

# A "Landmark" Event in Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary History

By Marilyn England

AT EIGHTY YEARS OF AGE, the Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary and Audubon Center is Audubon's oldest sanctuary. During that time, while the Sanctuary has been evolving into a premier natural science education and research center, the physical footprint occupied on the landscape has remained at its original 12 acres.

All of that changed on September 10, as the Sanctuary acquired three acres of adjoining property. While the acreage may seem small, it represents a giant step for the Sanctuary's future. Indeed, given its location in a suburban community, this acquisition is likely to be the only realistic opportunity the Sanctuary will ever have to increase its size (our other "nearest neighbor" is a historic cemetery containing Theodore Roosevelt's grave—not likely to be offered for sale any time soon!) No longer are we sandwiched between two private owners, with all of the concerns a near neighbor association brings to a highly active center. The Sanctuary's boundary now goes out to the road providing a sense of privacy and breathing room not previously enjoyed.

Equally important, the acquisition substantially increases the amount of wildlife habitat under our management, as about eighty percent of the new parcel remains in a natural state. This is good news for birds, which will benefit from our expanded efforts to replace non-native plant species with more wildlife-friendly native varieties. We also envision the "new addition" as adding value to our education and public programs and to enhancing the nature experience of sanctuary visitors.



Pictured above is the beautiful home, which sits on the Dartt Property. It is expected to serve as a residence for future Sanctuary Directors or perhaps other staff such as an onsite caretaker.

While the reality of this historic event hasn't completely seeped in, it nonetheless brings a smile to our faces as we look over the fence that once shut us out, and realize that land is now ours. We are sure that our first benefactors, Emlen and Christine Roosevelt who donated the original 12 acres to Audubon in 1923, would be smiling too. We can hardly wait for the day the fences come down, and the Audubon sign goes up!

## Restoring the Spirit!

By Glenn Phillips

IN THE MARCH-APRIL 1967 issue of Audubon Magazine, Joseph Shomon, then Director of the Nature Centers Division of the National Audubon Society, pondered, "Will a park die in Brooklyn?" Noting the impact of overdevelopment, he declared, "Misuse, overuse and wanton neglect have destroyed the kinship which once existed between man and his environment... Prospect Park itself has lost much of its spirit."

Shomon outlined a series of steps needed to restore Prospect Park,

including creating a 50-acre nature sanctuary within the park, and year-round educational center to promote stewardship of the Park. Thanks in large part to the efforts of the Park's first Administrator, Tupper Thomas, and the Prospect Park Alliance (an independent, not-for-profit organization dedicated to improving the Park), thirty-five years later, Prospect Park is once again inviting to people and wildlife, and the dream of the Park as a sanctuary with an Audubon Center has finally been realized.

The Alliance, with New York City Parks, is our partner in the creation of Audubon's first urban Center, and shares many goals with Audubon New York, which include the conservation, protection and restoration of habitat. The Natural Resources Crew was created by the Alliance to restore and maintain 250 acres of natural areas in Prospect Park. With the assistance of other departments and volunteers, over 100 acres of forest, meadow and wetlands have been restored to date. To support these projects, the Alliance has raised nearly \$50 million from government, foundations and individuals.

In conjunction with the opening of the Prospect Park Audubon Center, the Park has begun restoring 21 new acres of natural areas surrounding the Center. Work is currently underway on the Binnenwater, an area just north of the Center. Through the next five years, the Alliance will continue this project guided by the Park's Landscape Management Plan. The restoration of the Lullwater will include removing invasive species, dredging the water course

to recreate Olmsted and Vaux's original designs, addressing erosion, adding native plants, repairing paths and drainage, and building rustic shelters and viewing platforms based on original designs.

The proximity of woodlands and relatively quiet water along the Lullwater and Peninsula makes these important wildlife areas, favored by migrating warblers in the spring and fall. In the summer they provide breeding habitat for Green Herons and Black-crowned Night-herons, Kingfishers, and Orioles, as well as foraging habitat for other wading birds, such as Great Blue Herons and Egrets. In the winter, waterfowl, such as Ring-necked, Ruddy, and Black Ducks, Hooded Mergansers, American Coots, and Pied-Billed Grebes, use the area. Prospect Park was designated an Important Bird Area by Audubon New York in 1998.

On Friday, September 13, 2002 Prospect Park unveiled twelve acres of restored ponds, streams and forest known to the Park's staff as "Ravine I." Seven years after being closed for a major habitat restoration project, the fences came down and the area is now permanently open to the public. Once again, wood thrushes nest in Prospect Park; Prospect Park's spirit, at long last, has been restored.



Prospect Park Audubon Center at the Boathouse.