



the Swamp Scene

friends of great swamp national wildlife refuge

ISSUE SIXTY SEVEN
NOVEMBER 2021

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*Deadline for March 2022 Issue
March 1, 2022
Submissions Welcome*



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FRIENDS GREAT SWAMP PHOTO CONTEST—ONE OF THE BEST!

By Peter Lebovitz, Friends Photo Contest Coordinator

The winners in our 2021 Photo Contest were announced in a virtual (Zoom) presentation on Saturday, October 2. This year's entries are some of the best we've seen in years, and this is reflected in the quality of the winning photographs. During the Zoom event, many of the winners shared their comments on how they made the shot, and our judges joined in with their own perspectives on what made the picture so good.



The winning photo in the Raptor category was this one, "Sneaky Screech" taken by Chuck Hantis. You can see a video of the entire Photo Contest presentation, including the photographer's and judge's comments, on the Friends YouTube Channel. A gallery of the winning photographs may be seen on the Friends website / Photo Contest Page.

The Friends make good use of the many photos: on our website, to illustrate our Swamp Scene newsletter, for programs and outreach, in brochures, and on interpretive signs. This digital library, numbering in excess of 1,200 photos, is truly a treasure that cannot be duplicated—thanks to the generosity of all of our photographers. Thank you.

More photos on page 10.

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Steve Herdman, President, Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge



My term as President will end in December and I wanted to take this last opportunity to say what a challenging and rewarding experience it has been.

After 38 years living in Randolph, I've recently moved to the Wilmington area in North Carolina, which has been quite an experience and is proving to be quite an adjustment. However, thanks to Zoom, I will be able to complete my two-year term as a board member—remotely.

I have an enduring affinity for the Refuge which began as a teenager and has not diminished. I like to think part of me remains at the Swamp. During my ten plus years volunteering at Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, I have made many friends, I have learned so much, and I have a real sense of having given back to this special place. The level of support from our members and our volunteers is astounding and humbling. As an organization, working with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we have achieved so many things that

make the refuge a better place for wildlife as well as enhancing the visitor experience. Everywhere you look, there is something that was contributed by Friends.

The leadership of our organization continues to be strong and resourceful. As we move into 2022, I anticipate even more improvements to the habitat and increasingly rewarding recreational opportunities. I want to sincerely thank you all for your dedicated and generous support for the Friends. I will miss being at the refuge in person to help out, but I'm glad that technology allows me to continue as an active board member from 600 miles away. It's been a pleasure and a privilege. If you are ever in the Wilmington area, look me up! Thank you all.



LOOKING AHEAD TO 2022—THE FRIENDS BUDGET AND VOLUNTEER ACTIVITIES

Each year the Friends Board and Refuge staff meet to share ideas for new projects for the coming fiscal year. The Board then prioritizes the ideas based on the projected 2022 budget. Here are some of the exciting projects that have been approved for coming year.

- Phase II of the White Oak Trail Improvement Project:
 - * Trail work to extend the ADA compliant portion,
 - * A new entrance kiosk with interpretive panels to inform visitors of what to expect as they walk the trail, including wildlife, habitat, and the benefits of refuge management practices,
- Purchase of a UTV (utility terrain vehicle),
- New informative panels for the Wilderness Area kiosks,
- Head-start turtle research program—continuing the success story,
- Removal of additional dying ash trees at the Visitor Center and replacement with native species,
- Trail cams and purple martin nest cams.

In addition, the Friends are continuing support for:

- Invasive species removal by the Strike Team and the Pervasive Invasive team,
- Year-round volunteer greeters at the Wildlife Observation Center and at the Helen C. Fenske Visitor Center,
- Outreach programs and our urban partnerships,
- Maintaining native plant demonstration gardens,
- Educational monthly Second Sunday programs,
- Trail maintenance of 8 ½ miles of trail,
- Swamp Scene newsletter and Happenings eNews,
- Agents of Discovery—new Challenges for our smartphone app,
- Junior Refuge Manager program.

THANK YOU

*All of this is made possible by your generous donations
and by the thousands of hours
donated by our volunteers.*



AMERICAN RIVER—THE JOURNEY WILL CHANGE YOU

By Kathy Woodward, Friends Board Member

Scott Morris has done it again! He opens our minds and our senses to our part of New Jersey.

Scott's 2018 documentary, *Saving the Great Swamp*, retold the history of the land, the people and the process of creating Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

Scott's latest documentary, *American River* premiered at the Montclair Art Festival, October 23-24, 2021. Based on Mary Bruno's book, *An American River: From Paradise to Superfund*, the film follows Mary and river guide Carl Alderson as they kayak the Passaic River from Great Swamp NWR to the river's mouth in Newark Bay.

As Mary and Carl travel the 80-mile journey, they focus on the geology, history and the delights and challenges

of the waterway. Mary Bruno grew up near the highly polluted lower Passaic and her musings capture the ever-changing complexity of the river. How did this beautiful corridor of water become so degraded and is there hope for restoration? Incredible photography shows landscapes and inhabitants.

Scott Morris's interviews add information and connections. The conversations with people who visit or live and work near Paterson Falls are especially memorable. The music score, by Ben Morris, Scott's son, enhances the scenes.

In a post-show interview, Mary Bruno was asked about her "radical optimism" for the Passaic River. She noted that in the 10 years between her initial trip and her recent return to the

river, three amazing things have happened:

- the designation of Paterson Great Falls as a National Historic Park;
- the creation and expansion of Riverfront Park in Newark;
- and EPA's ambitious project for the "bank to bank" cleanup of the lower 8 miles of the Passaic from Belleville to Newark Bay.

American River will be shown live at film festivals before its general release. For more information about the documentary, visit www.americanriver.film.

You will want to see this documentary several times to appreciate all the elements of our river as presented by Scott Morris.

"Rivers have amazing stories. They flow through space and they flow through time and to write about a river, to travel a river—there's a new story around every bend." Mary Bruno

MEET CHELSEA UTTER, WILDLIFE BIOLOGIST

Never in my life did I think I'd end up back in New Jersey, but darn it, I'm glad I'm here. I grew up in the salt marshes and back bays of Cape May County where I always had a close relationship with nature. Right out of high school, I got my first job with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service at Cape May National Wildlife Refuge. I went on to receive my bachelor's degree in Fisheries and Wildlife Science at Paul Smith's College of the Adirondacks, while working the summer field seasons at Maine Coastal Islands NWR Complex on seabird nesting islands. After graduation, I was sent to Potomac River NWR Complex in Northern Virginia as their first refuge biologist in over six years. Although I loved the refuges at Potomac, the city life was not my speed. After three years, I found an opening and transferred to Wallkill River NWR, earning my ticket back to New Jersey and into the Lenape National Wildlife Refuge Complex.

I've been the wildlife refuge specialist at Wallkill River since 2015, so I've been working in the Lenape Complex

for a while. I am honored to now serve the refuges as the Complex biologist, stationed here out of Great Swamp!

Although I've only been here a few weeks, I've been diving in to learn more about the refuge from both the biological and historical perspective. I'm also gearing up for the fall mowing season which is starting soon! My office is upstairs in the Visitor Center, but you'll be seeing me out and about as much as possible.

Great Swamp is already an incredibly valuable place for wildlife. I'm looking forward to keeping active habitat management on the ground to ensure it stays as productive as possible. I also can't wait to start working more with the Friends and volunteers who keep this place in tip-top shape.

When I'm not at work you'll catch me riding my horse, hunting, fishing, or spending time with my husband, Evan. We have an amateur menagerie on our



Chelsea with two banded black ducks from a rocket netting project at Potomac River NWRC.

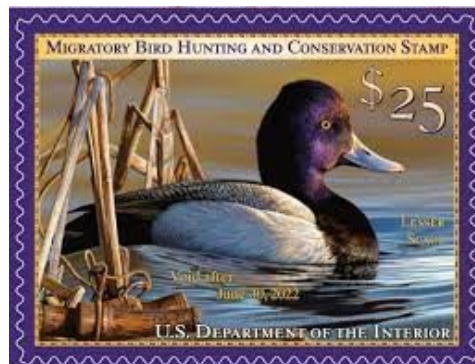
small 8-acre farm consisting of a horse named Cody, chickens, ducks, honeybees, rabbits, and two dogs. It keeps us busy in our "spare" time.

Thank you for this opportunity to introduce myself!

DO YOUR PART FOR REFUGES AND FOR CONSERVATION—BUY A FEDERAL DUCK STAMP

Yes, a duck stamp is required for waterfowl hunters. But it's not about hunting. It's actually about buying habitat for waterfowl—and for the other wildlife that benefit.

Federal Duck Stamps provide good value for your purchase—98 cents of every dollar from the sales of duck stamps goes to help acquire and protect wetland habitat. The current duck stamp serves as an entrance pass to national wildlife refuges.



Now isn't that a thoughtful and useful gift this holiday season!

If you enjoy visiting Great Swamp and other refuges, help ensure that these areas are protected into the future.

Federal Duck Stamps are \$25 and are available at the Helen C. Fenske Visitor Center, open Friday—Sunday from 10:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. You may also send a self-addressed stamped envelope with a check for \$25 for each stamp to:

Friends of Great Swamp NWR, 32 Pleasant Plains Road, Basking Ridge NJ 07920.

MEET JASON VASSALLO, MAINTENANCE TRAINEE

I was raised in Sussex County, and spent plenty of time exploring the natural landscapes of North Jersey. I grew up mountain biking, hiking, and trying to find fossils whenever I got the chance.

After college I wanted to see the country and work on public lands. I worked with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Virginia leading a Youth Conservation Corp crew for a summer. The next summer I had the opportunity to lead a high school conservation crew in Alaska. Both of these experiences made me realize that I wanted to pursue conservation work for a career. I got to see firsthand how people can come together and make a positive impact on public lands.

I also worked as an AmeriCorps trail worker in the Colorado Rocky Mountains. My crew worked on projects including trail remediation outside of Vail, building a bridge in a

wilderness area near Copper, and cutting a new trail on Mt. Elbert. I spent the whole summer camping and working in the backcountry.

I am looking forward to helping with various maintenance projects around the refuge. Trail maintenance, invasive species management, prescribed burning, and building maintenance are some of the activities I will be involved in at Great Swamp. Also, I look forward to learning more about birding, and the Great Swamp seems like a perfect fit for that.

I am grateful for the opportunity to work at Great Swamp as a maintenance worker. I have worked on public lands around the United States, but coming back to New Jersey has been my goal. I am looking



forward to working with the Friends group to help improve the refuge for years to come!



WOW! CHECK OUT THE NEW ENTRANCE SIGNS AT GREAT SWAMP NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE



Signs are at the Wildlife Observation Center and on Wood Duck Way leading to the Visitor Center.

The National Wildlife Refuge System has launched a rebranding campaign with new eye-catching colors, modern images, and more positive messaging. Refuges have often been described as “hidden gems”. The goal of this new campaign is to change that and to become recognized by the American public as one of the best places to enjoy wildlife and nature.

Instead of brown signs that all look very official, the new signs are bright and welcoming. Each refuge’s sign will showcase an “animal ambassador”, a species that is associated with that particular refuge. Great Swamp is one of the first refuges to receive the new signs with our ambassador—the Wood Duck. The new colors and images will also be used for the new interpretive signs being designed for the Chandler S. Robbins Viewing Platform. Watch for more changes to come as this campaign is rolled out nationwide.

PHASE ONE OF THE WHITE OAK TRAIL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT IS COMPLETE

By Dave Katz, Construction Crew Volunteer, Friends Board Member

What do you do with 56 tons of stone dust? You use it to create a beautiful ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) compliant trail system right across from the Visitor Center. That's right. The Friends Construction Crew worked all summer to finish the first phase of the White Oak Trail renovation. The project is being funded by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.



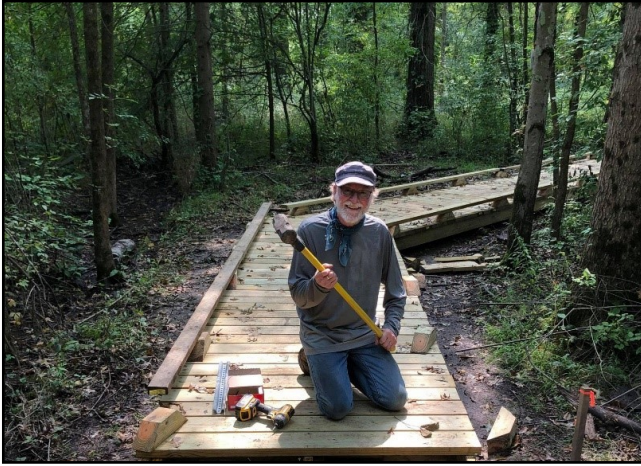
All that stone dust was placed on 3,610 square feet of underlayment—a geosynthetic material which helps stabilize the stone dust.



To provide drainage in muddy areas, over 100 feet of plastic conduit was installed. After the rains from Hurricane Ida, some areas of the trail had to be redone. New conduit was added, and reinforced with about 3 tons of gravel. After another storm, it was noted that some areas needed additional trenching, which was recently completed.

In wet areas that are prone to flooding, a series of raised boardwalks were built. These boardwalks required 10,000 board feet of lumber and many thousands of deck screws and other hardware.

None of this would have been possible without the dedication of the Construction Crew volunteers. They worked through heat, mosquitoes, rain, mud, poison ivy and even some engineering drama. Every pound of stone dust, every shovel of dirt, and each board was moved into place by a volunteer, and it was hard work. In total, over 2,000 volunteer hours were spent on this project. Of that, Crew leader George Solovay spent 320 hours designing, planning, and building the project.



While it was hard work, it was rewarding, and the finished section looks great. Some good friendships were made within the crew, and we got to celebrate George's 87th birthday in August with coffee and donuts. In October, the Friends put on a really nice luncheon for the Construction Crew, which the Crew greatly appreciated.

We hope you will come visit the White Oak Trail and enjoy what we have built. The entire Construction Crew is looking forward to beginning work on Phase Two next year.

Construction Crew (l to r): Dave Katz, Steve Gruber, Kent Stevens, Richard Hiserodt, George Solovay, Johnny Roush, Robert Schwaneberg, Tom Cartwright, kneeling in front, Matt Heiss. Missing from photo: Lee Brush, Joe Balwierczak, Pete Axelrod, John Herrlin, Bill Craine. Thank you to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service staff for their support.

BROTHER INTERNATIONAL CORPORATION—A LONG TIME PARTNER

By Randi Emmer, Board member and Outreach Chair and Jane Bell, Board member and Chair of the Trail Blazers

On Saturday, October 16, 2021, Friends of Great Swamp volunteers and Jonathan Rosenberg, Refuge Visitor Services Manager, welcomed a group from Brother International Corporation's USA headquarters in Bridgewater, NJ.

This was a special day for all. Brother International employees, as well as family members, have been coming to the refuge each year for a corporate work day, usually around April's Earth Day. Unfortunately, due to Covid-19, the work days in April 2020 and April 2021 had to be cancelled. This fall, we were all so fortunate to be able to host a small group albeit with many Covid-19 restrictions still in force.

Brother International has been coming to the refuge since 2012, always ready to go to work (even in the rain) no matter what the project. 2021 would have been their 10th consecutive year, but given Covid-19, we will have to wait until 2022 to celebrate that milestone.



April 28, 2012—the first Brother International Corporation work day at Great Swamp NWR

Welcome speeches were made by Jonathan Rosenberg on behalf of the refuge, Randi Emmer for the Friends, and Dustin Hirota, Vice President of Corporate Development for Brother. Now it was time to get to work and Friends volunteer leader Jane Bell had a project all lined up.

The Passaic River near the Helen C. Fenske Visitor Center flooded on September 1 as the remnants of Hurricane Ida moved up the coast and dumped record amounts of rain in the area. Some of the trails were hit hard, especially the Nature Detective Trail. The flood waters pushed the wooden

4-by-4s that border the trail into the pathways and washed away much of the wood chips covering it. Despite a quick volunteer cleanup after the storm, more work was needed.

A hard working team of Brother employees worked with Friends volunteers on the washed out trail. They loaded wheelbarrow after wheelbarrow with wood chips, hauling and dumping them in the path, and then raking. After a couple of hours of strenuous effort—the wood chip pile was depleted and the job was done! Mission accomplished!

Every year the Friends provide a BBQ for the employees, their families and our volunteers after the work is completed. The BBQ took place this year with Covid-19 guidelines and restrictions. No one seemed to mind and everyone had a great time and plenty of food.



April 25, 2015—Clearing the White Oak Trail

The impact the Brother employees have made at the refuge over these past years is very visible and very important. They have worked on the Nature Detective Trail on several visits, helped maintain the Bockoven Trail, and were one of the first groups to start the daunting task of clearing brush for the White Oak Trail. They have donated native trees, shrubs and a bench as well as presenting a generous check to the Friends each year. They have lugged mulch, pushed wheelbarrows of wood chips, and spread stone dust. They have planted, raked, weeded, edged, sanded and stained. The Friends and Refuge are so grateful for the long-time and continuing the support of Brother International Corporation and their enthusiastic and energetic employees. We are looking forward to 2022. Thank you all.

NEW JERSEY BLUEBIRD SOCIETY

By Leo Hollein, Volunteer and Refuge Bluebird Trail Leader

The Eastern bluebird (*Sialia sialis*) population declined precipitously in the early part of the twentieth century. Previously this attractive and popular species was abundant. Bluebirds feed primarily on the ground, with insects making up as much as 90% of their diet during the spring and summer months. They perch to hunt the ground for grubs, grasshoppers and caterpillars. Bluebirds also feed on spotted lanternflies, the latest foreign threat to native plants.

Bluebird populations declined due to habitat loss and the introduction of competing non-native cavity nesting species. Bluebirds are a secondary cavity nesting species. They are not capable of making their own nest holes. Historically, they nested in natural tree holes or abandoned woodpecker holes in open areas such as orchards or at forest edges. The widespread removal of dead and damaged trees reduced the number of potential bluebird nesting sites. Introduced house sparrows and European starlings aggressively competed with bluebirds for the dwindling nest sites.

The widespread introduction of bluebird nest boxes and nest box trails has been successful in reversing the downward trend in bluebird populations. The refuge staff was actively involved in creating and monitoring the nest box program in the last century to help restore bluebird populations. The Friends of Great Swamp took responsibility for the funding,



maintenance, and monitoring of the bluebird nest box trail in 2001. The refuge staff in recent years has focused on reversing the declining populations of wood turtles, bog turtles and bats.

Citizen groups concerned about declining bluebird populations began creating organizations to promote the recovery of bluebirds and other native cavity-nesting birds. New Jersey is home to the Eastern bluebird that inhabits the eastern part of North America. It is the state bird of New York and Missouri. There are two other bluebird species in North America that reside in the Western states. The Western bluebird (*Sialia mexicana*) is similar in color to its Eastern relative. The mountain bluebird (*Sialia*

currucoides) is all blue. All three species are cavity nesters. The mountain bluebird is the state bird of Idaho and Nevada.

The North American Bluebird Society (NABS) was founded in 1978. It currently has sixty-one affiliates in thirty-three states, four Canadian provinces and Bermuda. The New Jersey Bluebird Society (NJBBS) is one of its largest affiliates. The NJBBS newsletter *Jersey Blues* is issued twice a year.

Two of the refuge nest box monitor volunteers are NJBBS members. The refuge nesting data is included in the NJBBS data. In the last two seasons over 5,000 bluebirds have fledged from bluebird boxes or trails monitored by NJBBS members. Most fledglings were in the southern half of the state which has, in general, excellent bluebird habitat as well as a longer bluebird nesting season. The refuge fledges on average about two hundred young per season. While this is less than 5% of the total, the refuge reports the largest number of fledglings in Northern New Jersey.

Check out the NJBBS web site for more information on its activities at: <www.njbluebirdsociety.org>. The site has copies of past *Jersey Blues* articles and information on becoming a member.



PHOTO CONTEST 2021 *(continued from page 1)*

Fifty-five photographers submitted 257 photos in seven categories. The largest category by far was *Birds* with 62 entries, which doesn't include the *Raptors* category, with 26 entries. The photos represent all seasons and a wide variety of wildlife and scenic landscape photos.

The Friends are looking into new software for the 2022 contest, which will be announced early next year. So grab your camera or smartphone and head out to the refuge. But please remember to practice responsible and respectful wildlife viewing and photography. The Friends strongly support the *Principles of Ethical*

Field Practices issued by the North American Nature Photography Association at <Nanpa.org>. To quote: *"It is NANPA's belief that these principles will encourage all who participate in the enjoyment of nature to do so in a way that best promotes good stewardship of the resource"*. The principles are written for nature photographers, but are applicable for everyone who enjoys viewing wildlife.



Susan Neufeld: "Reflections of Summer's transition into Fall", 1st place Scenics



Karen Kelsey: "Orange mushrooms", 1st place Plants



Chuck Hantis: "Kingfisher", 1st place Birds



A HOLIDAY GIFT IDEA

If you are looking for a unique and very personal gift for the holiday season, how about an engraved commemorative brick to be placed on the patio at the Helen C. Fenske Visitor Center? Bricks can honor or remember loved ones, or can be used to share a favorite nature quote.

Check out the Friends website for more information and an order form.



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
32 Pleasant Plains Road, Basking Ridge, New Jersey 07920

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

☐ **EASTERN BLUEBIRD—\$15-\$49**

☐ **PAINTED TURTLE—\$50-\$99**

☐ **RIVER OTTER—\$100-\$249**

☐ **MONARCH BUTTERFLY—\$250-\$499**

☐ **WOOD DUCK—\$500 +**

☐ **New Member?**

TOTAL ENCLOSED \$ _____

You may also join online at www.friendsofgreatswamp.org

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 ...

**Become a Friend Today—or,
Give a gift membership to a friend.**

Thank you



Memberships help support the projects and programs at Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge.

Membership Benefits

- The Swamp Scene Newsletter.
- A 10% discount in Friends Nature Shop .
- Notifications of upcoming events.
- Satisfaction in knowing you are helping protect wildlife and wild places while safeguarding a national treasure for future generations.

Gift Memberships will include a coupon redeemable at the Friends Nature Shop for a free Great Swamp pin or Great Swamp patch.

Friends of Great Swamp NWR
32 Pleasant Plains Road
Basking Ridge NJ 07920

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THE SWAMP SCENE NOVEMBER 2021

Friends of Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge
Is an independent, volunteer, non-profit organization
dedicated to

Promoting stewardship of the natural resources of the Refuge,

Inspiring an appreciation of nature through education and outreach,

Engaging in partnership activities that support and enhance the Great Swamp National
Wildlife Refuge and the National Wildlife Refuge System.