

# WETLANDS

Wetlands are among our most important types of open space, providing the essential function of water retention and purification. They also harbor the largest amount and variety of life of any habitat in Simsbury. As would be expected in a river valley bounded by ridges, wetlands can be found in every part of town, from the floodplain itself to vernal, or seasonal pools and seasonal streams high in the hills. However, they have become badly partitioned over the years, as residential development has spread into private nooks and crannies and into more marginally developable areas. As wetlands are divided into smaller and more isolated parcels, migration patterns are altered, wildlife with minimum range requirements disappears, and the life that remains lives under additional stress from nearby chemicals, family pets, and changes in water levels.

There are several types of wetlands in Simsbury, defined primarily by the distinctive plants and animals each supports. Among these are the river and its tributary streams, year-round ponds, red maple or brush swamps, bogs, wet meadows, and vernal ponds. The loss of any one of these wetland types would diminish the rich variety of plants, insects, birds, amphibians, reptiles, and mammals which share this piece of the earth with us.

The Land Trust protects a 40-acre bog, a 29-acre red maple swamp, a 10-acre wet meadow, and various other ponds, streams, swamps, and vernal ponds that exist on its property. The Town and the State own large sections of the river front along with nearby tributary streams, marshes, and swamps. Great Pond, owned by the State, is another great wetland resource. Several of the following walks provide access to these sites.

## **The Wetlands Along Old Farms Road**

Along the base of West Mountain runs a long stretch of wetlands. Here, the Simsbury Land Trust protects a 40 acre bog, bordered by a sizable esker stretching from the end of N. Saddle Ridge and Elcy Way and an extensive swamp fronting Hedgehog Lane.

In addition to being an interesting glacial feature in itself, the esker also serves as a highpoint, with water to the north running into Bissell Brook and water to the south becoming Hop Brook. Consist-



ing of a thirty foot high bank of gravel left by a retreating glacier, the bank drops steeply to the south and somewhat less steeply to the north. A mountain stream from the ridge to the west feeds the red maple swamp and Bissell Brook just north of the esker.

To the south a very different situation exists. This area of approximately 40 acres is fed by underground springs. Cooler underground water, decreased oxygen, and lack of nutrients from the surrounding glacial till are key components in creating a bog habitat. Although common in northern New England and Canada, bogs are far less so in Connecticut, and this is the only sizable bog habitat in Simsbury.

Best known for their sphagnum moss that “floats” on the water, bogs are also home to a number of plants and animals seldom found in the more common red maple swamps. Characteristic leatherleaf plants contribute to the floating mat, while highbush blueberries and carnivorous plants such as pitcher plants and sundews thrive. The Land Trust, which owns the bog, is constructing a short elevated walkway to enable people to view this habitat up close.

The best access to the bog is from North Saddle Ridge. A short distance south of the N. Saddle Ridge cul de sac, at the base of the Eastern ridge of West Mountain, are two stone pillars marking the entry to Town Open Space. This land stretches from N. Saddle Ridge Drive on the west to Old Farms Road on the east. The trail from this point follows an early farm road along the top of the esker, ending just short of Old Farms Road.

A mile to the south, just north of Hedgehog Lane, the Land Trust owns a 29 acre swamp that is periodically flooded by beaver activity. The best way to view this spot is to park at Meadow Pond, on the south side of Hedgehog just east of the Saddle Ridge intersection, then walk a short distance east to a spot just before the brook runs under Hedgehog Lane. From that point, there is an open bank a short walk down the slope from the north side of the road. In the spring the calls of ducks and geese can be heard about the time the painted turtles can be first seen from the road. It is not uncommon to see beavers, muskrats, snapping turtles, ducks, and other birds busy in the marsh. Yellow pond lilies and floating duck weed (the smallest of flowering plants) can be seen from shore.

