

## Indian Creek Nature Center



Half a mile from Rensselaer Falls on Route 186, a brown and yellow sign announces "Indian Creek Nature Center." As you turn onto the unassuming, sandy road, flanked on both sides by tall grasses, you might expect to see a deserted farmhouse and the ruin of a barn, but instead, as you come over a rise, spread out before you in the distance, its waters glistening in the sunlight or obscured by a mist, lies a vast marshland, home and refuge of myriad wildlife.

Indian Creek Nature Center occupies 300 acres on this marshland and along its borders, within the Department of Environmental Conservation's Upper and Lower Lakes Wildlife Management Area. Established in 1972 by a volunteer group of local educators, cooperative Extension Service employees and Conservation Department workers (now a non-profit organization entitled North Country Conservation Education Associates—N.C.C.E.A.), the Nature Center's primary purpose is to serve as a focus for environmental education in the area. The tract had been used in recent years (as it still is) to host an annual "Conservation Field Day" for area sixth grade students, and the N.C.C.E.A. sought to expand and extend the educational services to the community in general. Because it encompasses several distinct kinds of habitat, in addition to the marsh, the area is well suited to observation and study of many kinds of plants and animals in their natural environments.



With the aid of the Youth Conservation Corps and many volunteers, a number of facilities have been, and continue to be developed, which help to make a visit to the Nature Center an enlightening and fascinating experience. A marsh overlook platform and a large roofed bird observation blind provide unusual visual access to the waterfowl that frequent the marsh along the flooded banks of the Indian Creek. Three man-made ponds offer interesting study of numerous aquatic insects and plants. Their cattail rimmed edges attract many red-winged blackbirds; swallows swoop low over the water; and sometimes a great blue heron searches for a fish or rises from one of the ponds, exhibiting a magnificent wingspan as he flies.



Several cleared trails lead one to some of the points of interest in the Nature Center. The "Woodland Succession Trail" guides the visitor through the various stages of forest development, from open field to mature woods. Features of this trail are pointed out and explained through interpretive signs, marked stations and an illustrated guidebook (currently in the process of being revised and printed). Here one may see evidence of beaver and muskrat, observe many wildflowers in the their seasons, and catch glimpses of woodpeckers, grouse and scarlet tanagers among the trees. Interesting features of forest growth are explained, often opening the eye of the visitor to see meaning in signs of nature which he might otherwise have overlooked.

The Nature Center is open year 'round to the public free of charge. Cross-country ski trails and a covered pavilion housing a large picnic table and fireplaces, invite enjoyment of the Nature Center in all weather.

The services of the Nature Center extend beyond its physical boundaries. Although funding for the Center has been limited, with the help of the Comprehensive Education and Training Act, the N.C.C.E.A. has been able to employ a temporary Nature Center Coordinator and is seeking funding in order to make the position permanent. The Coordinator maintains an office (currently on the State University campus in Potsdam) where many materials related to environmental study are housed and from which educational programs related to nature and environmental concerns are planned and arranged. During the school year the Coordinator visits area elementary schools, offering in-class slide presentations and discussions, as well as guided field trips at the Nature Center itself. At the Conservation Field Day held each June, sixth grade students from surrounding school districts have an opportunity to take part in a program offered by a number of guest speakers and field trip guides.

The educational services are also made available to other interested groups, such as teachers, Scouts, 4-H groups, and senior citizen organizations. Guided field trips and slide presentations can be arranged. Those interested in further information and those desiring to help support the Nature Center through individual or family memberships should contact the Coordinator, Richard Hartigan, 117A Satterlee Hall, State University College, Potsdam, New York 13676, Phone: 268-2768.

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