

U.S. Fish & Wildlife assists with grassland restoration efforts

Staff Report

Grassland restoration is a big job, but thanks to some big help from the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) we're getting it done. As a group, grassland birds have experienced some of the most precipitous declines in the Northeast. Populations of species such as Grasshopper Sparrows and Bobolinks have declined about 69 percent and 38 percent, respectively, in the past 25 years. Reversing those trends is a priority of Audubon New York.

For the past couple of years Audubon New York has been trying to restore portions of its Buttercup Farm Sanctuary to habitat suitable for grassland birds. This laborious task involves removing woody species such as invading shrubs and trees and has been completed mostly by hand. This past fall, however, our efforts got a big lift with some help from the USFWS New York Field Office in Cortland through their Partners for Fish and Wildlife program. They donated the services of a truly mammoth machine, called a hydro-ax, to clear the woody cover from 30 acres of the sanctuary. We all hope the not-too-distant results of this partnership include the sweet singing of breeding Eastern Meadowlarks.



Above, the USFWS hydro-ax is at work at Buttercup Farm Sanctuary to complete grassland restoration. The goal is to create a habitat suitable for grassland birds, which have been declining in numbers throughout the Northeast. At right, is the landscape prior to this restoration work. Below, both pictures show the Buttercup Farm barn. Immediately below, the barn is in the process of being restored.



Buttercup Farm Sanctuary barn restoration underway

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Audubon New York is in the midst of restoring the main barn at Buttercup Farm Sanctuary in Standfordville. The barn is a historic structure dating back to 1881. Uncommon and handsome hand-hewed chestnut beams support this two-story structure. The barn lies in the heart of an agricultural community in northern Dutchess County and has long been one of the most prominent features along Route 82. The barn is at the center of a 651-acre sanctuary of

incredibly diverse habitats including mature hardwood forest, wet woodland, wetlands, orchards, grassland and agricultural fields.

The Buttercup Farm barn is a symbol of the work ethic and cultural heritage of earlier generations. Audubon New York is exploring the possibility of using the barn as an education facility to teach schoolchildren and other sanctuary visitors about grassland bird species and the importance of cultivated farm fields for their breeding.

Educator Swaim recognized for outstanding achievement

By Stan Wecker

The Saw Mill River Audubon Society's (SMRAS) board of directors honored education director and naturalist Anne Swaim for her many outstanding accomplishments since coming to Audubon in 1989. The ceremony took place at the board's first awards dinner, at the Casa Rina Restaurant, Thornwood, Nov. 15.

Swaim's environmental education work with students and adults (she teaches more than 8,000 people a year) and her supervision of more than 300 acres of critical wildlife habitat in SMRAS' eight sanctuaries are among the highlights of a decade of achievement recognized by President Jeff Pinerio.

In addition to directing education

and conservation programs, Swaim designed and continues to maintain the chapter's web site, attends public hearings and reviews environmental impact statements, networks with other groups, represents the society at public events and writes articles for the *Audubon Advocate*.

The occasion was commemorated by gifts and written remembrances by board members, friends and guests. New Castle Town Supervisor Marion Sinek recognized Anne's contributions as chair of the town's Conservation Board. Anne also received a 10-year Distinguished Service Certificate from Audubon's New York State Office.

Stan Wecker has been an active board member of Saw Mill River Audubon Society for nearly 40 years.