

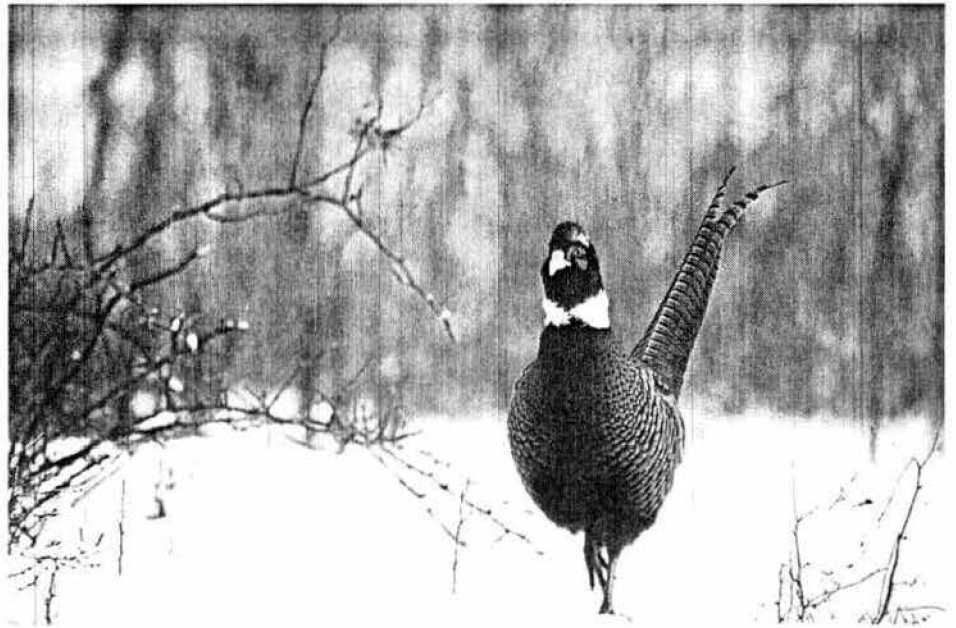
THE CELERY FARM CONSERVATION AREA

If you promise not to tell anyone, I'll tell you about a delightful place to watch birds. It's in Allendale. We've all heard the horror tales about national parks being trampled by hordes of people and you wouldn't want to be responsible should this happen here, would you? So, assuming you've crossed your heart and hoped to die, I'll disclose the details so that *you* alone can visit this bird sanctuary. And remember, this is just between the two of us. If you encounter someone on the trail, don't let on that I was the one to divulge this well-kept birding secret.

In 1981 the borough of Allendale acquired a sixty-acre parcel of black earth wetlands. Since then, an additional twenty-seven acres were obtained from neighboring property owners and eleven acres will soon be added from the adjoining Bajor Farm. (See map.) Acquisition of the Celery Farm was made possible by the New Jersey Conservation Foundation. They bought the property and held it until the town could arrange for repurchase with funds from New Jersey's Green Acres Program.

When title passed from the conservation foundation to the town, Mayor Edward FitzPatrick, who was instrumental in bringing this all about, authorized the Fyke Nature Association (FNA) to be responsible for the development of the land as a nature preserve. He also appointed me to be the park's new marsh warden. Since then, the association has installed a mile and a quarter nature trail and has constructed observation platforms, bridges, and boardwalks. It has also engaged in a number of other projects, some successful, some not. The wood duck nesting-box program is one of the successes. Seven houses were erected and they've been in use for many years. They're cleaned, repaired, and replenished with fresh sawdust each winter. This is the best time for maintenance because it's easy to reach them from the ice. Although one winter I fell through the ice and was saved by my companions John Brotherton and Mike Frantz. Both seem to think I should be forever grateful for this, even though the incident happened years ago. Is there no statute of limitations for this sort of thing?

Our ongoing tree swallow nesting experiment is quite revolutionary. It was found that bird houses placed at the



One of the Celery Farm's "pampered" pheasants.

GERALD BARRACK

Celery Farm were invariably used by "Bully, the English Sparrow." But, it was noted that tree swallows successfully raised young, without interference, in a three-inch pipe that stuck out of the marsh. Consequently, we erected eight more pipes and the swallows love them. Fortunately, "Bully" doesn't. The pipes are plugged about seven inches from the entrance, so that the birds don't slip down into the water, and a "ladder" of quarter-inch hardware cloth is placed in the tube to facilitate exit and entry. The nesting part of the pipe is either horizontal or at a 45-degree angle. Admittedly, the tubes aren't attractive, but they're much more practical and longer lasting than wooden houses.

Our attempt to reintroduce the ring-necked pheasant to the Celery Farm has met with comparative success. After a male was found in the phragmites in 1991, we purchased and released some hens and they've fledged twenty-one young so far. Funds for this were provided by several philanthropic individuals. The pheasant flock is admittedly pampered. Feed, donated by Wild Bird Market Place of Midland Park, is provided during the winter to aid survival. Of the birds, that is, not Wild Bird Market Place.

Now for the failures. We thought we could attract purple martins to the farm

by erecting a very expensive house. But the martins have ignored it even after we painted it purple. I don't believe they eat a thousand mosquitoes a day, anyway. There, I've said it and I'm glad.

About six years ago an osprey platform was installed with almost as much fanfare as the Iwo Jima flag-raising. On one day, one osprey alighted on the thing and consumed one fish. It didn't even spend the night. It's not easy being the marsh warden, and one thing you find out quickly is that birds display little gratitude.

Every year FNA invites the public to witness the autumnal spectacle of hundreds of waterfowl flying in to the Celery Farm as darkness descends. This event provides sustenance and socializing for both parties. The flights start in late August and continue until winter. From the number of arrowheads found at the farm, it's almost certain that members of the Leni-Lenape Indian tribe knew of this convocation of ducks and geese, too.

A total of 225 species of birds have been recorded at the farm. This past spring Charlie Mayhood and his New Jersey Audubon World Series group saw or heard 70 in one morning! A few of the more unusual birds found over the years (in no particular order) are: yellow-headed blackbird, yellow-throated warbler, northern shrike (every few

years), great cormorant (summer of 1994), Wilson's phalarope, black and king rails (which possibly nested), and prothonotary warbler and barn owl (which didn't). January is a good time to observe Virginia rails here. As many as seven have been seen at one time along the northern trail, usually near "Pink Potty Bridge." Late afternoon is the best viewing time.

If you visit the Celery Farm in mid-May, the dawn chorus will include the *fitz-bew* of the willow flycatcher and the rollicking purple finch-like song of the orchard oriole. If your hearing is acute, you may hear the low, rapid *doo-doo-doo* of a male least bittern. One you're sure to hear is the warbling vireo. It sings the entire spring and summer long. As an aid to recognition, Gordon Schultze, Lorrimer Sanctuary director, has put its rapid song to words as: "I'll see you and seize you and squeeze you till you squirt."

While on the subject of hearing, are you aware of Schultze's Paradox—when a song is recognized, the bird will be closer than it would have been in one's youth? Something like that. This applies to AARP members only.

From time to time, usually in late summer or early fall, several of us engage in what we call "An Hour on the Tower." What we do is position ourselves

on the fifteen-foot Pirie platform to see how many birds we can see and hear during a sixty-minute period. The record, to date, was attained on the morning of 9 September 1990, when Charlie Mayhood, Gordon Schultze, and I logged forty-two species. Not bad when one considers that two of us are legally deaf and that I had a hangover. One day when I didn't, Charlie and I saw a peregrine falcon fly by the tower and seize a green-winged teal!

The trails at the Celery Farm are maintained by Ken Appel, John and Pat Brotherton, the warden, and other dedicated members of FNA. The town has no appropriation for the farm; consequently everything is done by volunteers. On the first Saturday of April, my wife Lilly and her Garbage Girls pick up the trash that's accumulated during the year. She's recently noted that there's been a change in the litterers' beer preference. Budweiser, in spite of those frogs, is slowly being eased out of first place by that upstart, that "Uncommonly Smooth" Red Dog.

Judy Cinquina, teacher/lecturer/writer, has never been to England, but when she visits the farm she has the feeling that it must be very much like that beautiful country. And it is. See if you don't feel the same when you walk the trail along the Allendale Brook.

There are a couple of ways to visit the Celery Farm. One is to contact Gordon Schultze or Leslie DiCola at Lorrimer Sanctuary in Franklin Lakes (201-891-2185). Lorrimer has three guided spring trips and you're welcome to join them. But if you'd like to do it on your own, here's how to get there: Travel north 7.2 miles on Route 17, from Garden State Parkway exit 163, to the Allendale exit. Proceed westward on E. Allendale Avenue for 1.0 miles to Franklin Turnpike. Turn right (north) and drive 0.2 miles to a small marked parking lot on the right. This is three houses past Cottage Place. Walk the trail counterclockwise in the morning and the other way around in the afternoon. For the Anglophile, read anticlockwise. I forget why we do it this way, but there's a perfectly logical reason.

When Richard Pough, the great conservationist and ornithologist, saw the Celery Farm long before it was purchased by the borough, he commented that "if it could be preserved, the nature club would have a reason for being." How fortunate FNA is to have been asked by the town to oversee management of this eighty-seven acre treasure. You alone are invited to look it over. But don't forget, mum's the word.

—Stiles Thomas

