

FOSTER LAKE AND BIRDS OF THE AREA

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Two decades ago the USGS topographic maps of the Andover Quadrangle showed a small marsh two miles west and a little south of the Village of Alfred in eastern Allegany County. The area was predominantly open country and dotted by farm houses and barns. Today, Foster Lake occupies the site of this marsh, most of the houses and barns are gone and many of the open fields are now reforested.

The land involved in this change was acquired by Eddy E. Foster who planned and developed the marsh site into a 25-acre lake. After two decades from the time of its installation in 1950, it has evolved into a lake which matches the scenic beauty of a Canadian lake. Its waters and the surrounding reforested areas provide not only protective cover and sanctuary for waterfowl and other birds and wildlife but also recreational facilities in a pleasant natural setting. The Foster Lake Club, whose membership is open to subscription, maintains and controls such activities as picknicking, swimming, boating, fishing, and hiking.

Foster Lake is roughly 500 feet by 2150 feet and is situated between gentle east and west slopes, the water being impounded in the rather shallow north-south oriented basin by earthen dams at each end. The water at both ends is sufficiently deep for swimming and diving. The southern section of the west bank flares out considerably to provide ample room for two well-spaced islands for nesting waterfowl. The elevation is 2250 feet above sea level. Foster Lake drains into the Genesee River via the VanderMark valley. It lies within a short distance of the divide between the St. Lawrence and the Susquehanna watersheds.

Much of the beauty of the lake is derived from the extensive evergreen plantings that surround it. The long-needed Red and Austrian Pines and also Scotch Pine are each planted in separate groups. Mixtures of smaller numbers of White Spruce and Norway Spruce, European Larch, Japanese Larch, and some White Pine and White Cedar complete the list. Many of these trees have now reached a height of 30 feet or more. Shrub borders and groups are composed of High Bush Cranberry, Tartarian Honeysuckle, Filbert, Multiflora Rose, Autumn Olive, American Bittersweet, Blueberry and Wild Azalea (*Rhododendrum roseum*). The latter species and some of the blueberry are native to the site. The concern of the owner for the well-established colony of the beautiful *Rhododendrum roseum* in the marsh nearly discouraged him from establishing the lake but it was possible to transplant a substantial number of the plants to the shores of the lake where they now bloom each spring.

In the vicinity of Foster Lake two wildlife marshes were established by the New York Conservation Department on land leased by the De-

partment in accordance with the Pitman-Robertson Act. The larger of these, with an area of approximately 9 acres, is located nearly a mile north of the lake.

This marsh has the unique feature that the drainage from its opposite north and south ends flows into two different watersheds, the ones mentioned above. The smaller marsh provides an acre or so of water surface and is within a half mile of and north of the lake. It is perhaps significant to note that lands adjacent to these two wildlife marshes and to the Foster Lake area are owned by New York State and administered by the Conservation Department. This State land is largely reforested with pine, spruce, and larch, some stands of which are now nearly 40 years old and are approaching a degree of maturity. From the Township of Alfred this reforested State land extends westward into the Towns of Ward and Amity and northward into the Towns of West Almond, Almond, Birdsall, and Burns; southwestward beyond the area of Foster Lake lies an extensive forested region which includes Allegany State Park and the Allegheny National Forest.

Another artificial lake less than one-fourth the size of Foster Lake was constructed about 10 years ago by the Faculty-Student Association of Alfred State Tech college to serve as a recreation facility. It is known in the area as Ag Tech Lake and is located about two miles further north from its predecessor. It is accessible from a side road off of Route 244 about a mile west from the north end of the Village of Alfred. The extensive lawns that surround two thirds of Ag Tech Lake are favorite feeding areas for Killdeer. Up to 25 have been counted at one time. The shallow waters along the edges of the lake are good spots to look for shorebirds in the spring and fall. Many gulls have been observed resting on the island in the middle of the lake while the cattails on the southwest side have served as cover for broods of Mallards.

The development of these lakes and marshes has provided the opportunity for Alfred residents to observe migratory waterfowl in an area that does not have natural aquatic habitats. Although the lakes are generally frozen when the first swan and geese fly north, the ice cover does leave in time to attract later flocks. On March 22, 1966 a total of 79 Whistling Swan rested most of the day on the two companion lakes. In 1969 it was April 8th when the first flock of Canada Geese, 22 in number, stopped for a visit. This year most of the geese and early migrants had passed north before the ice cover left.

As the season progresses through April and the first part of May varying numbers of water birds come and go. Common Loon, Horned Grebe, Pied-billed Grebe, Bufflehead, Ring-necked Duck, Scaup, Oldsquaw, Hooded Merganser and Red-breasted Merganser are some of the species seen. Less frequently Redhead, Canvasback, Ruddy Duck, Common Goldeneye, White-winged Scoter, and Surf Scoter appear. Although marsh ducks such as Mallard and Wood Duck breed in the area others of

this group are not often seen. Our records show the occasional appearance of Black Duck, Pintail, Blue-winged Teal, Green-winged Teal, European Widgeon, American Widgeon, and Shoveler.

At one time or another through April and May, one can observe individual or small numbers of gulls — Herring, Ring-billed and Bonaparte's — and also Black Tern and rarely Common Tern. Every year generally brings a few Osprey which often use a small but conveniently located aspen tree near the south end of the lake for a fishing perch. On a warm spring Sunday afternoon two years ago several spectators witnessed an Osprey circle over the lake and then execute two spectacular plunges into the shallow water, missing the prey on the first attempt but not on the second. The same clump of aspen has been a favorite hunting perch for Kingfishers during June and July when they feed young in the nest holes at the gravel pits at Alfred Station and Almond. Coot may be seen in small numbers but Gallinule are very rarely observed.

Spotted Sandpipers are regular visitors at the lakes and marshes; other shorebirds occur in limited numbers. Solitary Sandpipers and both Yellowlegs, and an occasional Pectoral Sandpiper and also Dunlins have been seen in both spring and fall. During September and October 1968 when the water of Foster Lake was lowered to install a water-control outlet, all of these shorebirds and also Killdeer foraged over the exposed lake bottom. During the early phases of this operation a flock of 20 Canada Geese watched the workmen, often at close range, for several days. In August 1955 a single Ruddy Turnstone in breeding plumage was seen feeding along the banks of one of the islands. Woodcock are regular breeders in the fields and small evergreen plantations surrounding the lake and marshes.

The migration during the month of May provides many attractions at Foster Lake and the marshes. The lake is an excellent spot to observe swallows over water, principally Barn Swallow, Tree Swallow, and Bank Swallow. Many species of wood warblers are represented. Noteworthy in recent years have been the large number of Myrtles and Palm Warblers in both migrations.

Breeding warblers in the Foster Lake area and the adjacent reforested lands include Black-and-white (low last year, no records this year), Nashville, Yellow, Magnolia, Myrtle, Black-throated Green Blackburnian, Chestnut-sided, Ovenbird, Mourning (one pair last year), Yellowthroat, Canada, and Redstart. The Black-throated Green Warbler and Yellowthroat have been the most abundant. Blue-wings at Alfred occur locally at lower altitudes. Local observers have witnessed the incursion of the Myrtle as a breeding species into the area with much excitement. During June and July 1967 and 1968 the presence of both sexes was noted but no evidence of breeding was established until last year when adults feeding young out of the nest were observed during late June and early July. This year on May 19th an incubating female was flushed from a nest

in a 6-foot Scotch Pine in the field adjacent to Foster Lake. The nest contained 5 eggs, one being the egg of a Cowbird, which was removed. The evidence is good that at least a couple young warblers were fledged. Again this year adults are observed feeding fledglings. Up to 8 singing males have been counted in the immediate area of Foster Lake during the past two years. Thus, the Foster Lake area becomes another in Western New York that can list the Myrtle Warbler as a breeding species.

Bird observers seem to find some special delight in finding a new breeding species near their home. In addition to the Myrtle Warbler, Alfred observers were happy to see Golden-crowned Kinglets and Mourning Warblers feed fledglings in July 1969. The beautiful song of the White-throated Sparrow on breeding territory is also a welcome experience but the location of nests or the sighting of fledglings is still to be observed. The presence of a pair of Clay-colored Sparrows on a certain territory in a 10-year old Scotch Pine planting next to Foster Lake is now under study.

A check list of breeding species that occur at Foster Lake or within a radius of a mile or so would include a large proportion of those species of general and widespread distribution. Mention is made here of a few species that are of interest for one reason or another. A pair of Pied-billed Grebe were on the larger marsh during May 1968. It is possible that their nest, which was never discovered, suffered predation by Grackles. Red-tails and Red-shoulders (one pair) use the old deciduous woodlots for nest sites. Marsh Hawks fly low over the hedge rows and open fields, but have successfully hidden the location of their nests. The Ruffed Grouse that feed on High Bush Cranberry in the fall aid utilize the evergreen cover in the winter are heard drumming each spring. A young Long-eared Owl was reared in a nest in a 40-year old White Pine-Red Pine stand this year. Traill's Flycatchers (*fee-be-o*) seem to prefer the shrub groups and hedges near the Lake.

Two nests of the Solitary Vireo suggest their use of a habitat associated in some way with the larger conifers. In the upland grass fields that still remain one can locate nesting Bobolink, Savannah Sparrow, Grasshopper, Sparrow, Henslow's Sparrow, and Vesper Sparrow. Slate-colored Junco, Brown Creeper, Hermit Thrush, and Blackburnian Warbler seem to adopt the reforested lands where maturing pines and spruces are found. The status of the Red-breasted Nuthatch as a breeder in these stands is still to be established.

Picnickers at the Lake have the opportunity to enjoy their repast with the songs of the Purple Finches, Red-eyed Vireos, Song Sparrows and Chipping Sparrows and if they linger in the evening they are sure to see dozens of Robins along the waterfront or hear a Veery or a Wood Thrush. Breezes in the pines are frequently interrupted by the calls of Blue Jays or blend with the monotones of Cedar Waxwings. In the fall one can be sure of finding White-crowns and White-throats in the Multiflora Rose

hedges. As the autumn progresses the stillness of the evening hours may be broken by the calls of owls — Great Horned, Barred, and Screech — implying perhaps that they too could nest in the area. In November 1968 a couple of Bohemian Waxwings feeding in the Multiflora Rose demanded some scrutiny to be sure they were not Cedars. It is in the fall that the Chickadees gather into small flocks in the evergreens where they frequently share their shelters with the Tree Sparrows and the winter finches.

In addition to the usual Evening Grosbeaks, variety sometimes comes with Pine Grosbeaks, Redpolls and Crossbills. This year the Red Crossbills lingered into June and sent us out in search of their nests.

When the current list of birds is compared with a check list of a half century ago, changes are evident. Although the factors responsible for these changes are likely to be complex it is possible that the introduction of the lakes and the reforestation of the open fields have had some influence on the appearance of breeding species that are usually associated with habitats found in regions like the Adirondacks.

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