



Friends of Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge

Among Friends

Fall 2002

Friends of Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge is a private, nonprofit organization dedicated to the enduring protection, management, and appreciation of Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge and its environs.

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The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to preserve a national network of lands and waters for the conservation and management of fish, wildlife and plant resources of the United States for the benefit of present and future generations.

MARK YOUR CALENDAR FOR A 'WERTHEIM WEEKEND' – SATURDAY CELEBRATION & SUNDAY MEETING

Why not make October 19-20 a true "Wertheim Weekend"? Visit the Refuge on Saturday, Oct. 19, and enjoy a variety of activities to celebrate National Wildlife Refuge Week. Then, on Sunday, Oct. 20, attend Friends of Wertheim's annual meeting and become an active part of the Refuge's future.

National Wildlife Refuges: Something to Celebrate!

The second full week in October is National Wildlife Refuge Week, and you're invited to join in the celebration at Wertheim on Sat., Oct. 19, with an open-house event from 11:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. that includes the following activities

• **11:00 a.m.** – *Wildlife Detective Walk*

Walk on the wild side with Naturalist Edith Mingalone to sleuth out wildlife clues and make a plaster cast of a wildlife track to take home.

• **Noon** – *Birds of Prey*

Join the staff from Sweetbriar Nature Center as they reveal the world of owls, hawks and falcons. See live birds up close & personal!

• **1:00 p.m.** – *Nature Trail Ribbon Cutting & Tour*

The highlight of the day—the official grand opening of the newly resurfaced stretch of the White Oak Nature Trail. The trail now offers a smooth walk or ride for people with a variety of physical abilities. Discover the beauty of Wertheim NWR on an easy

journey past wetlands, pine stands, and an active osprey nest platform!

• **All Day**
Nature Games, Displays, Cool Giveaways, Time to Visit With Refuge Staff & Volunteers

Annual Meeting Features 'Birds of Wertheim' Talk

Kathleen O'Connor, FOW board member and former president of the Great South Bay Audubon Society, will be the guest speaker at FOW's 4th annual meeting, on Sun., Oct. 20, at 2 p.m., at the Post-Morrow Foundation, 16 Bay Road, Brookhaven Hamlet.

Kathleen's vivid slide presentation on "Birds of Wertheim" will feature many species, including those she discusses in the box on page 2.

The meeting will also include elections for FOW Board members, discussions of committees and opportunities for members to become more involved, a report from Refuge Manager Patricia Martinkovic – and extraordinary refreshments!

PARTNERS IN PRESERVATION

Marty Van Lith, FOW's Secretary and founding President, represents FOW on the Carmans River Partnership, a multifaceted group of both government and non-government organizations that work together to preserve and protect as much of the 10-mile-long river and its 70-square-mile drainage area as possible.

The partnership evolved from the Carmans River Coalition, which, in 2000, stopped Home Depot from building a store on a 20-acre site along the tidal portion of the Carmans River. This ultimately led to that parcel's being acquired and put in the public domain.

The Partnership, organized by Jim Tripp and Art Cooley of Environmental Defense, held its third annual meeting on September 10. There, Marty reports, the group was rewarded with glowing reports from the

(continued on page 3)

MEET THE FOLKS AT WERTHEIM – INTRODUCING ANDREA STEWART

As the Outdoor Recreation Planner at Wertheim, Andrea Stewart not only organizes celebrations like the one being held at the Refuge on October 19, and the Natural Treasures Festival last spring, but she also tries to make Wertheim's treasures available to all. Here, Andrea talks about some of her recent ventures.

"One of my projects was working with Linda Cox and Ed Samolin on the new trail guide for the White Oak Nature Trail," Andrea said. "We were awarded

\$5,000 via Challenge Cost Share Grant to redo the guide. A draft of the guide went to the Regional Office this summer and the final product should be hitting the brochure racks early this fall!"

As described in the article on page 4, the White Oak Trail now meets the standards of the Americans With Disabilities Act (ADA). "Because of this ADA-compliant trail section," Andrea explained, "I have been asked to help

As the Outdoor Recreation Planner for the Long Island NWR Complex, Andrea Stewart (second from right) "spreads the word about Wertheim" to a group of young visitors.



design an environmental education program for Eastern Suffolk BOCES [Board of Cooperative Educational Services]. A teacher working with students who have mental disabilities has paired his class with a class of students with a range of physical disabilities, and he was excited to learn about the resurfaced trail section. We're developing educational activities that focus on sensory perception and nature. I've visited their classroom three or four times to conduct these activities, and our last meeting will be on the White Oak Nature Trail. It's great to be able to offer opportunities to a whole new audience."

"Another partnership of local interest" Andrea continued, "is the one the Refuge now has with South Country Library. I am working with the library's young-adult librarian to offer environmentally related outings for teens and young adults. These outings are accompanied by a bibliography where participants can get more information about the experience they had on that particular trip. My first program with the Library was at the end of August — a kayak trip down the Carmans River, with a stop for lunch and a hike at Indian Landing. We saw a variety of wildlife, and for

some it was the first time they'd ever been kayaking. And I was able to spread the word about Wertheim to a group who might not visit otherwise. Our next trip will be some time in the fall."

For someone who marked the end of her second year with the LINWR Complex at the end of August, Andrea has accomplished quite a bit, but, she says, "I couldn't have done it all without the help of the Refuge staff, FOW and our volunteers."

And she adds, "One wonderful thing about my job – I can always see more exciting opportunities coming over the horizon!"

RAIN COULDN'T DAMPEN CELEBRATION



Kathleen O'Connor, (center above, with binoculars) who will give a slide presentation on "Birds of Wertheim" at FOW's 4th annual meeting on Sun., Oct. 20, gave a soggy early morning "Birding 101 Workshop" last May to kick off the Natural Treasures Festival at the Wertheim Refuge.

"Saturday morning, May 18th, was very wet, especially at 6:45 in the morning, at the outset of our walk," Kathleen recalled. "Ten brave individuals joined me to explore the fire path alongside the railroad tracks. It's always exciting to have people see a part of the Refuge that is not usually open to the public. We chanced upon a few species of birds trying to find shelter from the deluge. The highlight, however, was a pair of wood ducks in a small creek, which we spotted just as we were about to turn back and trek through more endless mud and puddles!"

The next afternoon, Kathleen led another walk under very different weather conditions. "The day was delightful," she said, "and our group consisted of families with children of varying ages. At the outset, the hanging basket-like nest of the Baltimore oriole was swinging in the sunlight for all to observe, and the male and female orioles obliged us with great views. On the White Oak path, a blue-gray gnatcatcher refurbishing his nest was a delightful encounter, as this is not a bird that anyone in our group had seen before. We observed more than 30 species, and the triumphant finale was the call of a "Bob White" quail which ended our journey."

Dear Friends of Wertheim,

On behalf of the staff of the Long Island NWR Complex, I thank you for your phenomenal support during last May's Refuge Centennial Celebration. Your diversity of contributions – from providing free food for the public (the "blue goose" cookies were my favorite!) to the wonderful array of nature-related sale items – helped make the event so successful and enjoyable for our visitors! Only true Friends like you would have been there at the start, despite the fierce, horizontal rain. We are so fortunate to have such a dedicated, dynamic and delightful Friends Group!

*– Patricia Martinkovic,
Refuge Manager*

A SURVEY OF SURVEYS (& STUDIES & PROJECTS)

Because so many wildlife species are rapidly disappearing throughout the nation, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (F&WS) conducts surveys to locate species of concern and their habitats. This spring and summer, reports Refuge Biologist Florence James, Wertheim staff and volunteers ("we") ran breeding surveys for F&WS Region 5 and a study for the U.S Geological Survey (USGS):

• **F&WS Anuran Breeding Call Survey** – Anurans – amphibians commonly called frogs and toads – are one of the most rapidly declining species in the Region. Traveling through the Refuge at night, we listened for breeding frogs. Most commonly heard were the northern spring peeper, green frog, pickerel frog and Fowler's toad. Rare species were the wood frog and eastern spadefoot toad. But the drought hurt species like the bullfrog, gray tree frog and southern leopard frog, which were not recorded.

• **USGS Vernal Pool Study** – Vernal pools – temporary water areas used by salamanders and anurans to lay their eggs – form after the winter thaw and spring showers, then disappear in the heat of summer. Wading through vernal pools and ponds, we counted eggs from wood frog, northern spring peeper, Fowler's toad and green frog, but none from salamander.

• **F&WS Forest Landbird Breeding Survey** – This survey focused on neotropical birds, or songbirds, which travel great distances in spring and fall between North and South America. Due to deforestation, many have lost their breeding grounds. We recorded neotropical

migrates breeding at the Refuge and noted many species of special concern, including yellow-billed cuckoo, eastern bluebird, American redstart, indigo bunting, scarlet tanager, and seven types of warbler.

• **F&WS Marshbird Breeding Survey** – Walking through Wertheim's vast salt marshes, we played rail callback tapes, listening for any response. Virginia and king rails responded, and we observed one least bittern, as well as NYS species of special concern like the sharp-tailed and seaside sparrow.

Also during the past year, Senior Biologist Mark Maghini and other staff were

WANTED: WEBMASTER



Former FOW Board member Ellen Dillon (left) and Refuge Manager Patricia Martinkovic at the FOW table at last May's Natural Treasures Festival.

Ellen Dillon, who had served the FOW Board tirelessly since its start – *thank-you Ellen!* – has moved to Arizona with her family, leaving open two key positions: Treasurer and Webmaster.

FOW President Claire Goad has temporarily taken on the responsibility of treasurer. But FOW's website – www.friendsofwertheim.org – is sorely in need of a caretaker.

If you are web-savvy and creative, FOW wants you for this volunteer position! Call Claire Goad, 286-0910.

involved with wetlands restoration projects at and nearby Wertheim:

• **Big Fish Creek** – In an ongoing program, we worked to improve habitat in this tributary of the Carmans River, through water level manipulations, herbicide application to dense *Phragmites* stands and prescribed burnings.

• **Beaver Dam Creek** – While not in the Refuge, this tributary to the Great South Bay, is of concern to Wertheim and our partners

in this project to restore the tidal marsh: Ducks Unlimited, Post-Morrow Foundation and landowners along the creek. On-the-ground work, scheduled to begin this winter, will involve removal of more than 5,000 cubic yards of dredge spoil, breaching and removal of berms from the creek edge, and creation of tidal channels to areas dominated by *Phragmites*. In addition, water quality improvements will be targeted through the collaborative work of local, state and federal agencies.

NATIVE GRASSES TAKE ROOT

About one year ago, FOW volunteers helped Refuge staff gather seeds of Indian grass, a native grass that grows naturally in the middle of the Refuge, providing food for many birds and small mammals. This spring, FOW Board member Anne Meinhold led a project to plant the seed, some by scattering over a small plot and some in pots.

Of the scattered Indian grass seed, Anne reported, "Because of the dry summer, I didn't expect much success. Much to my surprise, there were quite a few small patches of grass coming up. They are only a few inches tall but have survived in spite of the drought.

"The pots were more successful," Anne said. "We planted these to help fill in a small area on the Refuge that had been burned. Because those plants had a good root system, they were better able to survive the drought. Now, they are about two-feet tall and still growing!"

Partners in Preservation (continued)

Suffolk County Department of Health about the excellent quality of the water throughout the length of the river. "Even more encouraging," he said, "were reports from Suffolk's Parks and Real Estate Departments, Suffolk County Water Authority, New York State, and the Town of Brookhaven about the recent acquisitions of Camp Olympia and the Novak parcel, and ongoing negotiations with owners of approximately 600 additional acres of undeveloped land along the river basin."

Marty cautions, however, that any attempts at future preservation depend largely, if not entirely, on public support. Therefore, FOW strongly urges its members who live in the Town of Brookhaven not only to *vote YES for the \$20-million open-space referendum on the ballot this November*, but also to actively encourage your friends to come out to vote for it.

As Marty says, "Without funding from the environmental bonds approved in the State of New York, County of Suffolk and Town of Brookhaven, there will be zero local land preservation."



Friends of Wertheim National Wildlife Refuge
 PO Box 376
 Brookhaven NY 11719

White Oak Trail Gets a Makeover

If you take a walk on Wertheim's White Oak Trail this fall, you'll notice lots of improvements – even before you get to the trail!

First, if you pick up a trail guide, you'll find it's been completely redone, thanks to the funds, time and talent donated by FOW, Linda Cox and Ed Sambolin.

While you're looking for the guide, you'll notice new interpretive signs appearing on the information kiosk at Wertheim's main office. "These exciting projects are really giving Wertheim a new, updated look!" said the Refuge's Andrea Stewart.

Andrea explained that you'll find more changes as you walk along the nature trail. A one-mile section has been regraded in parts and resurfaced with compacted gravel and bluestone dust. It may look more like a road than a trail, but it complies with standards set by the Americans with Disabilities Act and offers a smoother walk or ride to people with a variety of physical abilities – as well as to children in strollers.

Three new signs have also been installed along

THIS FALL AT THE WERTHEIM REFUGE

this section. They tell about habitats at Wertheim, and you can hear the message just by pushing a button.

The official grand opening of the "new" White Oak Nature Trail will take place at the October 19th celebration at Wertheim (see page 1), but it's open now and waiting for you whenever you want to go!

Swallows Soar On the Carmans

Art Cooley, honorary FOW Board member, reminds us that tree swallows can congregate on the marshy shores of the Carmans River in the fall. If you're in a canoe or viewing Wertheim from the west bank, Art says, "Hordes of

tree swallows swoop in huge flocks over the marsh to the east or the north, rising and falling so densely that they can darken the sky. Stand at dusk any evening during about a two-week period in late September or early October and look out over the marsh. At first you may see nothing – then suddenly a flock will rise and tighten its formation and a dark cloud will appear. It will wheel and turn, rising and falling, before diving into the marsh grasses. Uncertain, the flock may rise again, only to repeat the process many times. Finally, all will seem right, and the flock will descend for one last time into the grass as the dusk deepens and one realizes that it is almost dark."

Why add swallow sightings to your busy fall schedule? "Maybe," Art suggests, "because you are never quite sure what you will see and whatever you see will surprise you a bit. Maybe the unexpectedness of what you see is refreshing. It is a contrast to much that is predictable in life. Tree swallows will not predictably be at Wertheim, but, if they are, you are in for a treat and you will walk away enriched."

GET YOUR FOW T-SHIRT TODAY!

They feature FOW's name and osprey logo in rich forest green on an earthy buff background. They're 100 percent cotton and come in different cuts for men and women.

They're the spectacular Friends of Wertheim T-shirts designed by FOW Board member Linda Cox.

FOW T-shirts will be on sale at Wertheim at the National Wildlife Refuge Week celebration on Sat., Oct. 19 (see page 1). But if you want to wear one to the celebration, order it right now by calling Linda at 286-8128.

FOW MEMBERSHIP

Please establish a one-year membership for:

Name _____

Address _____

City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Phone _____ E-mail _____

Each FOW membership costs only \$5.

If enrolling more than one member, please provide information for each person. Send check, payable to Friends of Wertheim NWR, to: PO Box 376, Brookhaven NY 11719