

THE FUTURE OF LONG ISLAND WILDLIFE

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To borrow a phrase popular in international politics, Long Island's naturalists are currently suffering through a period of "agonizing reappraisal". We have always prided ourselves upon living in one of the finest and most varied birding areas in the Northeast, but now we question how much longer we can do so. Not that the changes wrought by an expanding human population are uniquely ours; they are all too sadly familiar in many parts of the country. But here, they are taking place with such rapidity it seems that at best we can hope that other threatened areas can learn a lesson, in time to stave off their own similar fates.

We read that the combined population of Nassau and Suffolk Counties has just passed the two million mark, and that Suffolk is the fastest growing county in the entire nation. Our woods and meadows are fast disappearing; business, fattening on the rising population curves, is engulfing us in a rushing tide of concrete and neon. Even the outer beaches, once the ultimate refuge of the solitude-seeker, are being overrun with private clubs and summer homes, and rutted with the tracks of the beach-buggies, while the waters of once quiet bays and harbors are churned continuously by roaring outboards.

We wonder what will become of our wildlife. Can nothing be done to save at least a few choice areas for us, our children, and further generations? Will Long Islanders, fifty, twenty, even ten years hence, read with nostalgia the field notes of the 1950's, when black skimmers colonized the sandbars of Great South Bay, when a few red-tailed hawks and horned owls still bred in the quieter woodlots, when over twenty species of warbler could be counted in a single orchard on a May morning, when clapper rails clamored constantly from Mount Sinai's salt marshes? Without question, changes must come. We are too close to the great metropolis to escape altogether from becoming both a suburb and a playground for the masses. But what kind of a playground it is that does not provide some wild areas, where a man can refresh his soul with the wonders of untouched nature?

We must now bow submissively to the self-interests of the developers and merchants, and watch in silent dismay as all our wealth of natural resources goes by default. It is to be hoped that there are enough sensitive citizens, willing to object actively to the onslaughts of the bulldozer, the spray-plane, the hunter, the boy with the air-rifle, and a legion of other enemies. What can, and must be done, while there is yet something to be saved? The average amateur naturalist, by the very nature of his interests, is not an aggressive soul; he wishes only to be undisturbed in his unsophisticated joys. Yet he must share the blame, if he surrenders without a struggle for all he holds dear. I submit that he must act now, for the common good. With a missionary's zeal, he must educate. By this, I do not refer to education in the formal, classroom sense, though this can help also. I am thinking of the kind of education that can be given only in the field, the fostering of perceptiveness in human minds that have never before sensed a thirst for the beauties and pleasures of nature.

Surprisingly, the naturalist will find, in taking almost any child on a field trip, that he has a potential fellow nature-lover at his side. The presence of this universal but latent interest has manifested itself to me many times during the past few years, when a local high school science teacher and I have organized weekend outings for groups of girls and boys. They start out with no apparent attraction, no knowledge, and no eyes or ears for the wildlife with which they unwittingly share this earth. Yet very soon their senses and interests are whetted, they are planning their own expeditions, and saving from their allowances to buy their own binoculars and field guides. I can recommend this as a most rewarding task for those who would wish to see the next generation wiser in conservation than the present one.

Another mission we naturalists can undertake is in the field of public speaking. Here, the great American fetish for club meetings is a promising opportunity for us. We can seek, through our lectures, slides, and films, to convince our audiences that our cause is also their cause. Thus, we can strive to generate pressure on our local governments for the enforcement of wiser building and land development codes, more stringent hunting laws, curbs on the pollution of our bays and streams, greater protection for hawks, owls, and other persecuted species, and the preservation of selected areas for the benefit of all.

With this type of positive action we can hope to do much. Although Nassau and Queens Counties have already become essentially suburbs of New York, we still have a few examples, even there, of what can be done by dedicated people to save important wildlife areas. The sanctuaries at Jamaica Bay, Jones Beach, and Takapausha (Seaford), although hemmed in by massed human activities, are rich in bird variety. Scarcely a day goes by when the enthusiasts who haunt the Jamaica Bay Sanctuary are not stimulated by a rarity: European redwing, avocet, little gull, curlew sandpiper, blue goose, the three phalaropes, European widegeon, Louisiana heron — to cite only a few. Where else on the Island can one find such a concentration of brooding ruddy duck, blue-winged teal, gadwall, shoveler, and coot? All this, right alongside the Cross Bay Boulevard, with its endless streams of traffic, its hot-dog stands, amusement parks, and ranks of dowdy boarding houses.

Perhaps this kind of managed sanctuary, with its strict injunctions to keep to the footpaths, is the best we can aim for in the eastern part of the Island, but at least these would save for us a few of the rarer bird species most vulnerable to civilization *en masse*. Among the areas I wish to see preserved at all costs, for their birds as well as other precious natural assets, I nominate the following:

The Sunken Forest — unique holly woods,
The Riverhead cedar swamp — rare bog plant-life,
Moriches and Shinnecock sandbars — migrant shortbirds, breeding terns,
Mount Sinai Harbor — shorebirds, herons, nesting rails,
Hook Pond (Easthampton) and Sagaponack — wintering waterfowl,
Montauk Point — pelagics, sea ducks, northern gulls,
Lower Carmans River — oakwoods and salt marsh, waterfowl, herons,
Mecox Bay — migrant shorebirds, terns, wintering waterfowl,
Napeague — terns, waterfowl, ospreys,
Jessup's Neck — waterfowl, ospreys, horned owls.

Naturally, there are more, and many naturalists would question my omission of their own favored areas. I am merely suggesting the nucleus of a list to which I hope others will add those areas they consider the most important to be preserved, and for which they would be prepared to work selflessly.

On Long Island, man has been the dominant species for a long time. He has not used his dominance with thrift or wisdom; he can never bring back those priceless natural assets he has already squandered by greed and carelessness. We can only hope that these past attitudes will change and that, with a greater and more universal awareness for the beauty and complexity of undisturbed nature, some small oases can be saved. It must be the inspired mission of the amateur naturalist to convert more to his ranks, before the Island has become a tragic monument of concrete, steel, brick and billboards to a natural paradise that has gone forever.

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FALCON FLIGHTS ON LONG ISLAND

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For thousands of years the tumbled sand-dunes along the ocean on the South Shore of Long Island and the sandy cliffs along eastern Long Island Sound lay wild and unoccupied except for some roving Indians who made little impression on the terrain. Also, with the coming of white settlers, little change came over these remote outer tracts, for with sparse population and attention directed inland, building, if any, was spotty. Sixty years ago many of the barrier beaches were approachable only by boat and the old naphtha launch and sailboat were not conducive to expansive building.

So it is within the lifetime of the present average adult, in fact within the past 20-30 years, that great transitional changes have taken place, and now eastern Long Island's residential building on the dunes is keeping apace with that inland. Also, the very destructive 1938 hurricane and more recent ones have apparently acted as little or no deterrent to the construction, an example of which is the almost continuously occupied ocean front from Westhampton to Shinnecock Inlet, and on western Long Island from Point Lookout to Brooklyn.

Likewise, presumably for thousands of years during late summer and fall migrating hawks, especially Falcons, have used the dune-lines, generally beating their way along these on days of northwest winds. So it is the privilege of the present generation, unique in history, to study the changes in migration routes due to human occupancy of the coastline. Some of this has already been accomplished, much remains to be done, or at least to be accumulated into written material.

Roy Latham, of Orient, for many years studying hawk migration along the Sound on the eastern end of the north fork has given some thought to this subject. He states that the route along the Long Island Sound shore is the best one in Orient and the sandy beaches along the bay a poor second and that very few hawks come west in between. With the Sound shore starting to build up with fishing station and summer homes, he has not yet determined if this has made drastic changes in the hawk flights, but believes