

ALLENBERG BOG

A Wildlife Refuge of the Buffalo Audubon Society

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Long before the two "in" words, "ecology" and "environment" smote the public conscience, dedicated individuals and societies were engaged in projects to protect and preserve a vanishing wild America. Notable among these were the National Audubon Society and its affiliated branches. In 1957 one of its members, Miss Florence V. Cummings of Chicago, Illinois, offered to the national society a tract of 46½ acres located in the northern border of the township of Napoli, Cattaraugus County, New York. A portion of her tract comprises a part of Allenberg Bog, which, strangely, the U.S. topographical maps fail to separate from Waterman Swamp which is its near neighbor; the whole area is labeled the latter.

Convinced that the tract was too small and too distant from other National Audubon sanctuaries to be administered properly, its directors suggested that Miss Cummings donate her parcel to the Buffalo Audubon Society, its nearest affiliated branch. That following winter she presented our society the deed to her land, labeled Tract "A" on the accompanying map.

That generous gift became the nucleus of our present refuge of over 319 acres through a felicitous chain of circumstances: attractive adjoining farmlands with owners willing to sell, a generous bequest from a former member, Mr. John P. Bruck, together with frequent donations from other sources; and lastly most valued of all, the services of a Buffalo member, in whose sincere integrity these farmers placed absolute trust, Mr. Clayton T. Knox. As custodian of all our Allenberg holdings, Mr. Knox is as well-known throughout the region as the local residents.

After the Cummings gift, the parcel Tract "B", approximating 98 acres, was bought from Mr. William Mayo, and lies north and northeast of Tract "A", entirely within the township of New Albion. Because of its irregular east and west boundary, it has been necessary to fence off the fields on each side to keep cattle from browsing among our huge hemlock, white pine and black cherry woods. In 1969 a tornado-like storm struck down at least three acres in the very heart of those woods. These giants now lie where they fell, eventually to decay into humus which, in good time, will support new growth over the devastated area.

Soon after this purchase, Mr. Knox arranged the acquisition of two other tracts. The first, Tract "C", about 75 acres in extent, was bought from Mr. Clyde Peterson in Napoli township; it lies east of Tract "A". Here, as in Tract "A", are to be found the great thickets of rhododendrons, almost impenetrable in places, with their base lying below water level

much of the year. To the east the land rises to the highest elevation in the refuge, about 1800, compared to the average elevation of about 1720. The second parcel, Tract "D", of 50 acres, was bought from Mr. Ervin Puls, and lies in Napoli township, west of, and adjoining Tract "A". In its southeastern part, close to Tract "A", a sphagnum bog is surrounded by black spruce and tamarack growing through a carpet of leatherleaf. Its center is open water, 136' x 120', averaging 14½ feet in depth.

Our most recent acquisition of about 50 acres Tract "E", from Mr. Puls, is situated directly south of and contiguous to Tract "D". In a drier location, it contains deep woods which with its huge trees slope gently to a larger bog, 147' x 135', with an average depth of 26 feet. This bog is especially prized by botanists.

Years before Allenberg Bog became the property of the Buffalo Audubon Society, it had attained a fame among our state naturalists for its rare wild orchids. It was regularly visited by Professor William P. Alexander's students from the Buffalo Society of Natural Sciences, members of the Science Museum Camera Club, as well as people from St. Bonaventure University, including Dr. Stephen W. Eaton, who since 1950, has taken classes in biology there to work principally with vascular plants. Dr. Robert B. Gordon, Temporary Botanist of the New York State Museum, in his April 1940 *The Primeval Forest Types of South-western New York*,¹ devotes page after page, with accompanying photographs, to the unique vegetation and flora of Cattaraugus County, with emphasis on Waterman Swamp. Mr. Charles A. Zenkert, Research Associate in Botany at the Buffalo Museum of Science, includes 34 of the Bog's most interesting species, with a photograph by Albert Reiser on pp. 286-7 in his *Flora of the Niagara Frontier*.² In 1963 Sister Mary Salesia Schick, O.S.F. and Dr. Stephen Eaton published *Liverworts, Mosses and Vascular Plants of Waterman Swamp and Allenberg Bog*³ which listed 28 species of liverworts, 58 species of mosses, and 284 species of vascular plants. The two authors state that the list is but a preliminary one, with further studies to follow. Missing is mention of the yellow ladyslippers found years previously by Clayton Knox and William Wild on one of their photographic ventures.

From the very first, the Buffalo Audubon Society scheduled field trips to Allenberg—beginning in January, on through the succeeding months with ever-changing scenes. Once on the trails, it is difficult to decide which way to look—up, down or sideways, so profuse are the birds, insects, wildflowers, ferns, and, of course, the ever-luring rhododendrons.

¹ New York State Museum Bulletin No. 321.

² Bulletin Buffalo Soc. Nat. Sciences Vol. XVI.

³ Science Studies, St. Bonaventure Univ. Vol. XXI.

Birds are the favorites—from bobolinks, sparrows and meadowlarks in the fields, to flycatchers, vireos and warblers in the woods, with the winsome mixed melodies of four thrushes—hermit, wood, Swainson's and the veery. Greatest pride of all, though, is the turkey.

Allenberg has been called Owlberg Bog and Congdon's Pond, as well as Waterman Swamp. Its ornithological history goes back at least to 1823 when a large nesting colony of passenger pigeons is mentioned by Dr. A. W. Schorger in his *The Passenger Pigeon*, p. 90.⁴ This concentration began near the Allegheny River and extended northward through Napoli and New Albion to Dayton, and probably beyond. It averaged six miles wide and thirty miles long. No doubt Pigeon Valley Road, to the east of Allenberg Bog, received its name from this nesting.

Reference to the map shows that most of the drainage is either to the south by way of Cold Spring Creek to the Allegheny River near Steamburg, N.Y., or east via Little Valley Creek to the Allegheny River near Salamanca.

Should any State Federation member wish to visit the bog, it may help to have a compass handy, but it is best to arrange with some BAS member to accompany him for the first trip, since the region is so wild that one can easily become lost.

Allenberg Bog possesses so vast a wealth of natural beauty for all kinds of outdoors lovers—birders, photographers, botanists, biologists—that the Buffalo Audubon Society has set a policy that its natural state be preserved for both present and future generations. Nature, not man, will be the controlling factor in the introduction of new species of life. It is the fervent wish that, as visitors go there to enjoy it and learn from it, they leave it so that the next visitor will be unaware that anyone was there before him.

We are deeply indebted to Clayton T. Knox for his help and to Dr. Robert F. Andrie for the map of the area.

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⁴ Univ. of Wisconsin Press (1955).

