

SANCTUARY



THE LIGHT AT MONTAUK POINT



THE LONG ISLAND CHAPTER
of
THE NATURE CONSERVANCY
SETAUKET, LONG ISLAND

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Our publication was authorized by our Trustees at a meeting in March. We hope you will find it enjoyable and informative. We hope to issue it four times a year, that is, an issue for each of the four seasons, starting with Summer.

We have chosen the name SANCTUARY because this word, more than any other single word, seems to portray what our main objective is. We are devoted to the preservation of natural areas which have significant ecological value. Each area that we rescue from the advance of civilization will be a Sanctuary where wild flowers and wild creatures can continue to grow and live as they have heretofore. Each will be a Sanctuary to which our children and their children can resort to see and enjoy a living museum, a sample of what was once a huge and bountiful heritage.

Our bulletin is going to start its career as a friendly informal paper, prepared and reproduced voluntarily by Chapter members, at a minimum of expense, because the Chapter is going to need most of its money for fences and other expenses incidental to the preservation of areas. So you may expect some amateur embellishments. Bear with us, and someday we will have a fine, formal publication of which we can all be proud.

Because of the informal nature of our publication, we thought of calling it merely "News & Notes - Long Island Chapter of the Nature Conservancy". We decided, however, to select a permanent name which could be used eventually for our permanent publication. We thought of names which would describe our purpose forcefully such as "Long Island Reservations", "Long Island Wild Areas", "Long Island Preserves" and so on, but ended up with the one word "Sanctuary", which seems to tell our story quite adequately.

Our cover symbol for our first few issues is "The Light at Montauk Point". We are an island people. Our natural heritage is islandic. There is no more poignant reminder of this than the famous light which crowns our easternmost headland.

Our natural heritage on Long Island was one of the

richest ever to be bestowed on such a small area. Much of it was destroyed in the past to make room for farms to grow the food needed by the millions of people inhabiting New York City. Later the wars made it necessary to industrialize and tap the large rural manpower supplies. This in turn resulted in more people moving in, more clearing of land for homes, and more building for the thousand and one services required by our modern complex of living. Natural areas were destroyed wholesale to provide land for this, for that. But in spite of all this, our heritage is still rich and if we can preserve enough of it before the bulldozer's blade runs over it, enough of our heritage will be preserved for posterity so that the wonder that is Long Island will never be completely lost.

In the months and years that follow, SANCTUARY will bring the story that is Long Island to you. Few people realize how much we have, how fortunate we have been.

Many of us have only a vague idea of what Ecology is. Each wild area possesses a flora and a fauna, the individual members of which are interdependent on each other for survival. There is a balance of nature where conditions are healthy, and an unbalance otherwise. Ecology is the study of this balance. The ecology of a small pond in the terminal moraine makes a fascinating study. There was a pond in West Hills between Round Swamp Road and Mt. Misery Road. This pond was a glacial depression in the moraine. It was about one hundred feet in diameter and about four feet deep at the most, going completely dry in some seasons. It was surrounded by a protective belt of grass, brush, briars, vines and trees. Beyond this was hilly farmland.

This pond, known to many naturalists simply as West Hills Pond, or Melville Pond, was unique in that it was home for an unusual variety of frogs and salamanders. At any time of the year the Vermilion Spotted Newt was abundant, and it was in this pond that rather extensive studies of this salamander were made by the Department of Herpetology of the American Museum of Natural History. In early March, the Tiger Salamanders entered the pond to breed. In early April large numbers of Spotted Salamanders bred. Then as

Spring advanced, the Newts bred. In the surrounding woods the terrestrial Red-backed Salamander and the Four-toed Salamander were common. In October, large numbers of Marbled Salamanders came to the pond to breed.

The story was about the same for the frogs. Bull Frogs, Green Frogs and Pickerel Frogs were always present, except when they were buried in the mud in the winter. The first frogs to appear in the Spring were, of course, the Spring Peepers. A few days later the Wood Frogs entered the pond and joined the chorus, laying their eggs in the same underwater plants and brush as the Tiger Salamanders. Then came the Fowler's Toads. Later the Tree Toads came in good numbers, and as July moved in, their red-tailed tadpoles would be plentiful.

All these soft bodied amphibians attracted a host of predators. Giant Water Bugs, Giant Water Beetles, Dragon-fly larvae, Backswimmers, just to name a few, all killing and eating baby tadpoles and salamander larvae. This was the balance of nature; the weeding out of the weak, or Darwin's Survival of the Fittest. Always enough survived to carry on and improve the species.

Then one year the farmer became a bit greedy and extended his farm by ploughing nearer to the pond edge, eliminating much of the protective border of weeds and brush. With the first heavy rain, soft clay dissolved by the rains from the farmland washed down into the pond. Within a year's time the pond was well on its way to being filled with clay. Last October it was dry. In a damp spot we were able to find one Marbled Salamander where once there were hundreds. This March when all other ponds on Long Island were of a record depth, West Hills Pond was dry except for an inch of water here and there in shallow depressions. In one of these were found the signs of a few male Tiger Salamanders which came to the pond to breed, but found no females.

The ecology of West Hills Pond was ruined by clay. Its life changed. It is no longer rich in amphibians, and therefore it will no longer be rich in the predators which lived on the larvae of the amphibians. In fact, the pond was changed from a living museum of great value to a clay hole of no value. It is this kind of thing, happening because of ignorance or carelessness, that we want to prevent.

WHAT IS THE NATURE CONSERVANCY? It is a scientific organization dedicated to saving America's heritage of wild nature. It was once a committee of the Ecological Society of America. It started its plan for preserving areas of ecological value in 1917. In 1946 its name was changed to Ecologist's Union, and in 1950 to Nature Conservancy.

THE LONG ISLAND CHAPTER of the Nature Conservancy was established on October 29, 1954. It will spearhead the work of the Conservancy on Long Island. Prior to this time a group of people undertook successfully to procure and preserve the SUNKEN FOREST on Fire Island. The very fact that such a unique spot, long considered a kind of natural sanctuary, had been endangered by the building boom, and the fact that people would contribute their time and their money to preserve such a unique spot, constituted the stimulation that led to the formation of the Long Island Chapter. The Long Island Chapter thus has a reason to be grateful to the Sunken Forest and to the people who preserved it.

In the years since October 29, 1954, the Long Island Chapter has preserved several very interesting wild areas on Long Island. We will tell you more about these areas from time to time as we make field trips to them so that you will receive current information. They are enumerated below.

The Hoyt Property. This tract, which is in Commack, was offered to the Chapter by Mrs. Edwin Chase Hoyt. It was finally turned over to the Boy Scouts of America as a sanctuary. The tract, about sixty acres, was a sanctuary for a good variety of plants and trees and contained morainal ponds of the type described above. Adjacent land was acquired by the Boy Scouts for camp grounds and the like.

Smoky Hollow Bog. This is a small bog located at Fire Island Pines, and has been preserved and fenced. It is of value as a typical dunes cranberry bog, rich in dunes flora, including bog orchids. Acquisition of the bog was possible because of the efforts of Mr. John H. Thorpe, who is also acting guardian of the preserve. It was donated by Dr. Smadbeck, President of the Home Guardian Company.

Wolf Swamp Sanctuary, Lake Missepogue, Southampton. This preserve constitutes about twenty acres and was the gift of Miss Elizabeth Alexandra Morton. It is directly on the lake and is adjacent Elliston Park,

which protects it on one side. The Chapter protected the other sides with a chain-link fence.

King's Point Pond. This pond and the adjacent shore line, an area of about thirteen acres, was given to the Chapter by its owners. It was, prior to one of our recent hurricanes, a fresh water spring-fed pond of importance as a resting spot for migrating ducks.

The hurricane destroyed the dam, allowing tide water to invade the pond. It is now brackish, but the Chapter will replace the dam and in due time the pond will be restored to its fresh water character.

Delafield woods. This is a fifteen acre tract in one of Long Island's best preserved wild areas, the village of Nissequogue, lying between Smithtown and Long Island Sound. It was the gift of Mrs. Margaret Delafield.

There are also a number of tracts of land in the early stages of study. A favorable report from the Chapter's Technical Advisory Committee will, in each case, initiate the acquisition stage.

PRESERVES ON LONG ISLAND. While we are busy in our endeavor to save more of natural Long Island for posterity, we should not overlook the fact that splendid work has been done by the people who have gone before us, and actually there are many wonderful protected areas between the waterfront on New York Harbor and the State Parks at Orient Point on the north and Montauk Point on the south. These areas should be known to and enjoyed by all, and one of the features of SANCTUARY will be to visit these areas one by one and bring the first hand story to you. We will start with

JAMAICA BAY SANCTUARY

Jamaica Bay Sanctuary is one of the newest of Long Island's Preserves. It is part of the park system of the City of New York, and is also part of the program to improve the intricate water systems that constitute New York City's marineland. Everyone in the New York City Park Department who contributed to the formation of this Sanctuary should have our warm gratitude.

Jamaica Bay was for many years a famous wild fowl shooting grounds. When hunting was outlawed in the City, the area became a famous poaching ground. Duck hunters would carefully construct blinds of marsh grass

in low spots and mosquito ditches far out on the marsh where the long hand of the law could not reach them. But this had to come to an end some day, and it did with the construction of the Sanctuary. Now thousands of ducks and geese congregate in the man-made ponds to feed and rest during the lean winter months. Large numbers of Greater Scaup are there all winter, with fair numbers of Black Duck, Bufflehead, Ruddy Duck and American Widgeon or Baldpate. Lesser numbers of Green-winged Teal, Shoveller, Gadwall, Mallard, Pintail, Redhead, Ring-necked Duck, Canvas-back, American Goldeneye and Canada Geese are always present. Occasionally Snow Geese and Blue Geese are to be found there, and thousands of Brant swim in the waters surrounding the sand reef that borders the pond. With the Brant are to be found the sea ducks, the three Scoters, namely, the White-winged Scoter, the Surf Scoter and the American Scoter. Old Squaw are common, as are Red-breasted Merganser. In the pond its cousins, the beautiful Hooded Merganser and the American Merganser or Shelldrake are also to be found. In Spring, the Wood Duck and the Blue-winged Teal join the then dwindling flock. Occasionally such rarities as the European Widgeon and the European Teal are also found.

Ducks and Geese are but a small part of the bird life that finds food and shelter in the refuge. Shore Birds, Herons, Egrets, seaside species of Sparrows, all are benefactors of the protection afforded by the City. A total list of birds that are to be found in the Sanctuary in the course of a year is truly amazing. In early 1959 a European Redwing visited the Sanctuary and was resident for about a week. This is the first time that this bird of north Europe has been recorded in this country. It is significant that it was found at the Sanctuary, for it was feeding on the fruit of the beach rose, a species indigenous to its homeland. The Redwing is a thrush and is almost a twin for our own Robin, which is also a thrush. The Redwing attracted much attention and was featured in all the major New York papers. People came from miles around and visited the Sanctuary with the hopes of seeing this exotic visitor.

On Saturday, April 18th, a group of Long Islanders were enjoying a field trip to the Sanctuary. A large flock of ducks were in the lake and most of the species noted above were seen. In addition there was a Florida Gallinule, a number of Coot, and some Pied-billed Grebes. Three Great Blue Heron, one Green Heron

several Black-Crowned Night Heron, three American Egret and three Snowy Egret were wading the shores of the pond for minnows. An American Bittern was flushed out of the Phragmitis. Piping Plover ran back and forth on the sandy beach, and Greater Yellow Legs waded in the shallows of the pond. Large numbers of Myrtle Warblers fed in the bayberry, and Savannah Sparrows were everywhere. It was nearing the end of the day when the group was strolling back toward the parking field. A few Mourning Doves flew in and a big "V" of Double-crested Cormorant passed overhead on the way north. Of a sudden there were five large black birds directly overhead. Their long curved bills drew an exclamation of surprise from all. They were Glossy Ibis, real exotics in this cold northland of ours. Ordinarily we see them only when we make our winter trip to Florida where they can be seen feeding the shallows of Lake Okeechobee or the ditches of the Everglades, or when we make a summer trip to Stone Harbor in New Jersey, where they have recently taken to breeding. But here on Long Island in chilly April, they constitute a wonderful testimony to what a little protection and a little sanctuary can mean to wildlife and to all of us.

Jamaica Bay Sanctuary is on Cross Bay Blvd. in the County of Queens, New York City. A permit is required and may be obtained from the Park Department, but it is not essential that you have it for your first visit or two. There is a warden at the Sanctuary, Mr. Herbert Johnson, and you will find him to be a fine fellow who will be able to tell you what you may expect to see and where. The parking field is on the west side of Cross Bay Blvd., south of the bridge anchored to the mainland of Long Island. If you recall the Raunt, now just a memory, it is directly opposite. Should you have trouble finding the parking field, you may ask for help at the warden's house, which is next to the boat basin parking field directly at the bridge

We sincerely hope that you have enjoyed this, our first issue, and that you will look forward to our further issues. Your Chapter has been extremely busy in the past four and one half years, and has not had much time to convey its message to its membership. It has, however, already accomplished much in the preservation of wild areas on Long Island.

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