

Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge  
is managed under Wallkill River  
National Wildlife Refuge

Wallkill River  
National Wildlife Refuge  
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Federal Relay Service  
for the deaf and hard of hearing  
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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service  
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<http://www.fws.gov>

September 2008



U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Shawangunk Grasslands

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*

Monarch butterflies  
Montgomery Allen/USFWS

## Welcome



*This blue goose, designed by J.N. "ding" Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.*

## Introduction



## Grasslands

Welcome to Shawangunk Grasslands National Wildlife Refuge. The refuge, part of the more than 548 refuges that compose the National Wildlife Refuge System, provides exceptional grassland habitat within the Wallkill River watershed, a major tributary of the Hudson River. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service manages these lands to maintain them as grasslands, one of the few remaining grasslands in southeastern New York State. A wide variety of grasslands birds, including regionally rare species, use this important refuge as breeding, feeding, wintering and migration habitat. Other forest-edge and grassland-dependent plants and animals benefit from the refuge as well.

The Shawangunk Grasslands, located in the town of Shawangunk in Ulster County, New York, became part of the National Wildlife Refuge System in July of 1999. With easy public access to the refuge's habitats, and because of the grassland's open vistas, it is an ideal setting for wildlife observation, nature photography

and environmental interpretation. Visitors are encouraged to enjoy and appreciate the important contribution this small refuge makes to the National Wildlife Refuge System.

## History of the Area

The refuge is the site of the former 621-acre Galeville Army Airfield and training site, which the U.S. Military Academy at West Point declared excess in 1994. In 1999, the General Services Administration transferred 566 acres to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, creating the refuge, with the 55-acre balance transferred to the town of Shawangunk to create a community park.

The refuge lies in the Shawangunk Valley habitat complex, which is a subdivision of the Appalachian Ridge and Valley physiographic province. The Shawangunk Ridge forms the western boundary, while the much lower Plattekill Hills forms the complex's eastern boundary.

Glaciers have been the most significant factor in shaping the area's modern landscape, particularly





S. Maslowski/USFWS

*Bobolink*

the Wisconsin Ice Sheet, which retreated from this region about 10,000 years ago. This left many smaller recessional moraines and other distinctive glacial landforms (e.g., kames, kettles, eskers and drumlins) across the landscape north of the terminal moraine. Meltwater from the ice sheet in association with the moraines created several large glacial lakes in the watershed, such as Glacial Lake Hudson and Glacial Lake Albany. These lakes lasted for thousands of years; remnants are still visible as sand and dune deposits, and basins of deep marsh peat and lake sediments. In modern times the army filled much of the area to form the airfield.

## Getting Started



Dave Menke/USFWS

*Common yellowthroat*

To visit the refuge, take exit 5 from Interstate 84 to Route 208 north. In the town of Wallkill, Route 208 bears right – here you will bear left, go one block, and turn left onto Bryun Turnpike. Continue until you reach the second stop sign at Hoagerburg Road and turn right. The refuge parking area is about ½ mile on the right.

For a first visit, the period from mid-May through mid-June is a good time to start. This is when nesting activity for birds is at its height. A common sight will be the wonderful courtship flight displays of the male bobolink,

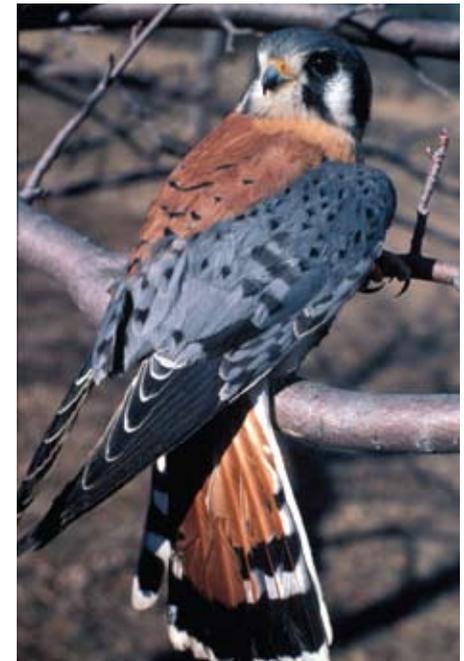
amid the musical songs of the eastern meadowlark, common yellowthroat, field sparrow and song sparrow.

By midsummer, many fledgling birds will be evident begging for food from their parents. Butterfly activity peaks at this time as well. Expect to see eastern tiger swallowtail, black swallowtail, orange sulphur, great spangled fritillary, meadow fritillary, red admiral, monarch and other species gathering nectar at the refuge's many wild flowers.

Fall is the time for sparrow lovers. By mid-October there will be many field, song, savannah and chipping sparrows, with fox and American tree sparrows arriving a bit later.

Winter is the season for the raptor enthusiast. Red-tailed hawks, which are present year-round, become even more numerous, along with northern harrier, American kestrel and some less common but regular visitors to this refuge.

## *American kestrel*



USFWS

## The Bigger Picture – Watershed Protection

The refuge offers many opportunities for wildlife observation, photography and exploration. The old runways provide a network of trails that explore much of the refuge. Future plans for the refuge include a perimeter trail and a visitor contact station.

While the refuge itself is small, it is part of a much larger effort to protect the greater Wallkill and Hudson River watersheds. A major partner in this effort is the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership which is composed of several non-profit and public agencies. The partnership has used geographic information system (GIS) technology to map the various habitats in and surrounding the ridge and has identified more than 1,400 species of flora and fauna in what The Nature Conservancy has designated one of the earth's "Last Great Places." This mapping process is extremely useful for land management that

considers the ridge ecosystem as a whole and not merely its individual parts.

The streams flowing from the ridge are a critical element of the groundwater recharging system that provides clean water for valley residents. The benefits of maintaining a healthy forest and plant community on the ridge cannot be understated. This includes managing invasive species, addressing problems from deer browse, and educating the public about the implications of fire suppression and the use of controlled burning as a management tool. Fire is beneficial to certain plant communities, such as pitch pine and wild blueberries on the ridge, but is also a valuable management tool on the refuge's grasslands for maintaining grasses and suppressing the growth of woody forbs and shrubs. Grassland birds seek the refuge's open areas as prime nesting habitat.

*Shawangunk  
Ridge and  
Millbrook  
Mountain*



# Shawangunk Grasslands

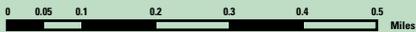
*National Wildlife Refuge*

To  
New Paltz

Runways and paved areas  
open for walking. All other  
areas closed.

**Legend**

- Refuge Boundary
- Private/State Owned
- Parking
- River
- Road
- Wetland



Only a small percentage of the area's critical habitats identified has been preserved, and the partnership will continue to work with local communities and the Service to protect vital tracts of land through acquisition, conservation easement and land use planning.

Any visit to the refuge can be combined with a further exploration of the surrounding Shawangunk Ridge, which rises above the grasslands' open vistas.

For more information on the partnership, please visit The Nature Conservancy Web site at [nature.org](http://nature.org) and do a search for the Shawangunk Ridge Biodiversity Partnership.



Dave Menke/USFWS

*Eastern bluebird*

## Wildlife Calendar

### *Spring (March-April-May)*

Some of our wintering raptors and sparrows are still present through March, but will soon be departing for their northern breeding ranges. If you are lucky, you may see the courtship flight of the short-eared owl before it heads north. Early arriving songbirds that nest here or nearby include American woodcock, red-winged blackbird, eastern meadowlark, field sparrow, song sparrow and eastern bluebird; these last two are year-round residents. They are soon followed by numerous warblers and flycatchers and more

grassland species such as bobolink, savannah sparrow and upland sandpiper.

### *Summer (June-July-August)*

Through early summer, displaying bobolinks are common. The song of the Baltimore oriole can be heard on the wooded edges. The American goldfinch will be found commonly picking at the thistles for nesting material later in June. There is also a profusion of wild flowers in the summer that provides an excellent opportunity to view the many species of butterflies that will seek nectar at them.

### *Fall (September-October-November)*

Fall migration season is highlighted by significant flights of sparrows and raptors, many of which will overwinter here. Passing broad-winged hawks are certainly possible. Monarch butterfly migration would also be noticeable in September and early October. White-tailed deer, while present year-round, are most active at this time during the rutting season.

*White-tailed yearling*



Greg Thompson/USFWS



*Short-eared owl*

### *Winter (December-January-February)*

This is the time of the year for many common wintering raptors such as red-tailed hawk and northern harrier, but it is the winter rarities that make the experience here special. During the day, one is likely to encounter rough-legged hawks perched or hovering as they hunt, and just before dusk, the emergence of short-eared owls.

### **Fishing**

The refuge has a one-tenth-acre pond that supports a small warmwater fishery dominated by largemouth bass and sunfish. Under the refuge's current comprehensive conservation plan, fishing in the pond will be allowed. No permit is necessary from the refuge office, but state fishing regulations apply.

*Fishing pond at  
Shawangunk Grasslands NWR*

### **Hunting**

The Refuge Improvement Act of 1997 identifies hunting as a priority public use. Under the comprehensive conservation plan, a white-tailed deer archery season is the only hunting that will be allowed. Permits will be available through the Wallkill River National Wildlife Refuge office in Sussex, New Jersey. Please contact the office regarding the opening of the archery season.

### **Volunteering**

If you would like to volunteer, we can use your help! Trail maintenance requires a lot of time – volunteers are deeply appreciated. Other volunteers do construction work or help us collect biological data. Contact the refuge office for more information.



*The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is, working with others, to conserve, protect, and enhance fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.*

