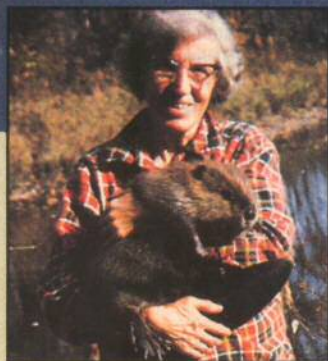


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S.J. Lang / VIREO



Wildlife seek refuge with Hope Sawyer Buyukmihci.

## An Unexpected Refuge

by Nina Natelson

**H O P E SAWYER BUYUKMIHCI** has always been ahead of her time. Long before the first glimmerings of a popular ecological consciousness, Buyukmihci recognized the value of preserving the wilderness. Thirty-one years ago, with money borrowed from her children's education fund, she and her husband, Cavit, founded an 85-acre wildlife refuge amid the industrial wastelands of New Jersey. They called it the Unexpected Wildlife Refuge. "With my delighted assent, Cavit robbed our children, hocked our future and bought the land," she writes in *Unexpected Treasure* (published in 1968 and now out of print), her book about founding and running the refuge. Over the years, the refuge has grown to 500 acres. Buyukmihci, now in her 70s, has run it singlehandedly since Cavit's death 5½ years ago.

Buyukmihci's respect for animals

was honed during the earlier years of her marriage some 40 years ago, which she spent in her husband's native Turkey, a country where "a woman's place is under her husband's foot," according to a proverb. There she was prohibited from going out or expressing opinions of her own in public; rebellion was inevitable. One day, Buyukmihci attempted to save a donkey that was being brutally beaten. Had she not been physically restrained, her behavior would have brought certain disgrace to her Turkish in-laws. Her husband agreed it was time to return to America.

The animal cruelty she witnessed in Turkey, and a later remark by a hunter comparing the hamburgers and chicken she ate to the deer and quail he hunted, eventually led Buyukmihci and her family to veganism.

There is a single-minded purpose in Buyukmihci's every action. Now she spends her time running the Beaver

Defenders (an organization that she founded), maintaining the refuge and taking steps to ensure that both will continue after her. And though she has faced threats to her life and bullets through her windows from hunters and trappers who resented the loss of hunting land, Buyukmihci is immovable. "This is my land and I will not allow anyone to violate it," she says.

Last autumn as Buyukmihci stood listening once again to the burst of hunters' gunfire just outside the refuge, her taut face reflected her inner struggle. "It kills me to stand here and do nothing to stop them," she admitted, "but if I demand that they respect the borders of the refuge, I must also respect their right to hunt on their own land." ■

*Nina Natelson is founding president of Concern for Helping Animals in Israel. She lives in Annandale, Va.*