



## Sanctuary interns immersed in marsh environment

By Eric Lind and Rich Anderson

"I don't think I could have asked for a better introduction to the world of outdoor education and natural history," said Avril Merandy of Cold Spring, New York, after completing her Audubon internship recently. Since 1989, Constitution Marsh Audubon Center has been giving college students the opportunity to spend the summer working and learning about all aspects of operating a wildlife sanctuary and nature center. Interns are quickly immersed in all of our activities and become a wildlife warden, environmental educator and a research scientist for three months. By the middle of the season, they are facilitating stream explorations for kids, leading canoe trips into the marsh, and identifying all sorts of previously unknown plants and animals. The objective is to augment what these students have learned in school and to hone their practical skills. This is a chance to apply their knowledge and to invent new ways to teach themselves. Ryan Crehan of Ridgefield, Connecticut explained that "by simply not telling me answers, but encouraging me to find them out for myself, I have continued to learn and discover each new place I go."

Many of our interns have used their experience as a stepping stone towards careers in the environmental field. They have gone on to become wildlife techni-



Constitution Marsh Audubon Center

*Interns play a crucial role in the education programs at Constitution Marsh Audubon Center, giving college students the opportunity to spend summers working and learning about operating a wildlife sanctuary.*

cians, environmental educators, fishery specialists, assistant sanctuary managers and of course, graduate students. Some have returned for a second and more advanced internship at the marsh the following summer, and many visit again just to keep in touch. "Interning at the marsh gave me a hands-on experience and created new ideas and opportunities for me to consider in the future. I was also able to meet many different people that passed through the marsh

from all different places," said Marakim Zablinis while reflecting on her recent internship.

Of course, the interns aren't the only ones who benefit from the experience. Exhibits, trails and the rest of the facility need to be maintained, and we depend upon and welcome their help. And each summer as the training begins we have an opportunity to remind ourselves of things that inspired us to enter the environmental field in the first place.

## Corps urged to protect IBA wetlands in new permit rules

By Graham Cox

Wetland habitat covers some 60 percent of the 127 Important Bird Areas (IBA) identified by the National Audubon Society of New York State. Though some of these sites are already in public ownership, many are not and deserve improved protection.

To increase their chances of improved protection the Audubon state program is asking two major agencies to consider including our identified IBAs in the revised steps they are taking to conserve open spaces and natural resources.

At the federal level the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is revising its wetlands permit rules. Audubon has asked both the New York City and Buffalo district offices of the Corps to include the IBAs in their list of sites that are off-limits to being covered by what are known as their Nationwide Permits. That is, Audubon is asking that no automatic exemption from a full Corps wetland permit review will be granted for projects that impact an IBA.

Revision of the Corps' Nationwide Permit program continues with ever-increasing complexity and potential for legal challenges. On March 9, after several delays and being inundated with 1,700 public comments, the Corps said that the new and revised nationwide permit rules would go into effect in June, and the old unpopular Nationwide Permit 26 would expire April 14. This blanket permit allowed developers to fill up to three acres of wetlands

along small streams without a Corps permit. The new general multiple permits, though complex and applying differing rules in different circumstances, bring this limit down to half an acre. This takes millions of acres out of the permit shortcut program.

Though the Corps insists that the new rules are a win-win for the environment, conservation groups have challenged them as still not strict enough.

As part of this rules revision, the Corps is also considering what are called

regional conditions. From the Buffalo district office, they have issued a list of wetland areas that will be exempt from the shortcut nationwide permit rules. These include some of the region's biggest wetlands, such as Montezuma in Cayuga County and Thousand Acre Swamp in Monroe County. The New York City office, which covers the eastern counties of the state, has not yet issued its regional conditions, but has expressed a willingness to consider proposals for exemptions, such as IBA wetland sites, on a case by case basis.

Meanwhile, the state DEC and other agencies have until June to comment to the Corps on the rule changes for the nationwide permits and regional conditions. National Audubon has prepared a comprehensive review for State Parks and DEC to consider in their comments to the Corps of Engineers. Readers interested in reviewing these permits can visit [www.eswr.com/ish54.html](http://www.eswr.com/ish54.html). Or they may contact [jsibbing@audubon.org](mailto:jsibbing@audubon.org) for a copy of the Audubon recommendations on improving the wetlands permit rules.

## Audubon State Board chair to serve with Hudson River Institute

Staff Report

Constantine Sidamon-Eristoff, chairman of the board of directors for the National Audubon Society of New York State, has been appointed to the advisory committee for the Hudson River Institute, proposed by Governor George E. Pataki to be a world-renowned focus for river and estuary research and education.

Marking the 30th anniversary of Earth Day, Governor Pataki named 35 members to the advisory committee from public and private educational and research institutions, as well as community leaders, public service organizations and businesses. The governor also named a working task force of state agency heads to develop the plans for the institute in the next year. DEC Commissioner John Cahill will chair the task force.

The task force and advisory committee are charged with defining the institute's mission, establishing its official name, developing a business plan and organizational structure, determining its location and initial research agenda, developing links to other research and education organizations,

identifying funding sources and conducting a search for a director and governing board members. The governor has set aside \$1 million for the planning work. It is expected to have a \$50 million annual budget and support up to 500 employees. The new institute will be patterned after the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute in Massachusetts.

*Audubon's Constantine Sidamon-Eristoff, among others appointed by the governor, will be developing and establishing the new Hudson River Institute, which will focus on river and estuary research and education.*

