

# ***WAPPING BOG: AN OVERLOOKED JEWEL***

by  
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We naturally get excited by new, large and expensive acquisitions such as Whitaker Woods in Somers. Other significant NCLT parcels, especially those with trail systems, also seem to be particularly valued by our members as well as by enthusiastic users in the general public. Examples include the Bald Mountain Preserve, the McCann Family Farm and the Skyline Scenic Area in Somers; Sunset Hill and the Swann Farm with its experimental Chestnut Orchard in Ellington and the fine collection of properties in the vicinity of Valley Falls Park in Vernon.

Alas, small isolated parcels tend to be dismissed as of little interest or consequence. This is unfortunate since at least one, the Wapping Bog in East Windsor, falls in this category but definitely should **NOT** be dismissed for the above reasons. While the entire parcel is only ~13.6 acres and the bog itself perhaps only a third of that **it deserves to be regarded as a real jewel in the care of the NCLT.**

Shortly after acquiring Wapping Bog in January of 2002 George Grant published an article on it in the NCLT's newsletter [Landmark (2002 No 8)]. He focused on the circumstances of the acquisition, the geologic history of such bogs, their physical and general biological characteristics as well as the threats facing our particular one. This is worth reading as background for this paper since it contains more information on the acquisition, geological history and physical condition of the bog than presented here

Just what is a bog? It is a permanent pond dating to the last ice age that is characterized by strongly acidic, oxygen deficient, nutrient poor water. Typically they are covered with a floating mat of slow growing vegetation highly adapted to this harsh environment. The mat is characteristically dominated by various sphagnum mosses as well as highly adapted woody plants predominately in the blueberry family. They are also commonly home to such interesting species as pitcher plants, other unusual carnivorous plants and even beautiful and often rare orchids. Ours is a "moated bog" which means open water separates the mat from the shore.

Why is Wapping Bog so special? Several reasons come to mind. First, while bogs are common farther north they are relatively uncommon this far south and man's destructive or at least disruptive activities have made them even more so.

Second, ours is a **black spruce bog**, a relatively rare plant community in Connecticut. While black spruce is a common conifer in the far north it is very uncommon this far south. Here they only manage to survive on bogs like ours because the highly acidic, nutrient poor water precludes other tree species that would otherwise out compete them on land.

Third, Wapping Bog has viable populations of two species (one an insect the other a flower) that are on the State of Connecticut's list of species that are **Endangered**,

**Threatened or of Special Concern. Since both species live exclusively on the floating mat it is off limits for visitors except by special permission from the NCLT.**

Besides, walking on the mat is dangerous in that one can easily fall through.

Fourth, such a special place has value for teaching and research. Towards this end George Grant and I have prepared a preliminary survey of the flora of the parcel to use during nature hikes there. Ken Metzler (Connecticut Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program) provided help with field identifications of some of the mat species. The accompanying table summarizes the results of our efforts. A few species reported in the literature on similar bogs and expected here are also listed even though we have not encountered them yet during our visits.

Aside from the impressive diversity present one other interesting but not entirely surprising result showed up in our data. All invasive species as well as all alien but non-invasive species were restricted to areas disturbed by man, namely, the berm along Wapping Road and the railroad right of way. In contrast the mat itself, the bog margin and the adjacent forest was apparently free of these pests. Two explanations for this come to mind. First, for the bog and its margin few or no species adapted to such an extreme environment have been introduced. Second, the interior of the forest away from the bog is sufficiently healthy to resist invasion by aliens -- at least for the time being.

Bogs in general are fragile and easily disturbed by human activities. Unfortunately this is also true for Wapping Bog. Three separate problems exist. A small slice of the northeast side of the bog is on private property. For some inexplicable reason the mat has been removed from that section. However the most serious threats come from nutrient and pesticide laden flood waters from two nearby properties across Wapping Road, a golf course and a tobacco field. That from the tobacco field is also often silt laden. In both cases the flood waters have a much higher Ph thanks to lime use which threatens to reduce the acidity of the bog. The impact of this contamination is so clear it can even be seen from Google Earth satellite photos. Some efforts have been made to reduce or eliminate these threats but the results have been far from perfect. Since nutrient poor, highly acidic water is vital to the survival of bogs this is a serious threat to this interesting and very special place.

Visitors on foot are welcome to explore Wapping Bog as long as they stay off the mat and do not disturb any vegetation, leave litter or otherwise degrade the property. The parcel is a crude triangle wedged into the intersection of Wapping Road on the southeast side and the railroad tracks on the west. Parking for 3 to 4 vehicles is available near the rail crossing. The healthiest part of the bog itself is most easily viewed from the open forest on the west side. While no official, maintained trails exist the forest is easily accessed from Wapping Road at various points a hundred meters or so northeast of the parking area.

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