



Connie Galt



**Green-winged teal duck**

## OTTER CREEK SWAMPS



Vermont's longest river, Otter Creek, runs for 32 miles through the largest and most biologically diverse swamp complex in New England. There are seven named swamps along Otter Creek — Brandon, Leicester Junction, Long, Salisbury, Whiting, Middlebury and Cornwall Swamps — which are all part of the larger, 21,000-acre wetland system.

The swamps of Otter Creek serve as one of the most important stopover areas for migratory waterfowl in the region and, in the summer, wide-ranging mammals like bear, moose, and bobcat feed here. At least 10 different natural community types are represented in the swamps, including northern white cedar swamp, red maple-black ash swamp, floodplain forest, sedge meadow, and one of only three examples of the red maple-white pine-huckleberry swamp documented in Vermont. The area also supports the largest example of red maple-northern white cedar swamp in New England.

There are 32 rare and uncommon plant species in Otter Creek Swamps, including eastern Jacob's ladder, American hazelnut, nodding trillium, and cuckoo flower, and over 43 species of birds have been seen in the swamps, including as many as 15 different species of migrating waterfowl. Each spring, flocks of mallards, pintails, American widgeons, green- and blue-winged teals, buffleheads, and snow geese, as well as unusual visitors like tundra swans, congregate on the flooded fields bordering Otter Creek.

Known for their dynamic hydrology, enormous size, and exceptional natural beauty, the swamps of Otter Creek attract the interest and admiration of local residents, visitors,

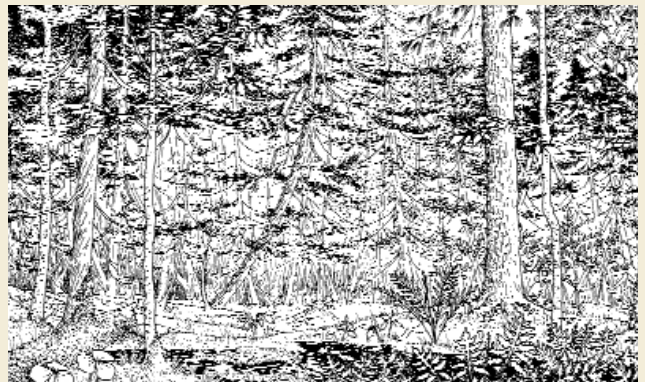
and scientists from around the region. The many different swamp communities are nestled within a rural landscape of farming and forestry. Cornwall Swamp, the "jewel" of the complex, was first identified in 1969 as an ecological site of statewide significance in "Vermont Natural Areas: Report 2," by naturalist Dr. Hub Vogelmann. It was then designated as a National Natural Landmark by the U.S. National Park Service in 1974.

The Nature Conservancy began working with the Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife to protect Cornwall Swamp in 1992. We have since expanded our protection work to Whiting Swamp and have directly helped conserve a total of 1,034 acres in the swamps to date. We are also working in concert with Middlebury College and the federal Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program to restore sections of floodplain forest by planting trees in fields that are too marginal for agricultural use.

Otter Creek is an ideal waterway for canoeing. In the spring, the river flows out of its banks and it's possible to canoe through the surrounding forests and over the fields.

### Driving Directions

Traveling south on Route 30 from Middlebury, pass through Cornwall and travel approximately three miles. Take a left on Creek Road, also known as Swamp Road. The road goes through the Cornwall Swamp Wildlife Management Area. Drive about a mile until you reach the covered bridge, known as the Cedar Swamp Bridge. You can put your canoe into Otter Creek at the fishing access on the right.



Libby Davidson

### Featured Natural Community:

#### Red Maple-Northern White Cedar Swamp

Generally found on calcareous bedrock, this community type has mucky soils and shallow-rooted trees that are easily overturned by wind. The resulting hummocky topography is often covered by moss and the sparse tree canopy is dominated by red maple.