

ACQUISITION OF A NATURAL HABITAT AREA

by Allan S. Klonick

For over 40 years Reed Road Swamp has been known to Bird people and naturalists as a fruitful area for birds and plants found rarely in other parts of Monroe County. It had always been included on our Christmas and Spring census. We all knew Reed Road Swamp, but no one ever bothered to learn who was the real owner. In early April of 1949 "For Sale" signs were posted along both sides of the macadam road that divides the two parcels and our interest was aroused.

Reed Road Swamp is located in the southwest corner of Monroe County about 2-1/4 miles north of Scottsville, and about 7-1/2 miles south and west of the city line of Rochester. It is located in the Town of Chili, formerly the town of Riga, just south of what is now the south branch of Black Creek. Ballantyne Road is at the north terminus of Reed Road and Morgan Road intersects to the south. Reed Road, which runs north and south bisects the sanctuary property - there is about 48 acres on the east side and about 36 acres on the west side. The basic terrain is low wooded swamp, the predominate trees being elm, and maple with thick brush affording rather an impenetrable undergrowth. This is occasionally broken by deer runs and the path made by fallen timber. The average altitude is about 565 feet and according to geodetic maps the contour variation is not over 25 feet from the western edge or high point to the eastern edge or low point. This condition plus the high water table keeps the surface under water for part of every year.

The actual acquisition was begun in May of 1949, when a contract of sale was signed between the owner and

several members of the Genesee Ornithological Society. It might be added here that the purchasers signed the contract with very little idea just where they could obtain the \$1,000.00, which was the purchase price. Immediately, the program was put before the membership of the G. O. S. and a drive was started to raise the money. The slogan used was "Buy an Acre of Reed Road Swamp for \$12.50". And they did. Of the 60 odd members, some bought 4 acres, some 1 acre, some 1/2 acre, and some even bought 1/12 of an acre. It all helped contribute to our goal - in fact we raised about \$1150.00 within 3 weeks. Everything was in our favor. An attorney member volunteered his legal services, an engineer member made a very complete record of title transfers, survey and a map of the Sanctuary property. Others talked to prominent citizens, and many non-members helped us to reach our goal.

It was decided that a corporation must be formed to administer the area, as the G. O. S. as the Ornithological Section of the Rochester Academy of Science could not own property. Bird Refuges, Inc. was formed pursuant to the membership corporation laws of the State of New York after the property was purchased in the names of several member individuals. Individual action was necessary because of the time element, and if your organizations are considering acquiring land I suggest this method for expediency sake. Transfer of the property to Bird Refuges, Inc. was completed November 22, 1949.

It is hoped that the necessary steps will soon be taken to permit Bird Refuges, Incorporated as owner of Reed Road Sanctuary to be free of real estate taxes as an educational project, and that very little funds will be needed to administer the Sanctuary.

Plans at the present time are for not exploiting the area with nature trails or clearing projects. The reason

the area was acquired was that it is a representative natural habitat area of which there are few remaining in the Rochester region. This does not mean that some trails cannot be cut, but improvements will not be made, if the convenience of man is considered above the perpetuation of natural habitat.

Ornithologically, perhaps the most outstanding discovery in Reed Road this last year was the finding of a Blue-gray Gnatcatcher's nest. This was the second known record of a nesting for this species in over 30 years in Monroe County. Other known nesting birds are, or have been, Scarlet Tanager, Rose breasted Grosbeak, Indigo Bunting, Redstart, Cerulean Warbler, Northern Waterthrush, Black billed and Yellow billed Cuckoo, Black and white Warbler, Woodcock, Saw-whet Owl, Barred Owl and Red tailed Hawk.

Botanically, the area contains among the larger trees, red maple 20%, American elm and red ash 18% each. Smaller amounts of willow, aspen, dogwood, basswood, white pine and arborvitae are to be found throughout the acreage.

Of the smaller plants, spice-bush is by far the major middle height shrub with smaller amounts of cinnamon, maidenhair and ostrich ferns. Purging buckthorn is also abundant with lesser amounts of wild ginger, raspberry, gooseberry, meadowrue, fox grape and barberry also present.

Future plans call for an immediate breeding bird census to determine among other things the approximate density of species. From this and future ecological studies a plan for the proper management of the area can be formulated.

It is anticipated that additional land will be acquired in

small parcels that will give us stream rights along the northwest corner adding some 14 acres to the present holdings. The additional piece might easily be flooded providing a small pond, which might encourage Wood and Black Duck to remain in the area. Owl nesting boxes are also being considered as a future project. It might be said here that with each project or operation the importance of a complete survey of probable detrimental action must be considered. The original purpose of preservation of the natural habitat area must be a foremost thought.

When we first thought of the idea of purchasing land, it seemed like a tremendous undertaking. The greatest obstacle along the way was to find three members, who would, to put it in the vernacular "stick their necks out" and sign their name on the original purchase offer. Needless to say, this acted as an incentive to raise the \$1,000.00. Imagine yourself coming home to your wife and saying "I bought a swamp today". Perhaps the reason the project met with such success was that the sum to be raised was not prohibitive. In similar circumstances I think other bird clubs would meet with just as much success. I would suggest considering small tracts of land for initial endeavors and expanding as opportunity and finances permit. As we know, preservation of wildlife areas is not a highly organized pursuit in our country. Therefore, it seems to me that it is up to clubs such as ours, small as they may be, to undertake a project similar to the one here described to help perpetuate the conservation of our natural resources.

Correction: In Vol. I, No. I, Page 8, "White Pelicans at Oak Orchard Park", a hypothetical record of the White fronted Goose was included. This record should be deleted at the request of the author.

