



33

Unexpected Wildlife Refuge

Unexpected Wildlife Refuge comprises fields, forests, wetlands and open water. Main Lake Branch flows through the center of the refuge. Flora and fauna found here are typical of the New Jersey Pine Barrens and include pitch pine and oak forests, Atlantic white cedar swamps, abandoned cranberry bogs, and farmlands. Ten miles of trails wind throughout these various habitats, with a unique system of concrete boardwalks traversing wetland areas.

What to Look For: The refuge is home to a colony of beavers who lodge in Miller Pond. Visitors may see the beavers swimming, eating, or grooming at dusk or early in the morning. Other species

found here include white-tailed deer, wild turkey, red and gray foxes, raccoon, opossum, and skunk. Three observation blinds are located around Main Pond for watching wood duck, hooded merganser, great blue heron, Canada geese, and painted, red-bellied and snapping turtles, river otter, and of course, beaver. Habitat has been specifically created and maintained for bluebirds. The refuge also supports several State and/or Federally threatened or endangered species, including bald eagle, osprey, pied-billed grebe, barred owl, bog turtle and pine barrens tree frog.

Seasonally: Early spring is a good time for watching migrating neotropical songbirds and listening to the ten species of frogs found here. Late May and early June are lovely when the large old stands of mountain laurel bloom. Hot summer days bring out sixteen different dragonfly and damselfly species. Late October is the best time to see brilliant fall foliage.

Where: Unexpected Road, Franklin Township, in Gloucester County; and Buena Vista Township and Buena Borough in Atlantic County.

Directions: Directions are provided upon making an appointment.

Owner: Unexpected Wildlife Refuge, Inc., a non-profit, tax exempt organization.

Size: 737 acres.

Visitor Guidelines: Visitation is by appointment only. Phone (856) 697-3541. Guided tours are provided to groups of up to five; educational and reference materials are available to visitors at the small nature center. No camping, fires, swimming, boating or biking

is permitted. No hunting, trapping or fishing is allowed. Depending upon the time of year, trails can be wet or flooded.

Facilities: The refuge has been described as “primitive” by many patrons. An outhouse is provided. Parking is very limited. No handicap facilities are available. The access road is unpaved, one-lane and very rough.

History: In 1961, Cavit and Hope Buyukmihci, with their three children, purchased an 85-acre tract in Buena Vista Township. Mostly wooded swampland, the purchase included a cabin and an old barn on an acre of cleared land, a stream and a cranberry bog. The Buyukmihcis were distressed by the increase in land development, reducing the habitat available for wildlife in Southern New Jersey. The couple decided to dedicate their land to habitat preservation so that native wildlife and habitat could thrive.

The Buyukmihcis settled down to raise their children in a simple environment. They made trails throughout the property, erected bird houses and posted “No Trespassing” signs. They named their haven Unexpected Wildlife Refuge after Unexpected Road, off which it is situated. Friends, photographers, clubs and school children visited the refuge to learn about the environment of South Jersey. To support the refuge, Cavit worked as a metallurgist while Hope observed and photographed wildlife within the refuge and wrote about her experiences. She published three books and gave lectures in schools, clubs and churches. In 1970, after befriending a family of beavers, she founded The Beaver Defenders, an organization dedicated to beaver protection and education.

Cavit Buyukmihci died in 1987, shortly after he had retired with the plan of spending more time protecting the refuge and becoming more involved in the cause of animal rights. Hope continued to run

the refuge with the help of dedicated volunteers, supported entirely by private donations from visitors. On June 20, 2001, Hope passed the directorship to Sarah Summerville, who will carry on with the refuge purpose of protecting the wild inhabitants and promoting humane education.

Something To Know

Cranberries: Many lakes and ponds in southern New Jersey are former cranberry bogs which are now kept permanently flooded. By convention, cranberry plantations are called bogs but they bear little resemblance to any natural wetland. They have been cleared, leveled, spread with a layer of sand, and planted with cuttings of selected varieties of cranberry. The plants are fertilized, pruned, irrigated if necessary, and weeded to get rid of competing native vegetation. A system of reservoirs, dikes, and floodgates allow the cranberry bog to be flooded at will. For wet harvesting (the most common method), the bogs are flooded to a depth of about 18 inches; machines are then brought in which beat the vines and agitate the water, causing the berries to break free and float to the surface where they can be collected. And in winter, the bogs may be flooded to protect the vines from freezing.

Large cranberry is native in North America from Newfoundland to North Carolina. Its habitat in the wild is in a variety of wet, acid soils - bogs and fens, lake edges, even the inland edge of some salt marshes. Native Americans ate them and introduced them to European settlers. In early times, they were simply gathered from the wild. Cranberry culture began in Massachusetts in 1816, and in New Jersey in 1840, near Cassville in Ocean County. Today, about 3500 acres in New Jersey grow cranberries.