



# The Swamp Scene

friends of great swamp national wildlife refuge

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### Highlights

Rich Guadagno Remembered	2
Volunteers Are Recognized	3
Behind the Scenes—Trail Blazers	4
White Oak Trail Renovation	6-7
Seeking Board Candidates	10

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## WHOSE HABITAT ARE WE PROTECTING?

*By John Berry, Friends Board Member and Great Swamp NWR Volunteer*

**T**he Great Swamp Strike Team's mission is to restore and protect habitat. But whose habitat? A habitat is defined by the plant or animal species that inhabits it, and given the complexity of Great Swamp food webs, no matter where the team works, we're in the middle of countless species' habitats.

Recently, the Strike Team began working in Fields 47b and 47c. These are large, wet, brushy fields that the Refuge mows periodically in order to maintain them as large, wet, brushy fields—critical habitat for many iconic Great Swamp species. Glossy buckthorn, unfortunately, has

invaded both fields, and sections of 47c are now badly infested with this Eurasian shrub.

Except for the glossy buckthorn, however, both fields are in good condition. A diverse native plant community is anchored by some key bushes: blueberry, silky dogwood, buttonbush, and serviceberry. Wetter areas have a lot of bur-reed.



Field 47c: It's hard to see, but chimney swifts and purple martins are flying low, foraging for insects.

During three workdays in June, a couple of bird species were especially notable. Large numbers of purple martins and chimney swifts foraged constantly over the fields, often low to the ground. Both of these aerial insectivores are in long-term decline due to habitat loss. (According to the North American Breeding Bird Survey, purple martin numbers fell by 37 percent between 1966 and 2015, while chimney swift numbers dropped by 72 percent.) The birds' habitat must of course include their aerial environment, where insect populations have been reduced by human actions below—development and insecticides. So, by working to eradicate glossy buckthorn in this corner of Great Swamp, the Strike Team is evidently protecting important habitat for purple martins and chimney swifts.