



Summer highlights from Constitution Marsh Sanctuary, James P. Rod Audubon Center

Staff Report

On the afternoon of May 24, a Glossy Ibis flew in and foraged for a while in Foundry Cove at the north end of Constitution Marsh. It was not only a new addition to our bird list; it also proved to be an exciting forerunner of the rest of the summer here along the shores of the Hudson River.

During the National Audubon Society board of directors June meeting at Bear Mountain, we hosted a field trip for the board and their families, and Audubon's senior management team. Needless to say, we worked long hours in preparation, and the center never looked better. Later in summer, Audubon's legal team and accounting department visited and were also shown the delights of Constitution Marsh by canoe. New York City Audubon toured the marsh on August 27th and Putnam Highlands Audubon held their September board meeting here. It is always a thrill for us to be visited by fellow Auduboners, people whom we may know only through e-mail or telephone, and share our program and beautiful marsh with them.

All told we conducted 56 programs for 1,551 visitors this summer. We served a varied audience, from New York City day camps, British fisheries biologists, exchange students from Germany and a Korean news team. New York State Parks Commissioner Bernadette Castro and Palisades Interstate Parks Commissioner Carol Ash honored us with a visit as well.

New opportunities for programs also came about this summer. We are working with the Haldane School, the Garrison Union Free School and the Little Stony Point Citizen's Association to develop river ecology programs to be conducted throughout

the school year. Central to these developing collaborations is the Hudson River Estuary and the values of its diverse habitats. We also have received federal and state bird-banding permits, the first step in realizing our bird monitoring and citizen science programs.

To continue, work on the new boardwalk began again in earnest at the end of the summer, after a nearly four month hiatus to prevent disturbance of breeding wildlife.

Also, the Hudson River Improvement Fund and the Hudson River Estuary Grants Program are funding the final improvements to the James P. Rod Audubon Center. These funds will allow us to heat and finish insulating the building, providing an extended teaching season and a more comfortable work environment. The Benjamin Moore Corporation is also giving much needed and welcome financial support.



James A. Beemer

More than 1,500 people visited the James P. Rod Audubon Center at Constitution Marsh this summer to participate in outdoor and indoor educational programming.

Finally, undergraduate students from Penn State and the University of Vermont interned at the sanctuary this summer. Emily Schwartz and Michael Rauch, along with Amy Gordon (who was sponsored by the Philipstown Garden Club) proved to be invaluable assets to our staff. Volunteers Joe Stapleton, Caroline Smith, Brian Rubino and Matt Kavaler provided tremendous enthusiasm and assistance to this successful summer season and we are most grateful.

West Nile cure may be worse than disease: National Audubon research

By William Cooke

Despite words of caution from the National Audubon Society of New York State and others that the cure may be worse than the disease, many community health officials in New York followed the dictates of the federal Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and sprayed insecticides in residential neighborhoods this summer. They did this to combat the West Nile strain of Encephalitis, which showed up for the first time in this hemisphere last year.

According to research by National Audubon and others, while West Nile Encephalitis is not a threat to the vast majority of New Yorkers, the response undertaken by New York City and a number of counties and driven by CDC does pose a long-term risk to the health of wildlife and people. CDC urges counties to broadly spray insecticides whenever a dead bird is found carrying the virus.

However, research shows that the West Nile strain does not represent a threat to the vast majority of people. Most people who get the virus never even know it. A very small percent get mild flu-like symptoms and for a rare few it may represent a serious health risk. In New York state during the summer of 2000, no one died of the West Nile virus.

According to research by Audubon

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and others, there are no scientific studies that support spraying insecticides to reduce the incidence of West Nile Encephalitis in the human population. In fact, Cornell University researchers have stated that the spraying is both ineffective and an inappropriate response because spraying may help increase the insects resistance to insecticides.

The National Audubon Society, its New York state office and Audubon chapters including New York City, worked with New York state health and environmental officials from and a number of counties, as well as with conservation and environmental groups, to prepare a reasoned, science-based response plan. Audubon will continue to work with all interested parties in an effort to have decision making based on sound science that takes into consideration the broader ecosystem and long-term public health concerns.

The long, grey woods

Biological diversity on the West Point Military Reservation

By James A. Beemer

The views expressed are those of the author, not necessarily the position of the United States Military Academy.

Perched on the west shore of the Hudson River near the northern gateway to the Hudson Highlands and well known for its role in American history is the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, N.Y. What may not be so well known however, is the rich biological diversity inhabiting the 16,000-plus acres under the Academy's management.

The cantonment area, which is east of Route 9W, is comprised of less than 2,000 acres. West of 9W is the West Point Military Reservation where the majority of military training of the Corps of Cadets occurs. The rugged slopes at West Point are primarily covered in an oak-hickory forest, although some pitch pine-chestnut oak communities and oak-hemlock stands are found on some ridges. About 25 terrestrial communities have been identified. The area contains seventeen lakes and ponds, 35 miles of freshwater streams, and 300 freshwater wetlands totaling nearly 1,100 acres. West Point has stewardship of 3.5 miles of Hudson River shoreline and river bottom, including World's End, the deepest point on the river at 206 feet.



James A. Beemer

West Point researcher James Palino poses with adult female bald eagle at Constitution Marsh (CMS) during a joint effort with the state DEC, CMS and West Point.

The U.S. Military Academy includes Constitution Island, directly across the river from the Academy. Constitution is the largest of the Hudson River's islands and is adjacent to Constitution Marsh Sanctuary, managed by the National Audubon Society of New York. The U.S. Military Academy takes an active approach towards managing its natural resources, since the early 1900s when its first forest management plan was adopted and approved by Gifford Pinchot.

More than 1,100 vascular plant species have been identified, 50 of which are listed as rare by the New

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