

FRIENDS OF GREAT SWAMP NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

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This newsletter
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What Friends Do...

FALL FESTIVAL—FUN FOR ALL



T.R. Bear in honor of
Teddy Roosevelt, Refuge
System Founder, greets
festival-goers

Exhibits, expert-led walks and workshops, activities for kids and adults, food for all—the second annual Fall Festival was a fun day all around. Nearly 300 visitors and volunteers participated in the day's activities.

We'd like to thank the Refuge staff for their support and participation; the Friends volunteers who came out in record numbers to do whatever was required; our walk, workshop, and exhibit experts who generously gave their time and shared their expertise—Marge Barrett, Len Soucy, Ken Bliss, Steve Byland, David Welch, Laura Fuhro, Blaine Rothhauser, Paul Steblein, Nancy Schenck (Wild Birds Unlimited, Scotch Plains), Janice Molinari, Terri Vollmuth, and of course our Fall Festival Artist—Ron Orlando. Special thanks to our Blue Goose (Merris Larkin) and T.R. Bear (Lisa Molinari)—it got pretty hot in those costumes.

It looks like this will continue to be an annual event to kick off the Fall Migration Season at Great Swamp NWR. (Event photos on page 4)

What Friends Do...

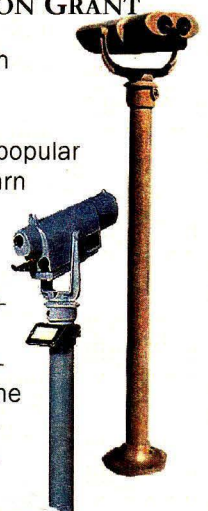
FRIENDS AWARDED NATIONAL FISH AND WILDLIFE FOUNDATION GRANT

The Friends of Great Swamp has been awarded a grant from the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation for two projects at Great Swamp NWR.

The grant provides \$2,000 for the creation of interpretive trail guides for the popular Boardwalk trails at the Wildlife Observation Center. Visitors will be able to learn about key points of interest along the trail—it'll be like having a personal expert along on your walk.

An additional \$3,000 has been awarded to replace and upgrade the fixed binocular scopes at the popular Great Blue Heron Rookery on the Auto Tour Route. We have one of the largest heron rookeries in New Jersey and our elevated and unobstructed view provides an unparalleled opportunity to watch the activities of the nesting and fledging birds without any disturbance to the herons. To meet the conditions of the Grant, the Friends need to raise matching funds for the binocular scopes—an additional \$3,000.

If you would like to contribute to Project Rookery-In-Sight, we are collecting donations at the Friends Bookstore & Gift Shop, or mail your contribution to Friends of Great Swamp, 152 Pleasant Plains Road, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920.



\$3,000 needed for project
Rookery-In-Sight

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Our mission statement proclaims that we will support the Refuge and the Refuge system.

This summer has been a time, as individuals and as a group, to learn ways to do both and have a great time, too.

On July 14, Judy Schmidt, Friends vice president, and I took the train to Washington, D.C. to attend a congressional reception honoring Refuge Heroes.

We visited Representative Rodney Frelinghuysen in his congressional

office to discuss Great Swamp NWR and the budgetary process, which impact the Refuge's ability to purchase available land. Rodney, as his father, has been a strong supporter of Great Swamp and the Refuge System.



Judy Schmidt, Kathy Woodward, Rep. Rodney Frelinghuysen

After an inspiring visit to the gallery of the House of Representatives, Judy and I joined a small group of Friends representatives from across the country. It was very exciting to be with people who were so enthused about conservation and the System. We

traveled together to Department of the Interior, where we met with Dan Ashe, Chief, National Wildlife Refuge System and Marshall Jones, Acting

Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. They talked with such pride about the Refuge System and they had high praise for our dedicated staff and the importance of Friends groups.

Judy and I had a wonderful time meeting and talking with staff and volunteers. They, in turn, wanted to know more about Great Swamp. We handed out lots of newsletters and our exclusive Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge pins.

Back home, we joined the Board in planning our Fall Festival and other activities for the next several months. It was so satisfying to be focusing on "our" Refuge, but to better understand the System of which we are a part.

Kathy Woodward

HAPPENINGS ON THE REFUGE

As we approach the end of the fiscal year (October 1) and the field season, Refuge staff are busy finishing projects and completing the spending cycle. One project that was given a high priority this year is the remodeling of the Refuge Headquarters. Staff, volunteers, and contractors patched, painted, and carpeted much of the Headquarters building. We are pushing on to remodel the meeting room, adding library shelves and cabinets, a matching conference table and chairs. Of course the walls will be painted (opportunity for a volunteer event) and windows trimmed with new dressings. We appreciate all the help so far, and look forward to finishing the job.

Invasive Species - A species is considered invasive when it spreads fast, often displacing other species, and frequently exotic (not native to an area and without the normal ecological limits). Garden weeds are invasive plants that you and I deal with at our own homes. Invasive plants can greatly affect ecological communities through direct replacement of desirable and varied native plants, and indirectly on the wildlife that depends on those plants for food and cover. There are many invasive plant species at Great Swamp. Some species, such as purple loosestrife, have received a lot of attention - refuge biologist Craig Bitler has made great progress in establishing beetles for biological control of loosestrife. However, many other species need attention (e.g., Japanese barberry, phragmites, Japanese knotweed, etc.). Several staff (Marilyn Eames, Paul Steblein, Craig Bitler, and Mike Horne) have been working on a strategy for controlling invasive species. A draft is

completed, and we will begin implementation with OUS Habitat Restoration funds. More information will be forthcoming, and perhaps ways that you can help.

Radio Replacement - The Refuge was funded this year for replacement of an aged and failing radio system. The radios are used for communication with staff and volunteers while in the field or during operations (e.g., checking outposts during the deer management hunt). They are necessary as a safety link and for coordinating activities. After researching alternative technologies, we elected to use a hybrid solution that combines the functionality of both radios and cell phones. The selected product was also about half the cost of traditional radios over the 10-year life span of the equipment. Phones will be assigned to staff, with extras available for volunteers on specific projects or activities. The new phones just arrived - they are ruggedized and bright yellow just in case someone drops one!

Boardwalk in front of Headquarters - Hot drying sun, driving rain, ice and the tread of large and small feet have worn the walkway to the Refuge Headquarters. Volunteers George Solovay and Neil Borman have been replacing the surface of the boardwalk leading from the parking lot to the Refuge Headquarters. Other volunteers have also recently shown up to help them. They are doing a great job, with steady progress each week.

Paul F. Steblein
Deputy Refuge Manager

What Friends Do...

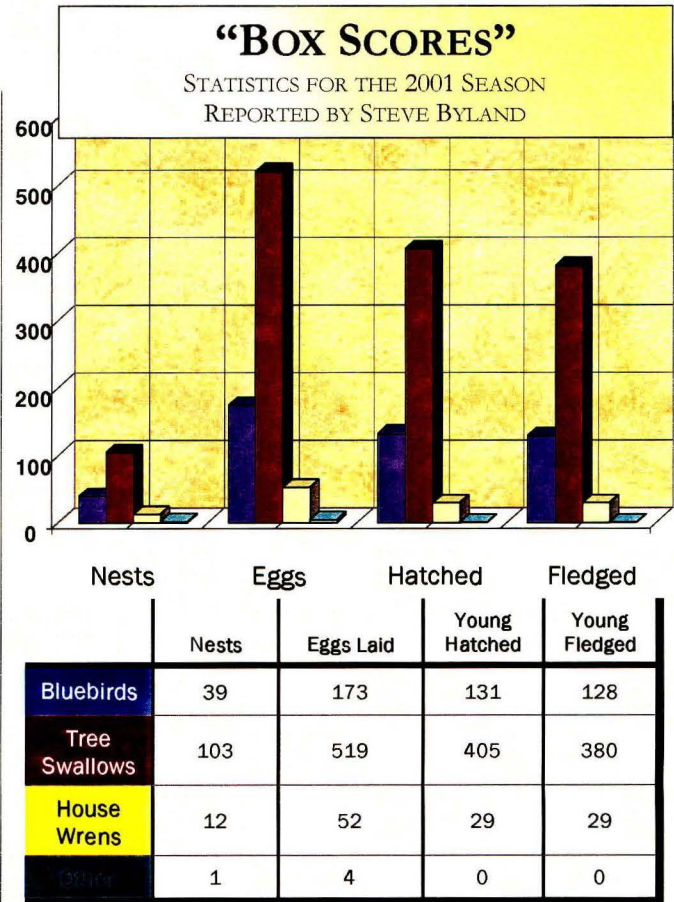
BLUEBIRD NEST BOX RESULTS FOR 2001

The nesting season for birds in the Great Swamp NWR for 2001 has come to an end. Once again, an extensive effort was made to maintain and monitor the 162 songbird nest boxes within the Refuge. Assisting me in this effort were Leo Hollein and Louis Pisane. Each of us spent a day or more each week from May through July wading through the briars and water to check on the boxes.

The season was, perhaps, a bit better than the average of the past few years, although well off the kind of production seen a decade ago. The Bluebirds were helped by plenty of rain in early May, which ensured good production of insects to feed their young. The drought of June was probably much harder on the Tree Swallows, which begin nesting several weeks later than Bluebirds. We had an all-time high number of Tree Swallow nests (103) fledging 380 young birds. Various predators showed little prejudice, claiming 26% of both species. The Bluebirds, however, proved to be a bit more tenacious, valiantly working to replace lost eggs again and again, losing only 2% of their young once hatched.

Historical data indicates that the number of nesting Tree Swallows has increased each year while the number of Bluebirds has slowly declined. The ratio of Tree Swallows to Bluebirds in the Refuge is significantly higher than at most other Bluebird trails in the state for a number of reasons. The primary problem lies with the nature of Tree Swallows and the placement of the nest boxes within the Refuge. Tree Swallows act somewhat communally to defend their territories against the threat of predators and other species of birds. As the number of nesting Tree Swallows increases, they are able to put more pressure on the Bluebirds and can eventually drive them away almost entirely. A prime example of this behavior was evidenced in the field just north of the Friends Office this summer. The 12 nest boxes in this field produced not a single Bluebird nest, while every box that could possibly hold a Tree Swallow did so. Fortunately, there are steps that can be taken which will allow for both species to nest in the same area. Positioning pairs of nest boxes 20 feet apart with 100 yards between each pair can ensure that each species has access to half of the boxes.

The Friends of the Great Swamp has generously agreed to pay for the relocation of the boxes in the field by their building to such a layout. At the same time, we are going to try a new style of predator guard to reduce the high mortality rate of our feathered friends (and keep out those pesky mice).



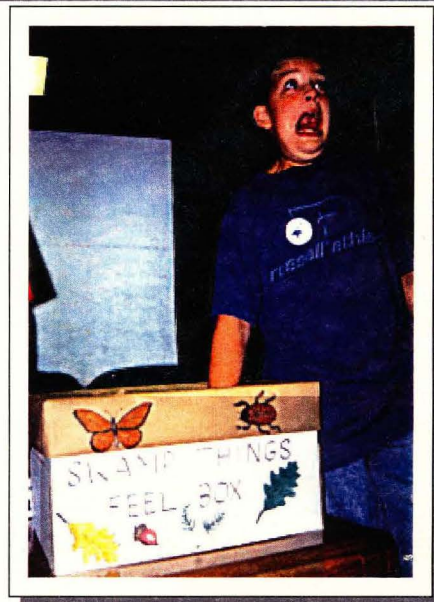
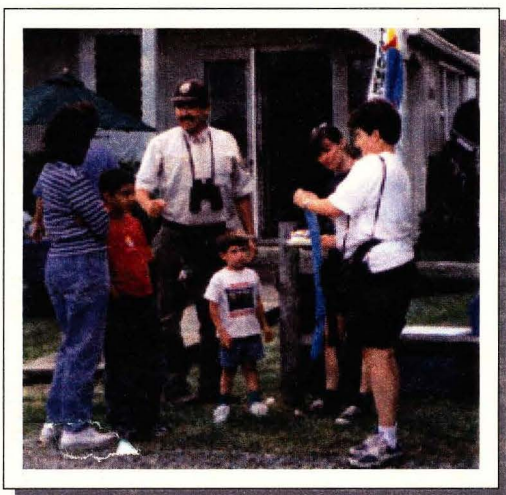
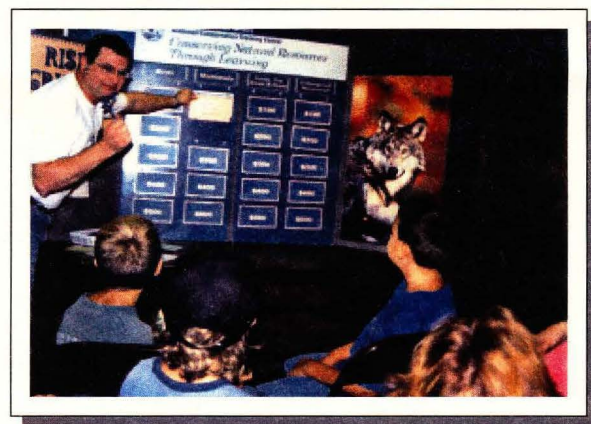
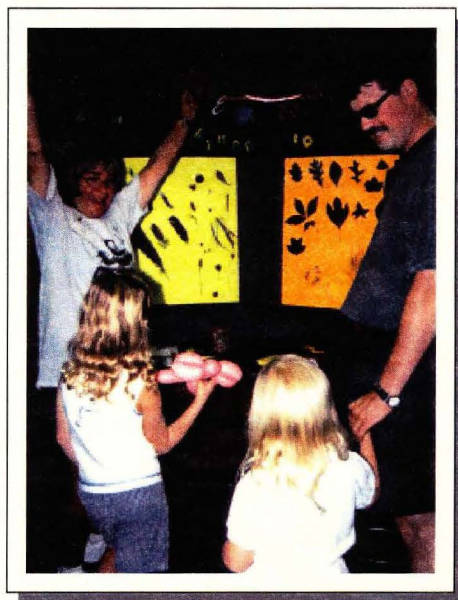
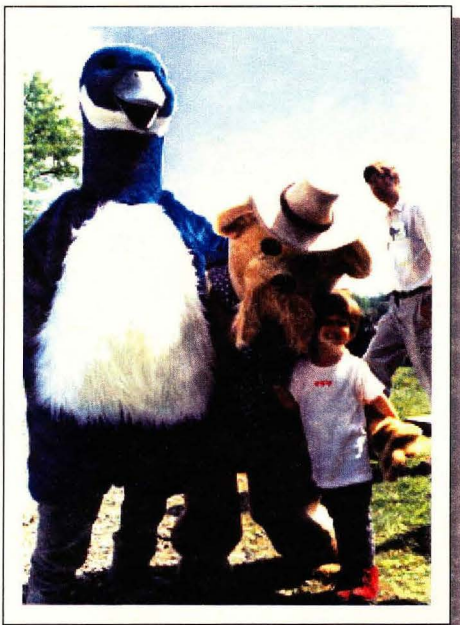
We will evaluate the results of this project and, if successful, we'll expand it to the remaining nest boxes in the Refuge. If half of the 160 nest boxes were, by careful spacing, "reserved" for Bluebirds you could expect as many as 100 broods (including second nestings) producing over 500 Bluebirds a year! Even the Tree Swallows would benefit. Having an equal number of houses available to them would actually allow them to increase the number of young they fledge to almost 600, especially with improved predator guards.

This would be a big project taking several years to complete, but it will be worth it. Without the help of people, Bluebirds would all but vanish. Even with our help, their numbers are down almost 90% from 100 years ago. The Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge is a vital resource for the preservation of Bluebirds. If you are interested in helping by donating either time or money, please stop by the Friends Bookstore & Gift Shop on weekends or leave a message at 908-797-7200.

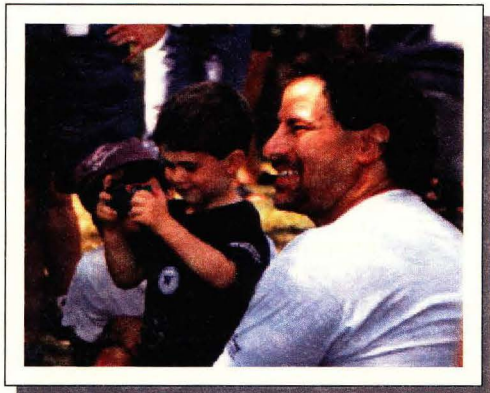
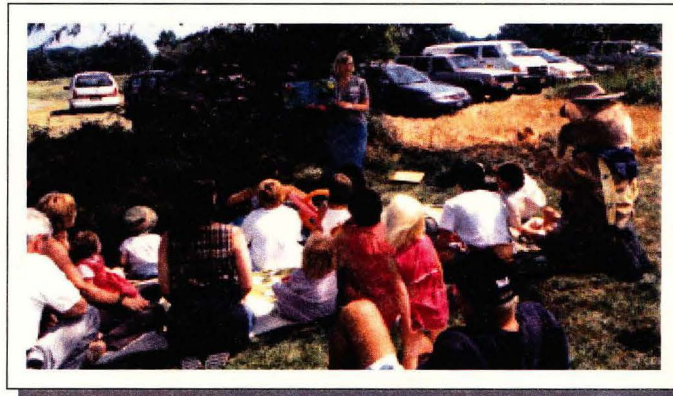
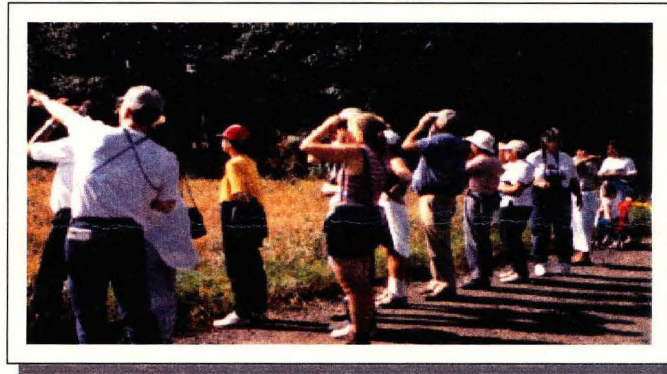
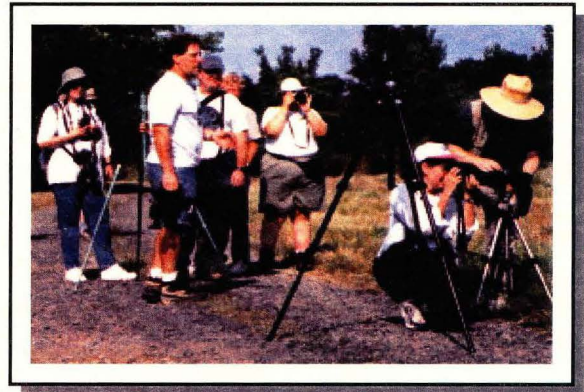
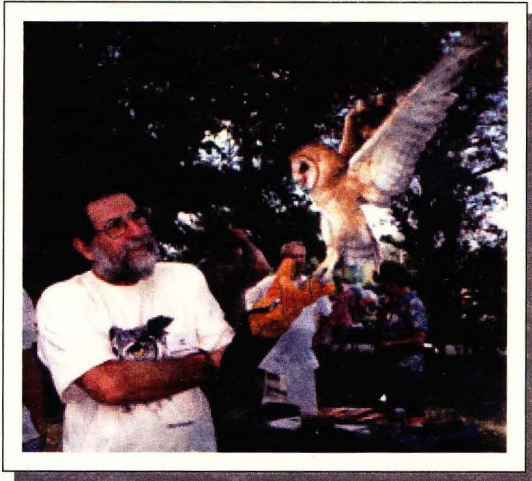
Steve Byland

FESTIVAL IN FOCUS!

Thanks to our friends photographers Charlie Gould, Jane Kendall and Janice Molinari—we bring you some of our Fall Festival surprises in our *Swamp Things Feel Box*, and learned about nature through stories, exhibits and workshops. great time—we can't wait until the next one!



highlights. Our junior friends (those under 4-feet tall) enjoyed spending time with Blue Goose and T.R. Bear, found some neat Our not-so-junior friends delighted in good food, good company, and many walks led by experts in their field. Everyone had a



MARK YOUR CALENDAR—UPCOMING EVENTS

OCTOBER 13—HOMESTEAD CLEANUP

Where: Cement Factory, White Bridge Road — When: 8:00 am to noon

Several times a year, the Friends help with the cleanup of an old homestead site on the Refuge, in order to reclaim the property for wildlife. We need volunteers to help on October 13. You will need to bring work gloves, boots, a sense of humor and some good old muscle power. You, too, may be a contender for the coveted Golden Glove Award!



OCTOBER 14-20 – SUNSET WALKS

Where: Friends Bookstore & Gift Shop — When: 5:45 pm every night

Watch ducks drop in for the night as the sun sets in beautiful surroundings! Once again the Friends will be leading sunset walks back to the pools in the management area during National Wildlife Refuge Week 2001.



OCTOBER 19TH — ANNUAL MEMBER MEETING

Where: Friends Bookstore & Gift Shop — When: 7:30—immediately following the sunset walk
The Annual Meeting of Members will be held. Details will be mailed separately.



NOVEMBER 1ST – PHOTO CONTEST DEADLINE

Last chance – Get out your camera – Fall pictures of the Great Swamp can be spectacular. November 1st is the deadline for the second annual Friends photo contest. Winners will receive a framed enlargement of their photo compliments of Colonial Camera & Framery in New Providence. Drop off your photos at the Friends Bookstore on Saturdays from 11-5 or Sundays from 1-4; or at Refuge Headquarters Monday-Friday from 8-4:30. Or mail your photos to Friends of Great Swamp, 152 Pleasant Plains Road, Basking Ridge, NJ 07920.



NOVEMBER 24 – SECOND ANNUAL TURKEY WALK

Where: Friends Bookstore & Gift Shop — When: 2:00 pm—4:00 pm

The first annual Turkey Walk was so much fun, we're having a second. We didn't see any turkeys on our walk into the wildlife management area – but, since we were all stuffed anyway, no one cared. Paul Steblein, Deputy Refuge Manager, provided an informative dialog along the way and the red-headed woodpecker was a special treat for all of us. What will we see this year?



FRIENDS BOOKSTORE RE-OPENS FOR THE FALL

Thank you, volunteers, members, and Refuge visitors; you all contributed to an outstanding first year for the Friends Bookstore & Gift Shop—we were open every weekend for eight months and welcomed more than 900 visitors.

Thanks to: Brenda Ayers, Cathy Borman, Neil Borman, Wes DeCou, Charlie Gould, Laurel Gould, Jack Higgins, Merris Larkin, Lisa Molinari, Sue Reed, Charlie Risberg, Edythe Risberg, Marcia Rymer, Judy Schmidt, John Wilmot, Kathy Woodward. We are providing a valuable service for by being open for visitors when the Refuge offices are closed, and, of course, proceeds from Bookstore sales will help fund Refuge-identified projects.

We have new Fall Hours. Stop by to browse, pick up visitor information, have a cup of coffee, report your sightings for the day, or just to say Hello!

Help Wanted! This year the Bookstore & Gift Shop will be open on both Saturdays and Sundays to further increase opportunities for visitor information. We need volunteers! Staffing the bookstore is fun and easy; 3-4 hours a month or less, a wonderful place to spend the day, and opportunities to meet the nicest people. Volunteer a little—or a lot. Leave a voice mail for us at 908-797-7200.



WORLD SERIES OF BIRDING... IN THE GREAT SWAMP

Midnight, May 12, 2001 – the 18th annual World Series of Birding kicks off. Guess where the winning teams chose to start off the contest? You bet! The Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge!

Sponsored by New Jersey Audubon, the World Series of Birding is the annual birding competition where teams scour the state to see who can tally the most birds in a 24-hour period. While this event is great fun for the birding teams, it's also a fantastic fundraiser for conservation, bringing in more than \$600,000 last year.

In support of this worthwhile cause, the Great Swamp NWR generously allows registered World Series of Birding teams to enter areas of the Refuge that are normally closed to the public. There are strict rules on when and where teams may travel and every team is required to turn in a birding checklist recording their sightings in the Swamp. In this

way, the Refuge obtains information about bird populations at times of the day when people are not normally in the Swamp. This year, twenty teams signed up for keys and the checklists show birding teams were active on May 12th from midnight until 10:00 p.m.

The cumulative total for the World Series of Birding teams (statewide) was 258 species. The cumulative total for sightings in the Great Swamp NWR as reported by the 20 teams was 123 species. Not bad for a single day!

In addition to 17 warblers, some of the more unusual sightings were: Pied-billed grebe, American Bittern, Least Bittern, Black-crowned Night Heron, King Rail, Virginia Rail, Sora, Greater and Lesser Yellowlegs, Solitary Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Least Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Orchard Oriole.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

One of our most successful and best-kept secrets has been the guided walks led by Friends Vice President and Outreach Chair Judy Schmidt with the help of her volunteer team. On October 3, 2000, Friends of Great Swamp gave our first guided walk to ten members of St. Claire's Behavioral Health Center. In the 12 months since then, 240 people, ages six to sixty, have taken advantage of our guided tours, including five scout troops, five school groups, one church day-camp, and a group from the Morris County Chamber of Commerce.

Six Friends volunteers have donated 42 hours to provide an "up close" lesson about the Refuge system, how Great Swamp got started, and why we value Great Swamp. These tours, previously offered by the Refuge, had been discontinued due to staff shortages.

According to Paul Steblein, Deputy Refuge Manager, "The Friends group has become the foundation for the Refuge to extend guided nature walks, interpretive programs, and presentations about the flora and fauna of the Great Swamp and natural resource issues".

We'd like to expand the number of tours we can offer, but to do this, we need additional volunteers who are available on weekdays. We're working with the Refuge staff on developing a training program for volunteers.



"We appreciate everything you do to improve our environment and make Great Swamp such a fun place to visit... we think the wildlife appreciate it too!"

Cub Scout Pack 33

Give us a call (908-797-7200), or stop by the Friends Bookstore & Gift shop on the weekends to find out more. This is a win-win! A unique opportunity to learn more about Great Swamp from the experts – and to experience the satisfaction of seeing that spark of interest catch on in the young people and adults who come to visit Great Swamp.

Reserve Now!

This year, we are again offering guided walks for school or youth groups, clubs, or organizations. The number of walks is limited and arrangements must be made at least two weeks ahead of time by calling Judy Schmidt at 908-647-2508.

Something Really BIG is About to Happen!

What do the following have in common?
First Flight at Kitty Hawk
Ford Motor Company
Harley-Davidson
Public Service Electric & Gas Company
National Wildlife Refuge System.
(Look for the answer in the next issue.)



Friends of
Great Swamp
National Wildlife Refuge

SEPTEMBER 2001

