To be specific, there are six recreational and educational establishments in or near the Great Swamp that offer wonderful opportunities to enjoy and learn about the natural environment of northern New Jersey. This article briefly describes each one if them, with the intent of increasing awareness and encouraging visits to all of them. The names of the six are: Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service), Great Swamp Outdoor Education Center (Morris County Parks), Environmental Education Center (Somerset County Parks), Conservation Management Area (Great Swamp Watershed Association), Scherman-Hoffman Wildlife Sanctuary (New Jersey Audubon Society), Raptor Trust Wild Bird Rehabilitation Facility (The Raptor Trust). The first three are under the ownership and management of governmental entities, and the last three are owned and run by non-profit organizations.



### Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge

Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge is the largest in area of the six, and perhaps the nearest to the hearts of the dozens of members of Friends of Great Swamp NWR who labor as volunteers to support the mission of this unit of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's nationwide system of refuges. The approximately 8,000 acres of this Refuge lie in the Townships of Chatham, Harding, and Long Hill in Morris County, and are administered in two parts—the Management Area on the west side, and the Wilderness Area on the east side. The Wilderness Area offers several miles of woodland trails, in three different networks, for the enjoyment of foot-traveling visitors. Parking areas are provided for convenient access to the trails at locations shown on a visitor map available at Refuge headquarters and at the bookstore and gift shop

operated by Friends of Great Swamp NWR, both accessed via Pleasant Plains Road from the Long Hill Township side. This Friends group also hosts visitors at the Wildlife Observation Center in the Management Area of the Refuge, off Long Hill Road in Harding Township. The Wildlife Observation Center has boardwalk trails leading to observation blinds in a wetland environment thus offering many opportunities to view reptiles, amphibians, and birds.

### Great Swamp Outdoor Education Center

Great Swamp Outdoor Education Center is one of about thirty units maintained by the Morris County Park Commission throughout Morris County. It is situated on a tract of some 40 acres of woodland and wetland at the far eastern corner of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. It features woodland and boardwalk trails, interpretive features, and a headquarters building, and offers educational programs and activities led by professional staff. The entrance to the Outdoor Education Center is on Southern Boulevard in Chatham Township.



### Environmental Education Center

The Environmental Education Center of the Somerset County Park Commission is located within Somerset County's Lord Stirling Park, in the Basking Ridge section of Bernards Township. It occupies over 450 acres including the westernmost portion of the Great Swamp landform, and lies immediately across the Passaic River from Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge. A modern building at the Center provides office space for the Park Commission's naturalists as well as facilities for many programs in environmental education, the natural world, and related topics. The Environmental Education Center is on Lord Stirling Road, a short distance from the crossing of the Passaic River.

In the next issue, we'll take a look at the three privately operated Great Swamp establishments. Each of these six establishments has its own special reason for being, and its own enthusiastic body of volunteers and supporters. We are fortunate to have within the confines of our watershed such a variety and richness of natural landscapes and creatures of nature to visit, to assist, and to enjoy.

*To be continued in the next issue...*



## FRIENDS OF GREAT SWAMP NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

The Friends of Great Swamp is an independent, non-profit organization organized in 1999. Our operations and activities are managed by an all-volunteer Board of Directors. As our mission statement indicates, our focus is Refuge-centric — we support the goals, projects, and mission of the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

To become a member of the Friends of Great Swamp, fill out the information on this form, and mail with your check to:

Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge  
241 Pleasant Plains Road, Basking Ridge, New Jersey 07920  
*Ask about our school or group memberships.*

### Annual Membership

Membership Type	<input type="checkbox"/> Family - \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual—\$15
Gift	<input type="checkbox"/> Family - \$25	<input type="checkbox"/> Individual—\$15
Renewal?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No

Donation—Thank You! \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State, Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number \_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address \_\_\_\_\_

Gift Membership From: \_\_\_\_\_

(If this is a gift, please include your full name on the line above so we may notify the recipient)

### **We need more friends . . .**



**Members are important!**  
**Give a gift of membership**  
**to a friend.**

Memberships help support the mission and projects at Great Swamp.

Members also receive the following benefits:

- Quarterly Newsletter
- 10% discount in Bookstore & Gift Shop
- Notification of coming events
- Feeling of accomplishment in supporting the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

Gift Memberships will include a coupon redeemable at the Friends Bookstore & Gift Shop for a Friends of Great Swamp Water Bottle -or- a Ron Orlando Great Swamp Centennial Poster.





**friends of great swamp  
national wildlife refuge**

**MAY 2008**

Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge  
Is an independent, non profit organization  
dedicated to  
Promoting the conservation of the natural  
resources of the Refuge  
Fostering public understanding and  
appreciation of the Refuge, and  
Engaging in activities that will support the mission of the  
Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.