

**DRAFT
REVIEW ONLY**



Oatka Creek Park Vegetation and Wildlife Report

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Prepared For:

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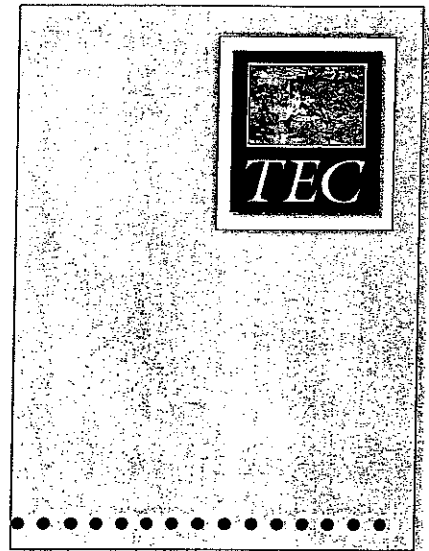
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Executive Summary



The Monroe County Department of Parks is proposing to develop a master plan for Oatka Creek Park in the Town of Wheatland, Monroe County, New York. The Environmental Collaborative (TEC) was contracted by Bergmann Associates, P.C., on behalf of the Monroe County Department of Parks, to conduct a vegetation and wildlife inventory on the property, including an evaluation of the possible presence of rare species.

Prior to initiating a field investigation of the site, a review of available information pertaining to existing vegetation, soils, hydrology, and other natural resources was conducted.

These sources of information included the NYSDOT 7.5 minute topographic maps, the National Wetland Inventory maps, the NYSDEC Freshwater Wetlands maps, the Monroe County Soil Survey, the United States Department of Interior Fish and Wildlife Service rare species and significant habitat information, the New York Natural Heritage Program biological information records, and the Breeding Bird Atlas data.

The aerial photograph in the Monroe County Soil Survey and a 1999 aerial photograph obtained from Bergmann Associates, P.C. were used to develop a preliminary vegetation cover map for the site. During the on-site vegetation

survey, this map was refined and information was collected on the dominant plant species in each cover type. Field methods used for conducting the wildlife inventory were standard field identification techniques (i.e., visual observations of species and/or their sign and, where appropriate, auditory observations).

Based on the field investigation, the vegetation community and wildlife habitat types identified on the subject property include developed land, hedgerow, deciduous forest, shrub upland, old field, wetland, intermittent stream, and perennial stream with associated floodplain.



Introduction

Oatka Creek Park is a 550-acre park located in the Town of Wheatland, Monroe County, New York. It is owned and managed by the Monroe County Department of Parks (hereafter referred to as the County). Bergmann Associates, P.C. was retained by the County to pre-

pare a master plan for the park. As part of the master planning process, The Environmental Collaborative was hired by Bergmann Associates, on behalf of the County, to conduct a vegetation and wildlife inventory to identify all plant and animal species, including the possibility of rare species.

This report includes a section on the results of the agency and literature review, a description of currently existing vegetation and wildlife (terrestrial and aquatic) resources within the project limits, species lists, and a cover type (vegetative communities) map. The report provides Bergmann Associates, P.C. and the County with the requisite information about the park such that all issues dealing with natural biological resources can be identified and used in developing the park master plan. It will be included as an appendix to the final master plan for Oatka Creek Park.

Site Location

The park is located approximately 2 miles to the southwest of the Village of Scottsville and about 18 miles ("as the crow flies") southwest of downtown Rochester. The park is located in a rural part of the county and is characterized by a gently rolling landscape, which is typical of this part of Monroe County. The park is bounded on the west by Union Street (County Road 170), on the south by Stewart Road, and on the north and west by the Rochester Southern Railroad (Figure 1).

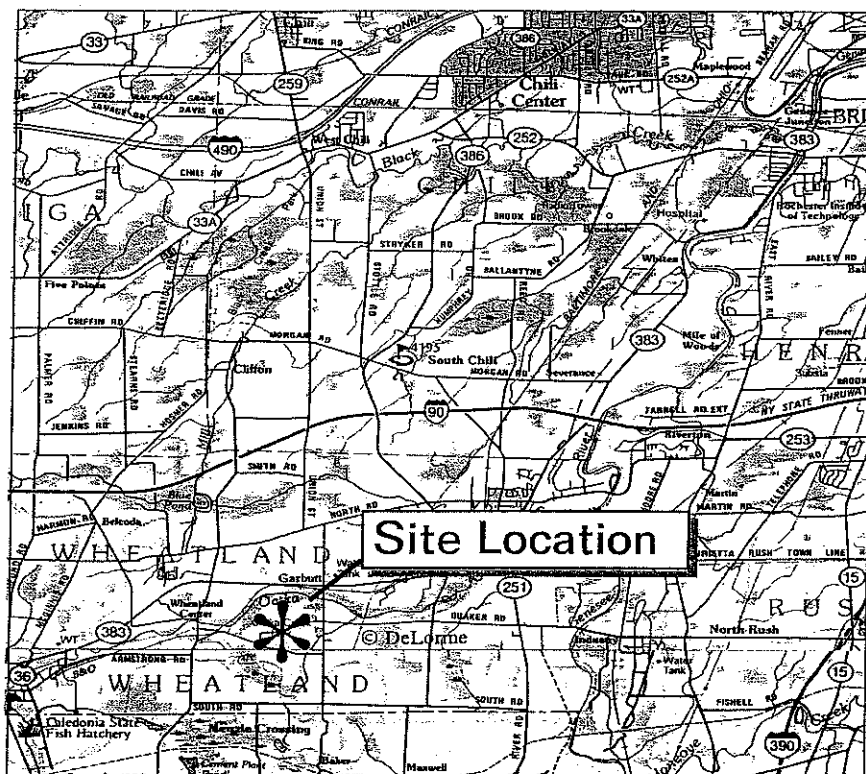


Figure 1. Location of Oatka Creek Park in the Town of Wheatland, Monroe County, NY.

Several single family residences occur along Union Street and on the opposite side of Stewart Road from the park. However, most of the land surrounding Oatka Creek Park is characterized by active agricultural land. Small urban centers (Wheatland Center, Garbutt, and Scottsville) occur to the west and northeast of the park.

Site Description

The majority of the park is characterized by gently rolling topography. However, steep grades occur in the southeast corner of the park and in the northern and western portions of the park leading down to Oatka Creek.

For the most part, the park is undeveloped. At one time Quaker Road

used to traverse the park but has since been abandoned. However, the road still functions as a main access route through the park for hikers, bike riders, cross country skiers, and horseback riders. Two small parking lots are located where this road meets Union Street and Stewart Road. Other access points to the park are located along New York State Route 383 and near the Union Street bridge over Oatka Creek. A small "lodge" and restroom facilities are located about 1,200 feet into the park from the parking lot off of Union Street. A maintained trail system throughout the park is used for jogging, biking, horseback riding, cross country skiing, walking, birdwatching, and nature study. Other uses of the park are fishing and orienteering. One interesting past use of the park was the

mining of gypsum. Although this activity ceased many years ago, evidence is still visible in the deciduous woods along the south side of Oatka Creek and in the form of sinkholes along the southern park boundary.

Oatka Creek is a perennial stream that flows in a westerly direction through the western and northern portions of the park. It flows into the Genesee River about 3.5 miles east of the park. An intermittent stream flows in a northeasterly direction through the southeastern corner of the park. This stream joins Oatka Creek approximately 0.5 miles from the park. A small intermittent tributary to this stream enters the park from the south via a culvert under Stewart Road and flows into the larger intermittent stream. Four wetlands are also present in the park.



Figure 2. Typical shrub upland in the park.



Figure 3. Typical old field in the park.



Figure 4. The main "access road" through the park. This used to be part of Quaker Road.



Figure 5. Oatka Creek as seen from the Union Street bridge.

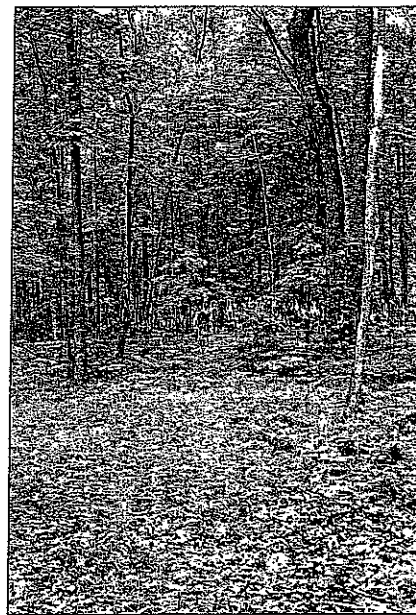


Figure 6. The relatively mature deciduous forest in the center of the park.



Figure 7. The wetland to the north of the main park "access road".



Figure 8. One of the sink holes recently discovered in the park.



Figure 9. One of the intermittent streams in the southeast corner of the park.

Agency Resource Information



Prior to initiating a field survey of the project site, existing environmental data were collected. The sources of this data include the following:

- NYSDOT 7.5 minute topographic maps (Caledonia, 1984; Clifton, 1997)
- National Wetland Inventory map (aerial photography Caledonia, 1986; Clifton, 1981)
- Freshwater Wetlands Maps of the NYSDEC (1986)
- U.S. Department of Agriculture, Soil Conservation Service, *Soil Survey of Monroe County, New York* (1973)
- Aerial photograph (1999)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service rare species and significant habitat information
- New York Natural Heritage Program biological information records
- Breeding Bird Atlas data

This information provides an indication of the probable occurrence and general location of wetlands and other

waters of the United States under Federal and State regulation, as well as the possible occurrence of rare species and/or significant habitats within the park.

NYSDOT Map

This map indicates the park is characterized by gently rolling topogra-

phy (Figure 10). Relatively steep slopes occur in the southeastern corner of the park and in the northern and western portions of the park. Oatka Creek flows through the northern and western edges of the park. Another perennial stream is shown to occur in the southeastern corner of the park. A wetland symbol indicates the presence of a small wetland located north of the park entrance road. Sev-

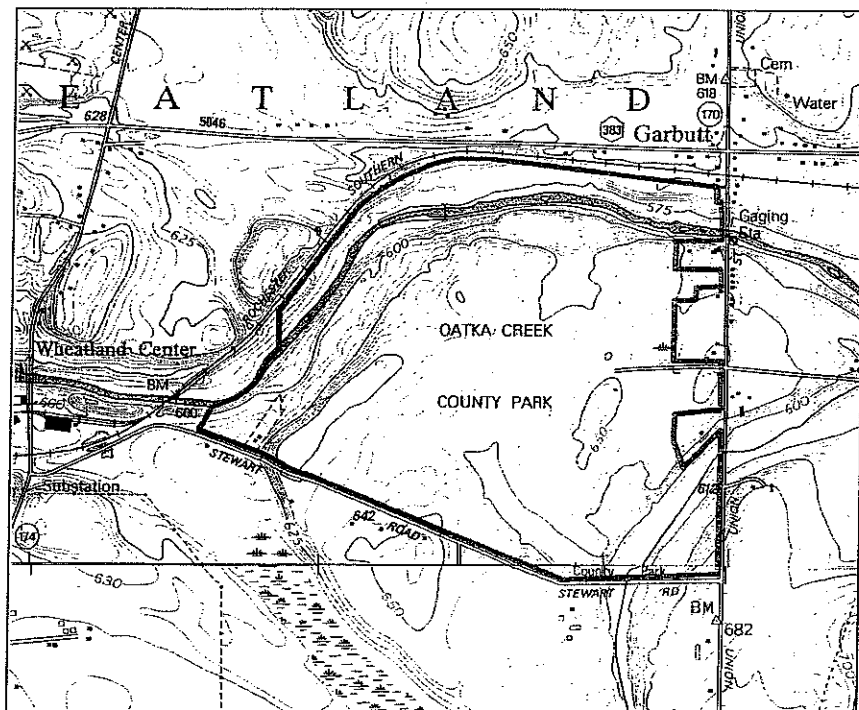


Figure 10. The boundaries of Oatka Creek Park outlined on the NYSDOT 7.5 minute topographic maps (Caledonia and Clifton quadrangles).

eral small islands are shown to occur within Oatka Creek and a bridge crosses the stream at about the midpoint of the stream within the limits of the park.

NWI Map

This map indicates the presence of several federally regulated wetlands within the park, as well as a perennial stream (Oatka Creek). The wetlands are classified as palustrine, forested, broad-leaved deciduous, seasonally saturated (PFO1E) and palustrine, scrub-shrub, broad-leaved deciduous, temporary (PSS1A). Oatka Creek is classified as riverine, upper and lower perennial, open water, permanent (R2OWH and R3OWH) (Figure 11).

NYSDEC Map

This map does not indicate the presence of any state regulated wetlands on the site (Figure 12). However, it shows Oatka Creek in the northern and western portions of the park and a perennial stream flowing through the southeastern corner of the park.

Monroe County Soil Survey

The soils within the park (Figure 13) are mapped by the U.S. Natural Resource Conservation Service (formerly the Soil Conservation Service) (USDA SCS - 1973, sheet nos. 69, 70, 77, and 78) as follows: Benson channery loam (BcB), Canandaigua silt loam (Ca), Cayuga silt loam (CeB), Eel silt loam (Ee), Hilton loam (H1A/B), Honeoye silt loam, limestone substratum (HoB), Lima and Cazenovia silt loams, limestone substratum (LoB), Ontario fine sandy loam (OfB), Ontario loam (OnB/C), Ontario loam, eroded (OnC3/D3), Palmyra gravelly fine sandy loam (PaD/F), Palmyra gravelly loam (PgB), Pits and Quarries (Pu), and

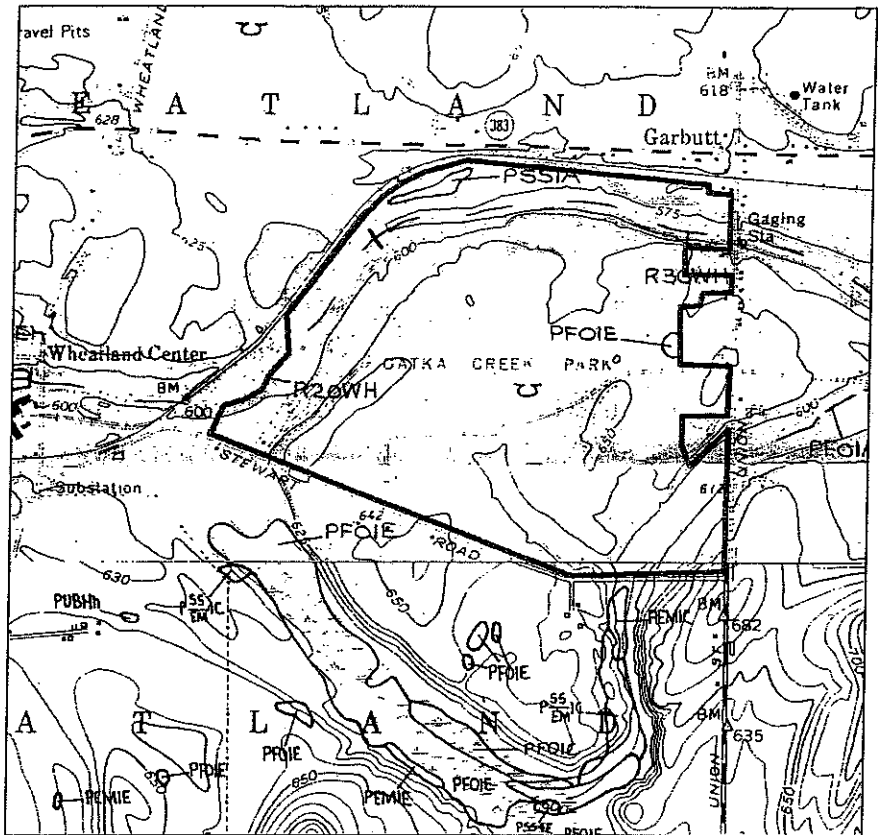


Figure 11. The park in relation to wetlands shown on the NWI Map.

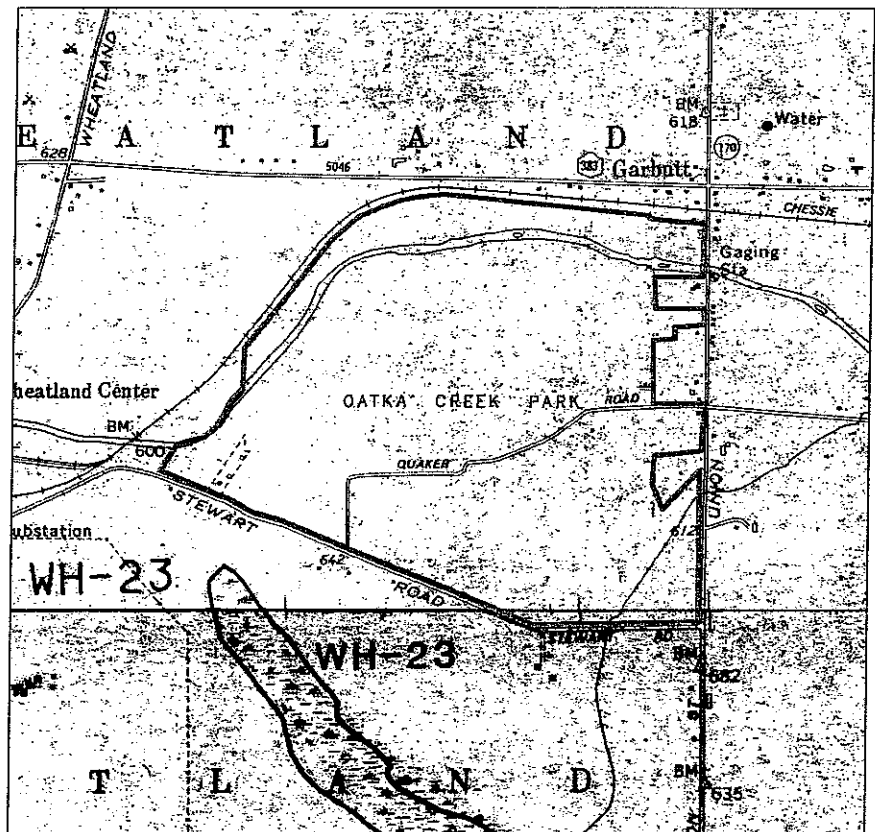


Figure 12. The park in relation to wetlands shown on the NYSDEC Freshwater Wetlands Map.

Wampsville cobbly loam (WcB). The only soils classified by the Natural Resource Conservation Service as hydric and having the potential for hydric inclusions are Canandaigua silt loam and Eel silt loam. All of the other soils mapped on the site are non-hydric soil types.

1999 Aerial Photograph

This photograph shows the park to be a mix of deciduous forest and inactive agricultural fields defined by hedgerows. It also shows a forested wetland to the north of the park entrance road. A small "lodge" and area of mowed lawn can be seen in the central and eastern part of the park (Figure 14).

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The information received from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service indicates that there are no federally listed or proposed endangered or threatened species known to exist on the subject property (Appendix A).

NY Natural Heritage Program

The information received from the Natural Heritage Program indicates that no endangered, threatened, or special concern wildlife species, rare plant, or natural community occurrences, or other significant habitats occur within the limits of the park (Appendix A).

Breeding Bird Atlas data

This information, gathered in 1980 to 1985, indicated a number of bird spe-

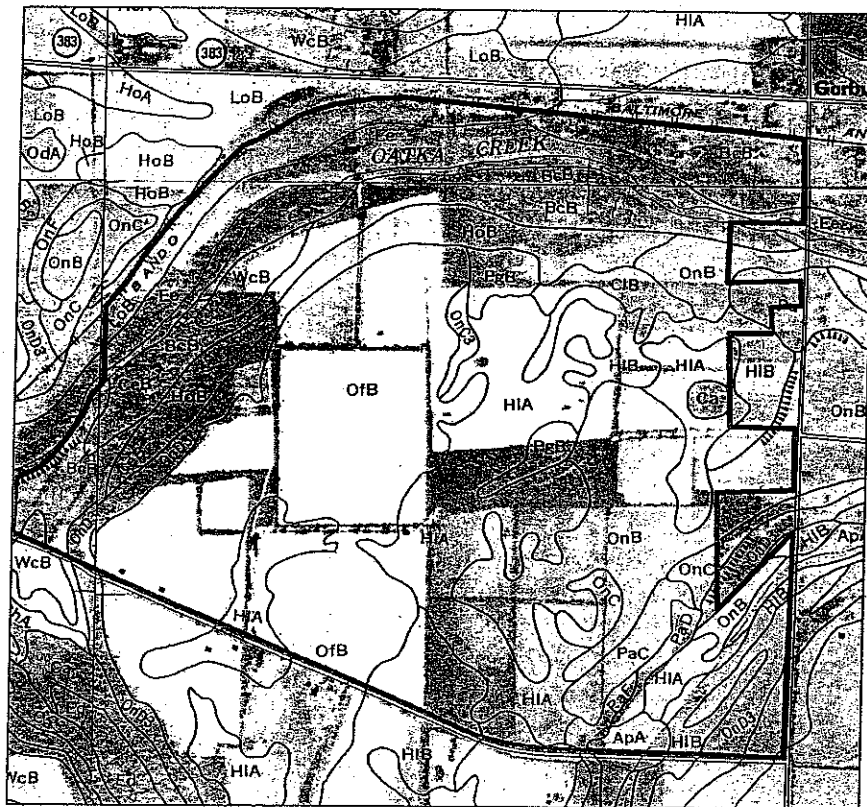


Figure 13. The park in relation to soils shown on the Monroe County Soil Survey map. This photograph shows that the majority of the park is in active agricultural land, with scattered forests throughout the area.

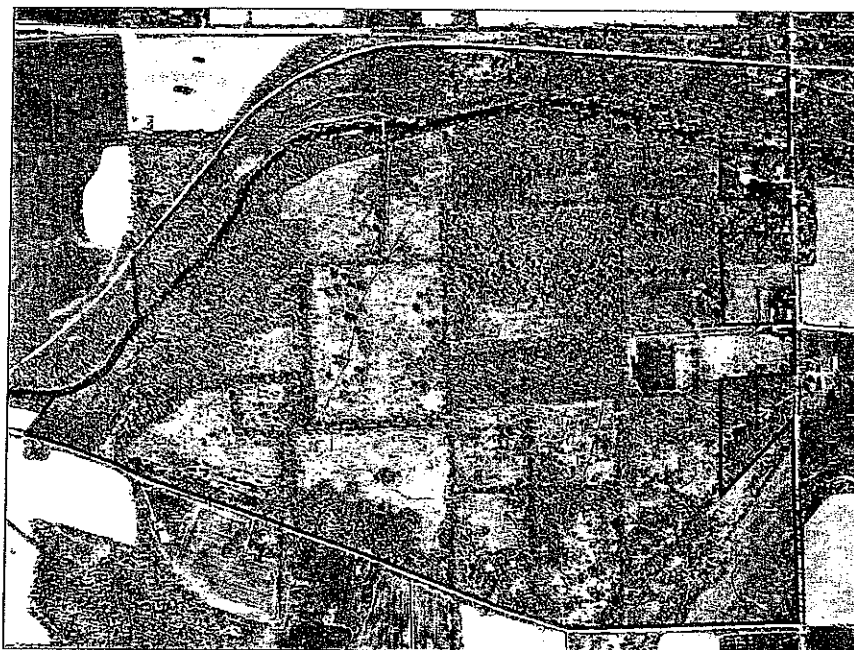


Figure 14. The park boundaries shown on a 1999 aerial photograph. Note the difference in the vegetation cover types compared to the photograph in the Monroe County Soil Survey.

cies breeding or possibly breeding on or adjacent to the subject property. Of these species, nine are classified as special concern, although none are classified as endangered or threatened (Appendix A).



Inventory Methodology

An on-site vegetation and wildlife survey was performed during mid- to late summer of 2000 by Barbara C. Reuter (Ecologist and Wetland Specialist) of The Environmental Collaborative (resume included in Appendix D).

Vegetation Survey

A vegetation survey to determine the plant species within Oatka Creek Park was conducted on June 28 and 29, July 12 through 14, and August 15, 2000. All areas of the park were covered at least once during the survey. A 1999 aerial photograph (1" = 1000') and the aerial photograph in the Monroe County Soil Survey (1" = 1070') were used to develop a preliminary vegetation community map. During the on-site vegetation survey, this map was used to identify and characterize the various ecological community types within the park. Where possible, vegetation community types were identified based on

the natural communities defined by Reschke in the *Ecological Communities of New York State* (1990). Information was also collected on the dominant plant species in each community type. Methods used for plant identification involved visual observation in the field as well as collection and identification through the use of taxonomic keys in the office.

Wildlife Survey

Information regarding wildlife species in the park was obtained by reviewing published and unpublished data, and interviewing New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (NYSDEC) personnel and frequent users of the park. Published data used included the *Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State* (Andrle and Carroll 1988), while unpublished data included NYSDEC reports, files, and correspondence.

The primary means for obtaining wildlife species data for the park

came from conducting a wildlife survey. This survey was conducted at the same time as the vegetation survey (dates mentioned previously). Observations of birds were visual (with the use of binoculars) as well as auditory. Identification of nests and feathers was also used to identify bird species. Mammals were identified through direct observation of species and/or their sign (dens, tracks, droppings, bones, etc.). Reptiles and amphibians were surveyed through systematic searches of wooded areas, hedgerows, fields, wetlands, and stream edges. In searching for snakes and salamanders, rocks, logs, and other debris were turned over and examined.

Wildlife habitat areas were identified based on field reconnaissance and mapped using the 1999 aerial photograph and Monroe County Soil Survey. Vegetative cover was categorized in terms of species composition and structural character. In addition, the presence or absence of specific habitat elements was noted.



Results of the Inventory

The vegetation and wildlife inventory was conducted toward the end of the breeding season for most birds. However, many birds were still active at this time and easily identified. Several amphibians were also still calling in the on-site wetlands, although a few species that tend to breed much earlier in the year were difficult to locate. However, it is felt that sufficient information was gathered in the field, along with supplemental information from various agencies and park users, for the purposes of aiding in the development of a master plan for Oatka Creek Park.

The types of vegetation communities and wildlife habitats observed on the site are all very common throughout most of New York State and are presented on the vegetation and wildlife habitat map (Figure 15 in Appendix

B). The following is a discussion on the results of the inventory.

Plant Species

Documentation of plant species within the park were not available from other sources. Therefore, all of the information presented in this report was gathered during the 2000 vegetation inventory. A total of 182 plant species were documented within the limits of Oatka Creek Park. A comprehensive plant list (including scientific names) is presented in Table 1 in Appendix C. None of the plant species identified in the park are listed by the New York Natural Heritage Program or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service as endangered, threatened, rare, or of special concern. In fact, typical habitats that often con-

tain rare species (i.e., prairie remnants, limestone outcroppings, fens, bogs, and rich woodlands) are not present within the park.

Vegetation Community Type Inventory

The park consists mostly of abandoned agricultural fields and deciduous forest, although a total of seven vegetation community types were identified. Several of these community types are the result of previous or on-going activities (i.e., farming and park maintenance). The communities identified on site and their respective approximate acreages are presented in Table 2. None of the vegetation community types is considered significant by the New York Natural Heritage Program or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

A description of each plant community, including mention of those species which are dominant or of particular interest, is presented below.

Developed

The only developed areas of the park are the entrance road, the small park-

| Community/Habitat Type | Acreage | Percentage |
|------------------------|-----------|------------|
| Developed | 7 acres | 1 percent |
| Hedgerow | 25 acres | 4 percent |
| Old Field | 76 acres | 14 percent |
| Shrub Upland | 71 acres | 13 percent |
| Old Field/Shrub Upland | 51 acres | 9 percent |
| Deciduous Forest | 293 acres | 54 percent |
| Wetland | 12 acres | 2 percent |
| Stream and Stream Edge | 15 acres | 3 percent |

Table 2. The vegetation community types in Oatka Creek Park. The acreages are approximate because the line of demarcation between several of the plant community types is vague.



Figure 16. Only a small part of the park is developed. This area is near the "lodge".



Figure 17. One of the maintained trails through an area of shrub upland.



Figure 18. One of the old fields located in the central portion of the park.

ing lots, the "lodge" surrounded by a mowed lawn, the gravel "access" road bisecting the park, and several mowed paths throughout the park. In the *Ecological Communities of New York State*, Reschke (1990) describes a number of community types that are classified as developed, including mowed lawn and unpaved road/path. Besides Kentucky bluegrass (*Poa pratensis*) in the lawn areas, other common species include English plantain (*Plantago lanceolata*), white clover (*Trifolium repens*), common plantain (*Plantago major*), heal-all (*Prunella vulgaris*), and black medic (*Medicago lupulina*).

Hedgerow

Hedgerows occur throughout the park along former fence lines that once separated active agricultural fields. These hedgerows are remnants of forests that dominated the area prior to clearing for agricultural purposes. Many of the hedgerows contain rock walls that were built while clearing the fields for plowing. Some of these hedgerows are still quite obvious, while others have become more obscure with the growth of surrounding forested areas. This community

type is not described in Reschke (1990).

This plant community type consists of a mix of relatively mature trees, a thick stand of shrubs and vines, and scattered herbaceous species. The dominant plant species in these hedgerows often reflect the species present in the forests before they were cleared for cropland. The most common species found in the hedgerows at Oatka Creek Park include black cherry (*Prunus serotina*), black oak (*Quercus velutina*), trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides*), gray dogwood (*Cornus foemina*), honeysuckle (*Lonicera tatarica*), northern blackberry (*Rubus allegheniensis*), black raspberry (*Rubus occidentalis*), wild grape (*Vitis aestivalis*), Virginia creeper (*Parthe-*

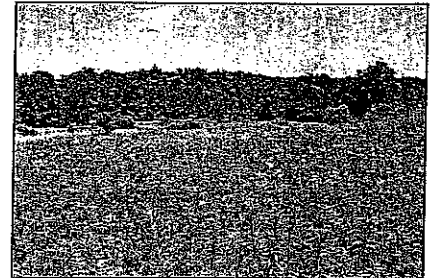


Figure 19. Some of the abandoned agricultural fields are dominated by forbs.

nocissus quinquefolia), garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*), mayapple (*Podophyllum peltatum*), and poison ivy (*Rhus toxicodendron*). Other species present to a lesser extent include white ash (*Fraxinus americana*), hawthorn (*Crataegus* spp.), buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*), pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*), white avens (*Geum canadense*), and wild strawberry (*Fragaria virginiana*).

Old Field

The vast majority of the park is characterized by abandoned agricultural fields in the early stages of secondary succession. This community type, referred to as old field, is classified by Reschke as successional old field, which is defined as "a meadow domi-



Figure 20. Clumps of tree saplings and shrubs are common in the old field areas.



Figure 21. Some of the old field areas have a relatively high component of shrubs.



Figure 22. A number of sinkholes have been discovered in the park.



Figure 23. One of the recently formed sinkholes on the south side of the park.

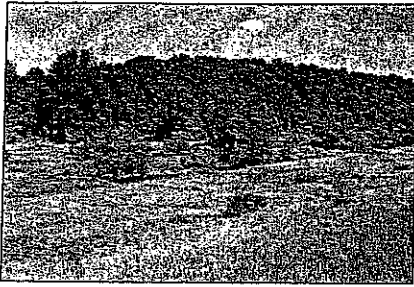


Figure 24. The old field in the southwest corner of the park is dominated by grasses.



Figure 25. Another view of the old field in the southeast corner of the park.



Figure 26. This old field in the southwest corner of the park is bordered by Norway spruce.



Figure 27. A large stand of black locust is located in this old field area.



Figure 28. A narrow band of old field occurs in the floodplain of Oatka Creek.

nated by forbs and grasses that occurs on sites that have been cleared and plowed (for farming or development), and then abandoned." Many of the old fields within the boundaries of the park grade into the shrub upland communities, making it difficult to determine the boundaries between these two community types. In this situation, old field and shrub upland community types are combined on the vegetation community type map.

The species composition varies from one area of old field to another, although there is a fair amount of overlap. However, there are distinct differences between the old field in the southeast corner of the park and the rest of the old field areas. The old field in the southeast corner of the park is dominated by grasses while the other old fields are dominated by a mix of grasses and forbs (broad-leaved herbaceous species). These differences could be attributed to past agricultural practices, soil types, or the conditions of the fields at the time of the abandoned farming practices.

The old field in the southeastern corner of the park is dominated by grasses and contains very few shrubs.

The most common grasses include smooth brome (*Bromus inermis*) and timothy (*Phleum pratense*). Other herbaceous species that are fairly common in this old field are slender vetch (*Vicia tetrasperma*), common milkweed (*Asclepias syriaca*), English plantain, and butter-and-eggs (*Linaria vulgaris*). A few clumps of gray dogwood and honeysuckle are scattered throughout this old field. Black locust (*Robinia pseudo-acacia*) saplings are common along Union Street and Stewart Road.

Some of the more common herbaceous species in the remainder of the old field areas include Canada goldenrod (*Solidago canadensis*), timothy, orchard grass (*Dactylis glomerata*), cow vetch (*Vicia cracca*), slender vetch, and common milkweed. Other species that occur to a lesser extent include Queen Anne's lace (*Daucus carota*), wild strawberry, bergamot (*Monarda fistulosa*), white sweet-clover (*Melilotus alba*), yellow sweet-clover (*Melilotus officinalis*), and red clover (*Trifolium pratense*). Another common component of many of the old fields is gray dog-

wood, which is often only as tall as the other herbaceous species and tends to blend in so that it is difficult to discern the extent of woody versus herbaceous plants.

One of the old field areas south of the abandoned portion of Quaker Road through the park contains a rather substantial stand of black locust. Another old field area to the north of this road contains a number of stands of trembling aspen (*Populus tremuloides*).

Shrub Upland

The shrub upland areas within the park vary from solid stands of dense shrubs to areas with patches of old field vegetation and scattered trees and tree saplings. This community type is classified by Reschke as successional shrubland and is described as "sites that have been cleared (for farming, logging, development, etc.) or otherwise disturbed. This community has at least 50 percent cover of shrubs."

The dominant shrub species in the shrub upland areas within Oatka Creek Park include gray dogwood,



Figure 29. The shrub upland areas have dense shrubs with some trees and saplings. This community type has less than 50 percent cover of herbaceous species.

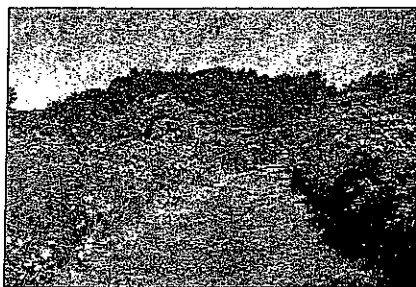


Figure 30. In some of the shrub upland areas, the shrubs are so high it is impossible to see over them while walking on the mowed paths.



Figure 31. A large portion of the park consists of various types of deciduous forest, which is an important resource in this part of the state.

honeysuckle, and wild grape. Other woody species occurring within this community type include northern blackberry, black raspberry, staghorn sumac (*Rhus typhina*), green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*), white ash, box-elder (*Acer negundo*), and pasture rose (*Rosa* spp.). As mentioned previously, patches of old field vegetation occur within many of these shrub upland areas. The most common herbaceous species include Canada goldenrod, timothy, orchard grass, yellow sweet-clover, white sweet-clover, and cow vetch.

Forest

There are a number of different forest types within the boundaries of

Oatka Creek Park, all of which are dominated by deciduous trees. They vary widely in species composition as well as age.

The forested areas along the south side of the park bordering Stewart Road are dominated by almost pure stands of black locust. This particular forest type does not fit any of the descriptions of forests in *Ecological Communities of New York State* (Reschke 1990). Other components within the understory of this forest type are cleavers (*Galium aparine*), Canada goldenrod, buckthorn, white avens, slender vetch, poison ivy, dame's rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*), and dandelion (*Taraxacum officinalis*).



Figure 32. Typical understory in the forested areas on the south side of the park that are dominated by black locust.

The forest in the central portion of the site consists of relatively mature trees (ranging from 3 to 18 inches in diameter, although a few trees measure up to 3 or 4 feet in diameter), many saplings of varying sizes, and relatively few shrubs, as would be expected in a relatively mature forest. The canopy is relatively dense but there are gaps that allow light to penetrate to the forest floor, thus promoting the growth of various understory tree, shrub, and herbaceous species. The closest match of this forest to any of the upland forests described in Reschke (1990) is rich mesophytic forest. The most common tree species include black oak and red maple (*Acer rubrum*), although black cherry, white ash, and shagbark hickory (*Carya ovata*) are also fairly abundant. Other tree species present in lesser amounts include sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), green ash, sweet cherry (*Prunus avium*), pignut (*Carya glabra*), basswood (*Tilia americana*), and American elm (*Ulmus americana*). A few white pine (*Pinus strobus*) are also present in this forest. Understory tree and shrub species include buckthorn, pagoda dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*), and red elderberry (*Sambucus racemosa*). The



Figure 33. The canopy of the deciduous forest in the central part of the park is open enough to let some sunlight penetrate to the forest floor.



Figure 34. The relatively mature forest in the central part of the park is dominated by black cohosh in the herbaceous layer.



Figure 35. The deciduous forest on the south side of Oatka Creek is traversed by numerous narrow dirt paths.

most prominent ground layer species in this forested area is black cohosh (*Cimicifuga racemosa*). However, other common species present include poison ivy, jumpseed (*Polygonum virginianum*), wild geranium (*Geranium maculatum*), and white lettuce (*Prenanthes alba*).

As is evident from the NYSDOT topographic map (Figure 10), a relatively steep slope grades down to the east and south sides of Oatka Creek in the western and northern portions of the park. This hillside is dominated by deciduous forest vegetation, somewhat similar in character to the forest just described. The dominant tree species include black cherry, basswood, sugar maple (*Acer saccharum*), shagbark hickory, and black oak. Sassafras (*Sassafras albidum*) and pignut (*Carya glabra*) also present to a lesser extent, with a number of hemlock (*Tsuga canadensis*) and sycamore (*Platanus occidentalis*) on the northern slope leading down to Oatka Creek. Witch-hazel (*Hamelis virginiana*), flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*), and pagoda dogwood are minor components in the understory. Black cohosh is again dominant in the herbaceous layer, with other common species including mayapple, Canada anemone (*Anemone canadensis*), early meadow-rue (*Thalictrum dioicum*), and wild-licorice (*Galium circaezans*). Closer to Oatka Creek, the character and species composition of the forest changes. The trees are smaller and the canopy is less dense, with a thicker shrub and herbaceous layer. Green ash and basswood dominate,



Figure 36. One of the main trails through the deciduous forest south of Oatka Creek. This area is also riddled with sinkholes and other evidence of the abandoned mining operation.

while some black oak and white cedar (*Thuja occidentalis*) are also present. Black willow (*Salix nigra*) is common along the edge of the stream. Musclewood (*Carpinus caroliniana*), hop-hornbeam (*Ostrya virginiana*), honeysuckle, and buckthorn are common in the understory. White snake-root (*Eupatorium rugosum*) and lowrie's aster (*Aster lowrieanus*) are present in the herbaceous layer. The portion of this forest on the south side of Oatka Creek was heavily disturbed by past gypsum mining activities. Evidence of this mining operation can be seen throughout the entire forested area in the form of sinkholes, old roadways, and abandoned shafts going into the hillside.

A band of deciduous forest to the south of the previously described forest was apparently farmed at some time but abandoned earlier than the other agricultural areas. This forested area is a mix of various tree and shrub species, but do to the history of disturbance, it is difficult to place it into one of Reschke's classification types. Common tree species within this forest are bigtooth aspen (*Populus grandidentata*), trembling aspen,

shagbark hickory, black cherry, and black oak. The understory is dense with many seedlings and saplings of the above-mentioned species, along with honeysuckle, buckthorn, and staghorn sumac. Virginia creeper and poison ivy are common in the herbaceous layer.

Between this forested area and the mature forest in the center of site (previously described) is another very young deciduous forest. This area had been cultivated at one time and is in an early forest successional stage. The forest is dominated by green ash saplings with a few relatively mature black cherry and sweet cherry trees present. Buckthorn forms a dense understory. Also present in the herbaceous layer is garlic mustard, poison ivy, and white avens. This forested area is most like the successional northern hardwoods described in *Ecological Communities of New York State* (Reschke 1990).

Finally, a floodplain forest is present between Oatka Creek and the Rochester Southern Railroad that borders the park on the north and west sides. This forested area is classified according to Reschke's system as flood-

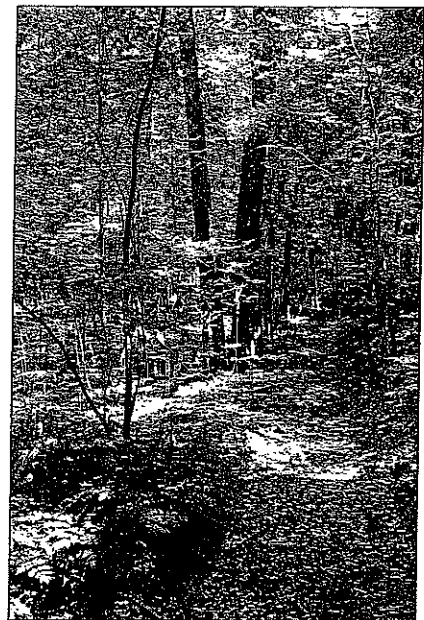


Figure 37. The deciduous forest on the slope on the western side of the park leading down to Oatka Creek.

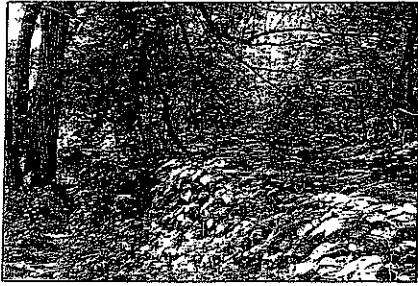


Figure 38. Typical view of the floodplain forest on the north and west side of Oatka Creek.



Figure 39. The wetland to the north of the "access road" in the east-central part of the park.

plain forest which is a "hardwood forest that occurs on mineral soils on low terraces of river floodplains and river deltas. These sites are characterized by their flood regime; low areas are annually flooded in spring, and high areas are flooded irregularly. Some sites may be quite dry by late summer, whereas other sites may be flooded again in late summer or early autumn (these floods are caused by heavy precipitation associated with tropical storms). This is a broadly defined community; floodplain forests are quite variable and may be very diverse." The most common tree species in this forest is green ash, with black walnut (*Juglans nigra*) and Eastern cottonwood (*Populus deltoides*) contributing substantially to the character of the forest. Large black willows and box-elder are common along the edge of Oatka Creek, as well as within the floodplain forest. A few hawthorn and apple (*Malus* spp.) are also present. There tends to be few tree saplings and shrubs in this area, although some buckthorn is present. The herbaceous layer tends to be quite dense and is comprised mostly of false nettle (*Boehmeria cylindrica*), moneywort (*Lysimachia nummularia*), white snakeroot (*Eupatorium rugosum*), purple-stemmed angelica (*Angelica atropurpurea*), and garlic mustard.

Wetlands

A relatively small wetland occurs to the north of the park entrance ("access") road and west of the parking lot off of Union Street. This wetland occurs in a low depression where sur-

face water runoff collects; there is no outlet to the wetland. This wetland is best classified as a shallow emergent marsh, as described by Reschke (1990), which is a "marsh community that occurs on mineral soils or fine-grained organic soils (muck or well-decomposed peat); the substrate is flooded by waters that are not subject to violent wave action." The center of the wetland is dominated by emergent wetland vegetation, including narrow-leaved cattail (*Caltha palustris*) and water plantain (*Alisma subcordatum*). The edges of the wetland are dominated by trees and shrubs, including silky dogwood (*Cornus amomum*), green ash, and black willow. Other species present around the periphery of the wetland include American elm seedlings, swamp white oak (*Quercus bicolor*), sedge (*Carex stipata*), river grape (*Vitis riparia*), and reed canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*). This wetland has approximately 1 to 1.5 feet of standing water in it, but there was evidence of a greater depth and areal extent of water earlier in the spring. Areas of open water (devoid of vegetation) are also present within this wetland.

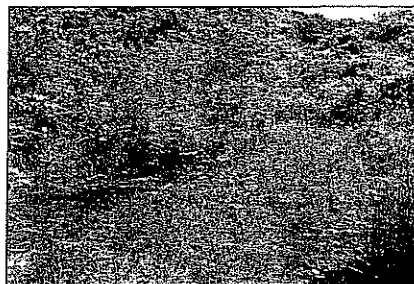


Figure 41. The small wetland in the southeast corner of the park resulting from a seep.



Figure 40. The edge of the wetland north of the "access road". Note the standing water on top of the soil.

A second wetland resulting from a hillside seep occurs in the southeastern corner of the park, adjacent to the intermittent stream that crosses the park from the south to the northeast. This is also considered a shallow emergent marsh. At the time of the field work, this wetland contained up to 6 inches of water which flowed out of the wetland and into the intermittent stream to the west. This wetland consists mostly of open water surrounded by herbaceous and shrubby vegetation. These include the following: spotted Joe pye-weed (*Eupatorium maculatum*), sedge, field horsetail (*Equisetum arvense*), shrub willow (*Salix* spp.), rice cutgrass (*Leersia oryzoides*), redtop (*Agrostis gigantea*), mosquito-fern (*Azolla caroliniana*), and water speedwell (*Veronica anagallis-aquatica*).

Another wetland occurs to the north of Oatka Creek between the stream and the railroad track embankment and east of the abandoned bridge that crosses the creek. This wetland also best fits the description in Reschke of shallow emergent marsh. However, portions of this wetland would also be classified as wet meadow, which is not described in Reschke (1990).



Figure 42. The wetland in the floodplain on the north side of Oatka Creek.

This wetland is dominated by broad-leaved cattail (*Typha latifolia*) and narrow-leaved cattail. Other species present include black willow, skunk cabbage (*Symplocarpus foetidus*), purple-stemmed angelica, spotted jewelweed (*Impatiens capensis*), boneset (*Eupatorium perfoliatum*), spotted Joe pye-weed, rice cut-grass, and sedge. The soils in this wetland were saturated to the surface at the time of the vegetation survey.

Finally, a forested wetland occurs to the north of Oatka Creek between the stream and the railroad track embankment and immediately west of the abandoned bridge that crosses the creek. Although the physical description of this wetland is closest to the red maple-hardwood swamp described in Reschke (1990), red maple is absent and green ash is the dominant tree species. The description in Reschke is as follows: "a hardwood swamp that occurs in poorly drained depressions, usually on inorganic soils. This is a broadly defined community with many regional and edaphic (soil) variants." Dominant herbaceous species in this wetland include moneywort, spotted Joe pye-weed, spotted jewelweed, and clearweed (*Pilea pumila*). This is a seasonal wetland, with indicators of standing water early in the spring as evidenced by water marks on the tree trunks and blackened leaves on the ground.

Stream/Stream Edge

Oatka Creek is a perennial stream occurring along the northern and western boundaries of the park. The por-

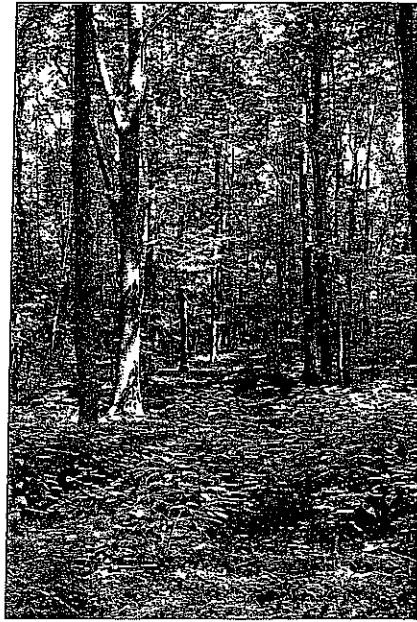


Figure 43. The wetland between the north side of Oatka Creek and the railroad track embankment, immediately to the west of the abandoned bridge over the creek.

tion of this stream within the park is best described as a midreach stream and a main channel stream. According to Reschke, a midreach stream "has a well-defined pattern of alternating pool, riffle, and run sections. Most of the erosion is lateral." Reschke also describes a main channel stream as having "large, quiet, base level sections where there are no distinct riffles. Main channel streams usually have clearly distinguished meanders. They are characterized by considerable deposition, with a relatively minor amount of erosion."

Oatka Creek, which is within the Genesee River drainage system, has a substrate of sand, gravel, and rock.

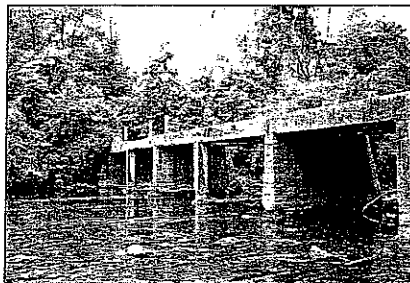


Figure 46. The abandoned bridge over Oatka Creek provides easy access to the park. This bridge is used by Eastern Phoebe as nest sites.

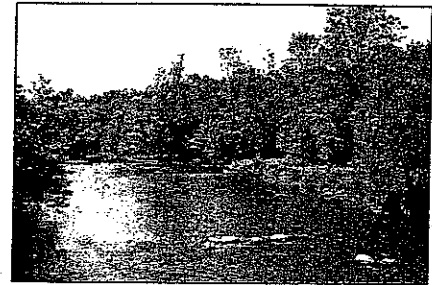


Figure 44. Several wetland areas occur along the edge of Oatka Creek, and several backwater areas provide breeding habitat for various frog species.

This stream is bordered by a broad floodplain on the north and west side. The floodplain on the east side of the stream tends to be very narrow, while the south side of the stream is bordered by a steep embankment. An old abandoned bridge crosses over Oatka Creek about midway between the park's boundaries. The abutments of another bridge occur about midway between the abandoned bridge and the bridge at Union Street.

The floodplain of Oatka Creek is mostly forested, although wetlands occur between the stream and the rail-



Figure 45. Oatka Creek is bordered by large black willows and box-elders. These trees provide valuable perches for bird species that hunt along the stream.



Figure 47. Weasel and Raccoon are known to hunt along the edges of Oatka Creek. Beaver have also been seen in the area.



Figure 48. The intermittent stream that occurs in the southeast corner of the park. This is used as a travel corridor by Whitetail Deer.

road tracks (previously described) and a narrow band of old field vegetation occurs on the north side of the stream and west of the abandoned bridge.

The most common tree species found in the floodplain of Oatka Creek include green ash, black willow, Eastern cottonwood, black walnut, and box-elder. Buckthorn, apple, and hawthorn are common shrubs and understory trees in the floodplain, while false-nettle (*Boehmeria cylindrica*), purple-stemmed angelica, and garlic mustard are common herbaceous species.

An intermittent stream traverses the southeast corner of the park from the south to the northeast. A minor tributary to this stream enters the park on the south side and joins the stream from the west. Both of these intermittent streams are devoid of vegetation, but occur in forested and dense shrub upland areas. This type of stream is classified as an intermittent stream by Reschke and is described as a "small, ephemeral streambed with a moderate to steep gradient, where water flows only during the spring or after a heavy rain."

Wildlife Species

A total of 73 species of wildlife were documented on the project site. A list of all wildlife species observed within the park, including both common and scientific names, is included in Appendix C.

Amphibians and Reptiles

Habitat for amphibians and reptiles is primarily limited to the wetlands and stream corridors and adjacent forest, shrub, and old field areas. The developed areas offer little cover for amphibians or reptiles; therefore, use of these areas is primarily of a transient nature.

Three species of amphibians and one species of reptile were seen on the project site (Table 3). All of the species observed are common throughout most of New York State in appropriate habitat.

Eastern American Toads (*Bufo a. americanus*), Gray Treefrogs (*Hyla versicolor*), and Green Frogs (*Rana clamitans melanota*) breed in the shallow backwater pools of Oatka Creek and the small wetlands within the park. Other common species of amphibians such as Bullfrog (*Rana catesbeiana*), Spring Peeper (*Pseudacris crucifer*), and Redbacked Salamander (*Plethodon cinereus*) most likely occur in these areas as well, but were not observed during the wildlife survey. This is most likely due to the time of the year that the survey was conducted and does not mean that these species are not present within the park.

The one snake species that was observed is the Eastern Garter Snake (*Thamnophis s. sirtalis*). This species was found in the shrub upland and forested areas of the park. This spe-



Figure 49. The floodplain forest along Oatka Creek could be utilized by Red-headed Woodpeckers, although none were observed during the wildlife survey.

cies is very common in New York State and can be expected to occur in any area of the park where appropriate cover is available.

Snapping turtle (*Chelydra s. serpentina*) and painted turtle (*Chrysemys picta*), as well as other common snakes, most likely occur within the limits of Oatka Creek Park, but were not observed during the wildlife survey. Again, this does not mean that they are not present in the park.

None of the reptiles and amphibians identified within the park are listed as endangered, threatened, rare, or of special concern by the New York Natural Heritage Program or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Birds

A total of fifty-six species of birds were observed on the project site (Table 4). Although a comprehensive list of bird species found specifically within the park does not exist, the *Atlas of Breeding Birds in New York State* (BBA - Breeding Bird Atlas) data provided some information on breeding birds in the park (Anderle and Carroll 1988; Breeding Bird Atlas Data provided by NYSDEC). Oatka Creek Park is located within two BBA sampling blocks (2676B and 2676C). Each block is five km² in size and includes a fair amount of land outside of the park. Therefore, the data does not accurately represent the breeding bird population within the park. However, it does show that about 100 species of birds nest in the general region of the park. Given the large number of birds noted for this area, a discussion of the species will not be presented here but will be covered briefly in the wildlife habitat section of the report.

Most of the species observed or documented as occurring within or adjacent to the park are common species found in a variety of forest, wetland, open field, and shrub community types. However, nine species documented in the BBA as breeding in the

area are listed as Special Concern by the NYSDEC. These species include Sharp-shinned Hawk (*Accipiter striatus*), Common Nighthawk (*Chordeiles minor*), Red-headed Woodpecker (*Melanerpes erythrocephalus*), Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), Golden-winged Warbler (*Vermivora chrysoptera*), Cerulean Warbler (*Dendroica cerulea*), Yellow-breasted Chat (*Icteria virens*), Vesper Sparrow (*Poocetes gramineus*), and Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus savannarum*). Each of these species is discussed briefly below (based on citations in Anderle and Carroll 1988).

The Sharp-shinned Hawk tends to be a rare and unevenly distributed breeder in New York State. This hawk utilizes heavily forested (mixed and coniferous) areas, both on its breeding and wintering grounds. Forests in which this species breeds must contain evergreens to serve as nest trees (Apfelbaum and Seelbach 1983). Although its immediate future seems secure, the continued destruction of forest habitats makes its long-term future uncertain. This species was not observed within the park, although there are some relatively large areas of forest with some coniferous trees.

The Common Nighthawk appears to be declining throughout most of New York. It prefers to nest on rooftops in cities and towns, as well as barren ground in open areas. Nighthawks were not seen during the wildlife survey, although their crepuscular behavior (foraging for only a few hours at dawn and dusk) make them difficult to observe. However, suitable habitat for this species appears to be lacking in the park.

Bottomland swamps and open woodlands with dead trees are the preferred habitats of the Red-headed Woodpecker. After an apparent decline during the early to mid-1900s, most likely due to clearing forests for agriculture, some reports now indicate that this species is increasing slightly within the state. This species was not

noted in the park, although the BBA documents confirmed breeding in the area. It could very well be present within the park.

The Horned Lark can be found in open areas with bare ground or short grass. There is some evidence that this species is declining in population as agricultural practices change and farms are abandoned, allowing land to grow back to forest (Robbins et al. 1986). However, Bull (1974) reports that in New York, the Horned Lark can be seen inhabiting airports, golf courses, fields, pastures, sandy beaches and dunes, and barren wastes. This species was documented in the BBA documents as possibly breeding in or near Oatka Creek Park. However, none were observed during the field survey and, because of its habitat requirements, it most likely does not occur there.

The distribution of the Golden-winged Warbler in New York seems to be shifting northward, with increasing abundance at the northern limits of its range. However, it is highly localized and not common throughout most of the state. It nests in areas with scattered patches of grass, thick brush, and a few trees (Confer and Knapp 1981). This type of habitat is mainly produced by succession following abandonment of farmland and occurs only briefly in time (10 to 20 years) as these areas grow into forests. This species was documented in the BBA documents as possibly breeding in or near the park. There appears to be adequate habitat within the park for the Golden-winged Warbler although none were observed during the wildlife survey.

The Cerulean Warbler in New York is rare in many counties, but common locally, particularly in the central and western counties near Lake Ontario. This species has been slowly expanding its range within the state for decades. Cerulean Warblers nest in wooded swamps, in deciduous forest in stream bottoms, and along lake and river shore with numerous tall trees



Figure 50. It was surprising not to find any Grasshopper Sparrows in the old field located in the southeast corner of the park. In fact, other species that would be expected in this type of habitat, such as Henslow's Sparrow, Eastern Meadowlark, and Bobolink, were also not present.

(Bull 1974). Given this type of habitat in Oatka Creek Park, this particular species of warbler might be present. In fact, the BBA documented the Cerulean Warbler as possibly breeding within or near the park. However, none were observed during the wildlife survey.

The Yellow-breasted Chat is a species common in the southern United States, with few localized breeding pairs in New York. It can be found in dense brushy tangles in lowland areas and on brushy hillsides. The BBA documents confirmed breeding of this species within or near the park. However, as with the previous species, the Yellow-breasted Chat was not observed at Oatka Creek Park during the wildlife survey.

The Vesper Sparrow is a ground bird, inhabiting open grassy fields and preferring pastureland and cropland, either with row crops or field crops but with sparse cover of weeds and grasses. This habitat preference makes the Vesper Sparrow dependent on agriculture. Because of the decline in agriculture throughout much of New York, this species has been declining for a number of decades. It was reported to be possibly breeding in or near the park by the BBA. However, this species was not observed during the wildlife survey.

The Grasshopper Sparrow occurs in grasslands where it is seldom seen as

it spends most of its time on the ground. However, during breeding season, the males are fairly conspicuous as they sing from various perches around and in their territories. Prior to clearing the forests for farming, this species was rare and highly localized. Its population increased slowly as land was cleared for farming, but has been in decline as abandoned farms return to successional old field and forests, agricultural lands are developed, and row crops are replaced by grain crops (Richmond and Nicholson 1985). This species was documented as breeding within or near the park by the BBA. Although the grassy old field in the southeastern corner of the park appears to be ideal habitat for the Grasshopper Sparrow, none were observed during the wildlife survey.

Mammals

There was no published or unpublished information available for mammalian species within Oatka Creek Park. Direct observation, assessment of habitat suitability, and conversations with individuals familiar with the park were used to document the populations of mammalian species within the park. Thirteen species of mammals were identified on the project site (Table 5).

Tracks of Whitetail Deer (*Odocoileus virginianus*) were observed in every vegetation cover type on the property, while those of Raccoon (*Procyon lotor*) were noted in the wet-

lands and floodplain forest along Oatka Creek. Eastern Chipmunk (*Tamias striatus*), Gray Squirrel (*Sciurus carolinensis*), and Red Squirrel (*Tamiasciurus hudsonicus*) were confined to the upland forest areas. In fact, the Red Squirrels were found in the forested area where coniferous trees are present.

A dead Masked Shrew (*Sorex cinereus*) was found in one of the mowed trails near the forest along Oatka Creek. This small rodent is one of the most common shrews in New York State and can be found in moist microhabitats within forests, old fields, and shrub uplands.

Woodchuck (*Marmota monax*) burrows were noted in the hedgerows and forests, while Eastern Cottontails (*Sylvilagus floridanus*) were observed along the edges of the developed areas (near the "lodge" and mowed trails). Both species appear to be relatively common in the park.

Mink (*Mustela vison*), Red Fox (*Vulpes fulva*), Opossum (*Didelphis marsupialis*), and Coyote (*Canis latrans*) were noted by other users of the park. Mink would be found along Oatka Creek where they hunt for small mammals, birds, eggs, frogs, crayfish, and fish. Red Foxes and Coyotes would be found utilizing the open forests, old fields, and shrub upland areas of the park, while the Opossum would be found in the forests and along the edges of the stream.

Other species that would most likely be found in the park include various bats such as Eastern Pipestrell (*Pipistrellus subflavus*), Little Brown Bat (*Myotis lucifugus*), Big Brown Bat (*Eptesicus fuscus*), Red Bat (*Lasiurus borealis*), Hoary Bat (*Lasiurus cinereus*), and Silver-haired Bat (*Lasiorycteris noctivagans*). Various voles, mice, moles, and shrews, as well as Flying Squirrels (*Pipistrellus subflavus*), would also be expected to occur within the park. However, the nocturnal behavior of bats and flying squirrels, and the small size and secretive behavior of mice, voles, moles, and shrews makes them very difficult to locate.

None of the mammals observed in the park are listed as rare, threatened, endangered, or of special concern by the New York Natural Heritage Program or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

A discussion with a wildlife biologist for the NYSDEC (Region 8) indicated that a high deer population is present within the park and the surrounding area (J. Hauber, pers. comm.). This was confirmed during the wildlife survey, as numerous deer were observed, along with their scat, tracks, and resting places. Contrary to what might be expected, a significant amount of damage to the vegetation within the park was not observed. However, this is still a concern with regards to an overpopulation of deer. Over-browsing can cause ecological damage to the native vegetation within the park as well as economic damage to the crops and horticultural plantings in the surrounding areas. In addition, numerous collisions between deer and motorized vehicles have been reported in the area. Finally, over-browsing causes a depletion of the food base for the deer, resulting in physiologically weakened individuals that can easily succumb to predation and severe winter conditions. The NYSDEC would prefer to see hunting allowed within the lim-



Figure 51. This low forested area of box-elder, located in the southeastern portion of the park, is a deer concentration area.



Figure 52. Numerous tracks of Whitetail Deer make it obvious that this area is a concentration area.

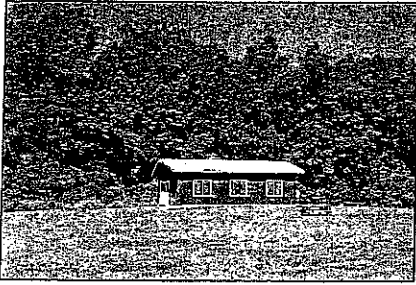


Figure 53. The developed areas of the site provide limited wildlife habitat. This area is used for picnics and to teach classes to local children.



Figure 54. The main "access" road through the park creates an edge effect, which opens up the forest and provides habitat for various species of songbirds.



Figure 55. Hedgerows, such as this one seen in the back of the photograph, provide excellent cover and travel corridors for wildlife species.

its of the park, but this is currently prohibited by Monroe County Parks Law.

Wildlife Habitat

All of the project site can be considered wildlife habitat, as every area is used at some time by some species. However, the abundance and diversity of wildlife on site is a function of the diversity of habitat found within its boundaries. Wildlife habitat not only consists of the vegetation community types in an area, but the supply of food, cover, and water needed by each species of animal to successfully survive and reproduce.

Oatka Creek Park includes large areas of old fields, shrub uplands, and deciduous forests, numerous hedgerows, several wetlands, a perennial stream, an intermittent stream and tributary, and a small developed area and maintained trails. Each of these habitat types has particular elements that make it valuable to different species of wildlife. A discussion of the wildlife habitats observed in Oatka Creek Park is presented below.

Developed

The developed areas of the park measure approximately 7 acres (1 percent) and consist of a small "lodge" surrounded by mowed lawn, a gravel road that traverses the site (abandoned portion of Quaker Road), and a number of mowed paths and dirt trails. These areas are used to vary-

ing degrees for passive and active human recreational activities.

A limited amount of wildlife habitat is provided by these areas. The mowed lawn around the "lodge" provides foraging habitat for a small number of birds such as Northern Flicker (*Colaptes auratus*), American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*), and Tree Swallow (*Trachycineta bicolor*) and small mammals such as Eastern Cottontail and various mice, voles, and shrews. The edges of this area, as well as the trails through the various vegetation communities, provide more abundant habitat for wildlife species than the mowed lawn.

Hedgerow

Hedgerows make up about 25 acres (4 percent) of the park and separate areas of abandoned agricultural fields that are now successional old fields and shrub uplands. These areas are linear bands of woody cover dominated by trees of varying ages and relatively thick shrubs.

Trees and shrubs adjacent to open fields and shrub uplands are commonly used as singing and hunting perches by open country songbirds and raptors and provide habitat for various nesting birds. The occasional dead trees in the hedgerows most likely provide foraging and nesting sites for species such as Downy Woodpecker (*Picoides pubescens*), Black-capped Chickadee (*Parus atricapillus*), Gray Catbird (*Dumetella carolinensis*), Brown Thrasher

(*Toxostoma rufum*), and Northern Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis*). Plant species such as black cherry, gray dogwood, wild grape, honeysuckle, staghorn sumac, blackberry, black and red raspberry, northern arrowwood (*Viburnum recognitum*), buckthorn, and crabapple are common in the hedgerows and produce berries that are consumed by mammals such as Raccoon, Striped Skunk (*Mephitis mephitis*), and Opossum, and birds such as American Robin, Northern Cardinal, Blue Jay (*Cyanocitta cristata*), and Cedar Waxwing (*Bombycilla cedrorum*). Hedgerows also provide food, cover, and travel corridors for mammals such as Whitetail Deer, Woodchuck, Opossum, and Eastern Cottontail.

Old Field

Old field habitat occurs throughout the site and includes approximately 76 acres (14 percent). These areas are abandoned agricultural fields in the early stages of succession. The fields

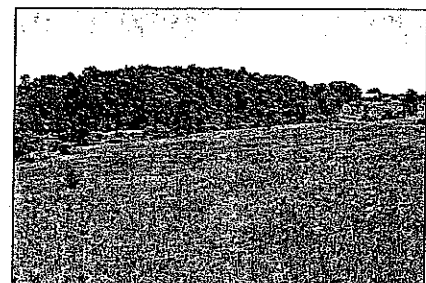


Figure 56. The grassland area in the southeast corner of the park should provide habitat for various sparrows, Bobolink, and Eastern Meadowlark. However, none were observed during the wildlife survey.



Figure 57. A mowed path provides access through the grassy old field in the southeast corner of the park. This is the only old field in the park dominated by grasses.



Figure 58. Bluebirds were observed in one of the old fields in the interior of Oatka Creek Park. It is assumed that they are breeding in the park.



Figure 59. Scattered trees and shrubs in old field areas provide important perching sites for species such as Song Sparrow, Field Sparrow, and Eastern Kingbird.

vary in size and species composition, with some areas dominated by grasses while others are dominated by forbs. Several of the old fields have a large component of shrubs and, in fact, grade into areas that would be considered shrub upland and not old field.

Old fields and open grasslands are becoming increasingly rare in New York State. This is caused by the short-lived nature of these areas due to succession and development pressure from urbanized areas. As a result, a number of bird species that are dependent on this type of habitat are becoming increasingly uncommon. These species include Savannah Sparrow (*Passerculus sandwichensis*), Grasshopper Sparrow (*Ammodramus henslowii*), Vesper Sparrow, Bobolink (*Dolichonyx oryzivorus*), Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*), Eastern Bluebird (*Sialia sialis*), and Eastern Meadowlark (*Sturnella magna*).

Open fields provide nesting cover and food in the form of seeds and insects

for many of these species. The adjacent hedgerows, tree and shrub stands, and isolated trees provide singing and foraging perches for songbirds and raptors. In addition, old fields provide cover for various mammals such as Eastern Cottontail, Woodchuck, and numerous moles, voles, shrews, and mice. These species in turn provide a food base for predators such as hawks, owls, foxes, and coyotes.

Shrub Upland

Shrub upland habitat covers approximately 71 acres (51 percent) of the park. These areas are also abandoned agricultural fields that are in various stages of succession. Shrub uplands are dominated by thick stands of shrubs, although patches of old field vegetation are common in some areas. With the abandonment of many farms throughout New York, this habitat type has become increasingly common over the past several decades. It is an intermediate successional stage between old field and deciduous forest lasting from 10 to 20



Figure 60. Old fields are not as common in upstate New York as they used to be with the succession of these fields to shrub upland and then forests.

years. Many species of songbirds utilize these areas for nesting and cover, including Indigo Bunting (*Passerina cyanea*), Field Sparrow (*Spizella pusilla*), Eastern Towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*), Blue-winged Warbler (*Vermivora pinus*), Gray Catbird, Brown Thrasher, Song Sparrow (*Melospiza melodia*), Eastern Kingbird (*Tyrannus tyrannus*), and American Goldfinch (*Carduelis tristis*).

Common shrub species within these areas include gray dogwood, honeysuckle, northern blackberry, black raspberry, staghorn sumac, and pas-

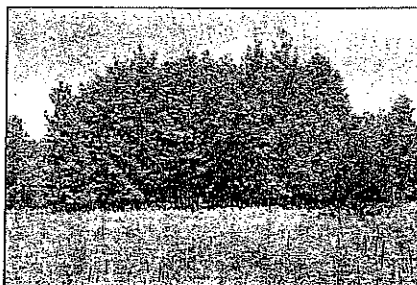


Figure 61. A large stand of black locust in one of the old fields provides cover and perching sites for birds breeding in this field.

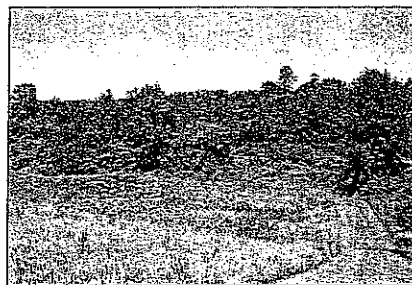


Figure 62. Old fields are important for many species of songbirds such as sparrows, Eastern Kingbird, and Eastern Bluebird.



Figure 63. Shrub uplands supports a variety of wildlife species due to their thick cover and abundant food supply.



Figure 64. The mowed paths through the various parts of the park create more habitat diversity for wildlife.

ture rose. Wild grape is also quite common within the shrub upland areas. All of these species provide abundant berries that are important to the songbirds and mammals that utilize the areas. Insects that are attracted to the plants in this community type are also eaten by many of the bird species. These areas are used as cover by Whitetail Deer, Red Fox, and Eastern Cottontail.

Deciduous Forest

Approximately 293 acres (54 percent) of the site are covered by deciduous forest. The deciduous forest communities within the park vary in terms of species composition, canopy cover,



Figure 65. A variety of foliage heights within a forest offers many ecological niches for a wide variety of birds and other wildlife species.

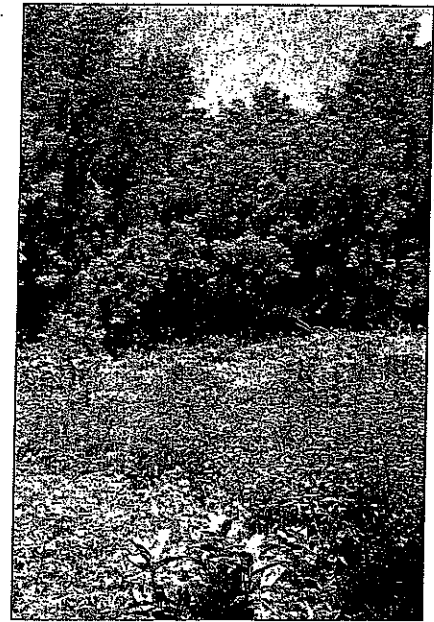


Figure 66. This low area of wet meadow and deciduous forest near the intermittent stream in the southeast corner of the park is heavily used by Whitetail Deer.

and structural complexity. The relatively mature forests in the park are dominated by oaks, hickories, and maples, while other forested areas are dominated by aspens, hickories, cherries, and oaks. Several species of pine, spruce, and fir are also present

in small amounts within these forests. Early successional deciduous forests in the park are dominated by ashes and cherries, with a dense layer of shrubs, understory trees, and saplings. Some of the forested areas along the southern property boundary are dominated exclusively by black locust with a relatively open understory. Finally, the floodplain forests along Oatka Creek are dominated by ashes, apples, and hawthorns. These forest communities typically have a closed to partially closed canopy and an understory characterized by tree saplings, shrubs, and a somewhat diverse herbaceous layer.

The forested areas on the site contain numerous habitat elements that make them attractive to a variety of wildlife species. For example, mature oaks and hickories produce large quantities of nuts which are eaten by small mammals, squirrels, deer, wild turkey (*Meleagris gallopavo*), and songbirds. Rough barked trees (sugar maple, hickories, and oaks) provide foraging sites for bark-probing birds such as Black-capped Chickadee, Brown Creeper (*Certhia americana*), and White-breasted Nuthatch (*Sitta*

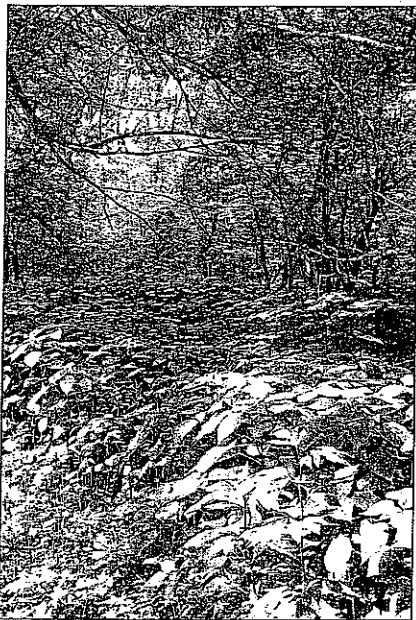


Figure 67. The floodplain on the north side of Oatka Creek is characterized by a mix of vegetation community types. The dense vegetation provides habitat for numerous wildlife.



Figure 68. Black cohosh is a dominant herbaceous species in the mature forests in Oatka Creek Park. There are relatively few shrubs in many of the forested areas in the park.

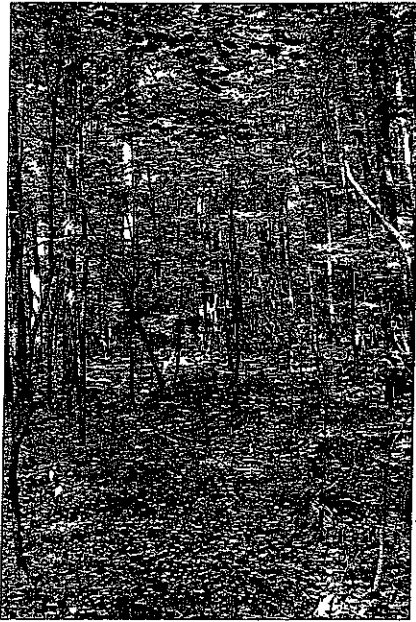


Figure 69. Large tracts of undisturbed forests provide important wildlife sanctuaries in an area that is otherwise heavily cultivated and disturbed.

carolinensis), and food storage sites for species such as Tufted Titmouse (*Baeolophus bicolor*) and White-breasted Nuthatch.

Deadwood (standing and fallen dead trees) is another important feature of the forested areas on site. Many insects are found in standing deadwood which provides a food base for numerous bird species such as woodpeckers, nuthatches, brown creeper, and some of the warblers. Standing deadwood also provides cover and nest sites for various wildlife species such as woodpeckers, nuthatches, squirrels, and raccoon (although some of these species will utilize living trees as well). These species either use existing cavities created by decay or breakage, excavate their own cavities, or utilize cavities created by other species. Finally, migratory bats are known to roost in tree hollows and under the loose bark of standing deadwood and living trees.

Fallen deadwood (branches and logs) is another important feature of forests. Fallen branches provide important cover for ground dwelling species of wildlife such as various song-

birds and rabbits, while logs provide cover for small mammals, amphibians, and reptiles. Squirrels, chipmunks, raccoons, and rabbits use hollow logs for cover. Finally, many insects and crustaceans can be found in deadwood which then provide a valuable food source for a variety of wildlife.

Forests generally exhibit an array of foliage heights provided by mature trees, saplings, understory trees, shrubs, and herbaceous species. Because this structural diversity provides a large number of food and cover niches, forests usually support numerous bird species. In addition, large tracts of continuous, undisturbed forest are relatively rare in areas that are highly agricultural in nature. Certain species of songbirds, such as Eastern Wood-pewee (*Contopus virens*), Wood Thrush (*Hylocichla mustelina*), Veery (*Catharus fuscescens*), Rose-breasted Grosbeak (*Pheucticus ludovicianus*), Scarlet Tanager (*Piranga olivacea*), and Red-eyed Vireo (*Vireo olivaceus*), nest in the interior of forests. Large forests thus provide protection from disturbance by park users as well as parasitism by cowbirds which typically

nest on the forest edges. In addition, large continuous forest canopies are important for bird species that migrate through an area but might not necessarily nest there. Therefore, the relatively large tracts of forest in Oatka Creek Park are important for resident breeding populations of birds as well as migratory birds.

Most of the forests within the park are mature, although some are relatively young. These forests provide some cover for various wildlife species and provide limited food. However, until the trees mature and produce fairly large amounts of fruits and are big enough to provide nest cavities, these areas are considered relatively poor wildlife habitat (Hassinger *et al.* 1979). Even so, the young forests in the park provide some diversity and will eventually mature to provide higher quality wildlife habitat.

Wetland

Wetlands cover approximately 12 acres (2 percent) of the site. Water is one of the habitat elements all species require and is used for drinking and bathing, as well as a source of



Figure 70. Open water in wetlands provides opportunities for drinking, bathing, and breeding for various species of wildlife.

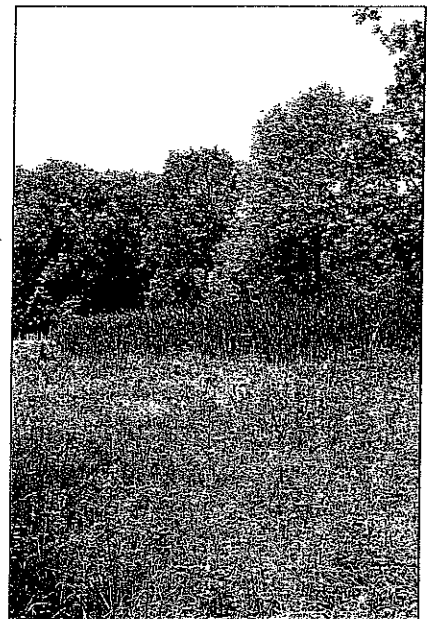


Figure 71. A relatively large emergent wetland and wet meadow occurs to the north of Oatka Creek.

food for numerous wildlife species. Abundant populations of insects and other invertebrates are common in wetlands, which are the basic food items of many species of birds, reptiles, amphibians, and bats. Because water is so important to wildlife, wetlands and floodplains tend to be used by wildlife disproportionately more than other types of habitat (Bottorff 1974, Kelly *et al.* 1975).

Areas of open water in the park occur in Oatka Creek (to be discussed in the next section) and in the two small wetlands in the interior of the park. Frogs, toads, and turtles utilize these areas for food, cover, and breeding sites. Wood Duck (*Aix sponsa*) was noted in the wetland that occurs on the north side of the main "access" road through the park.

The wetlands in the park are variable in terms of dominant vegetation type, hydrology, and their value to wildlife. Wet meadows and emergent marsh in the floodplain of Oatka Creek and in the two small wetlands within the interior of the park provide cover for wading birds, songbirds, frogs, and muskrats (*Zebethica ondatra*). They also support abundant populations of insect and other invertebrates, which are eaten by many species of songbirds, wading birds, and bats.

All of the previously-mentioned wetlands in the park include a significant tree and shrub component. As mentioned previously, trees and shrubs supply abundant food and cover for a variety of wildlife species. Often

times these areas also contain varying amounts of standing and fallen deadwood. Standing deadwood is particularly important as foraging perches for aerial insectivores such as Eastern Phoebe (*Sayornis phoebe*) and swallows. It also provides singing perches for breeding songbirds. Woodpeckers, Black-capped Chickadees, and other cavity nesters, as well as raccoons, utilize standing deadwood for nesting sites. Woodpeckers also feed on insects found on deadwood. Thick shrub cover and overhanging branches along wetland edges provide cover, perches, and feeding sites for numerous birds, including herons, warblers, flycatchers, and Red-winged Blackbirds (*Agelaius phoeniceus*).

A forested wetland dominated by mature green ash with an open understory and herbaceous ground layer is found in the floodplain on the north side of Oatka Creek. This wetland is used as a foraging area for Raccoon, Opossum, and other upland mammals. It also provides seasonal habitat for breeding amphibians such as American Toad, Gray Treefrog, and Northern Spring Peeper.



Figure 72. Oatka Creek is considered one of the best fisheries in western New York.

Stream/Stream Edge

Stream and stream edge occupy approximately 15 acres (3 percent) of the site and occur in the northern, western, and southeastern portions of the park. Oatka Creek is a perennial stream occurring along the northern and western boundaries of the park. This stream is classified by the NYSDEC as a Class C stream with C(t) Standards (6NYCRR 838.6). According to one of the NYSDEC Region 8 fisheries biologists and a NYSDEC Fish and Wildlife Technician, Oatka Creek is considered one of the best trout streams in western New York (M. Sanderson, pers. comm., and D. Stone, pers. comm.). The section of the stream within the park is a unique resource in that it is a completely wild fishery; there is no stocking of fish in this section of the stream. Species of fish found within Oatka Creek include Brown Trout (*Salmo trutta*), Brook Trout (*Salvelinus fontinalis*), Longnose Dace (*Rhinichthys cataractae*), various darters (*Etheostoma* spp.), Common Shiner (*Luxulus cornutus*), Rock Bass (*Ambloplites ru-*



Figure 73. Deadwood and overhanging trees and shrubs provide important habitat for numerous wildlife species.

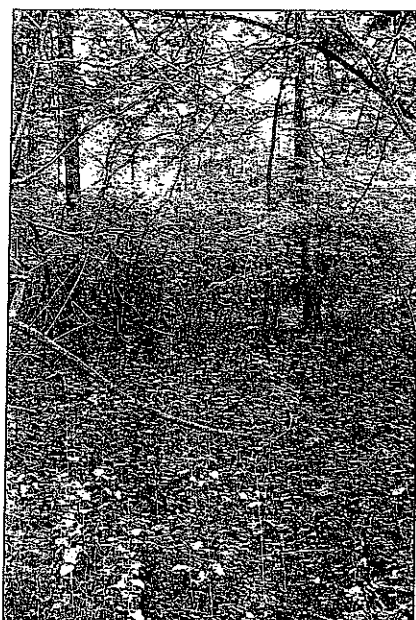


Figure 74. The floodplain on the north side of Oatka Creek provides habitat for terrestrial and semi-aquatic species of wildlife.



Figure 75. Debris caught on vegetation in the floodplain of Oatka Creek shows where previous flooding occurred.

pestris), various sunfish, Smallmouth Bass (*Micropterus dolomieu*), Largemouth Bass (*Micropterus salmoides*), Carp (*Cyprinus carpio*), various suckers, and Northern Pike (*Esox lucius*).

The open water provided by Oatka Creek attracts large amounts of insects which are then prey items for a number of species of birds, including flycatchers and swallows, as well as various bats. A few backwater areas were noted along the edges of the stream which contained tadpoles. Obviously, various frogs are abundant along the stream which are then fed upon by Green Heron (*Butorides virescens*) and Great Blue Heron (*Ardea herodias*), Raccoon, and Opossum, while a number of fish species within the stream provide food for the herons, Belted Kingfisher (*Ceryle alcyon*), Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*), Raccoon, and Opossum.

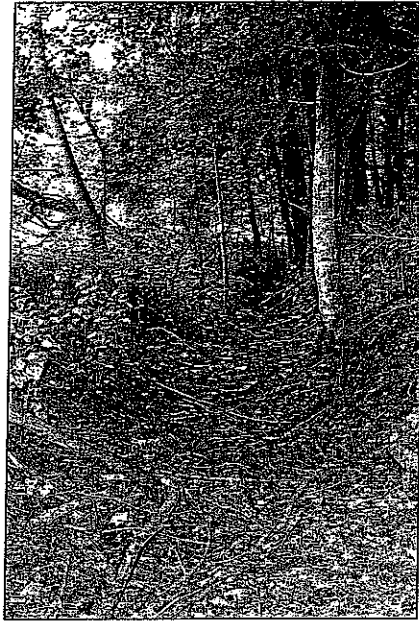


Figure 76. An intermittent stream along the southern park boundary joins the larger intermittent stream that traverses the southeast corner of the park.

The thick shrubs and trees along the stream and within the floodplain provide cover, food, breeding sites, and travel corridors for numerous other aquatic, semi-aquatic, and terrestrial species of wildlife, including various songbirds, Whitetail Deer, small mammals, and Beaver (*Castor canadensis*). Standing deadwood provides important perching sites for the aerial insectivorous and fish-eating birds, while also providing nesting cavities for various species and harboring insects which provide food for birds and bats.

An intermittent stream and tributary traverse the southeast corner of the park. The stream and tributary provides limited wildlife habitat for water dependent species. However, the streams are bordered by a dense stand of shrubs which provides important cover for various songbirds and small mammals. When the streams are dry, they are used by Whitetail Deer as a travel corridor.



Conclusions

A vegetation and wildlife inventory to identify all plant and animal species, including the possibility of rare species, was conducted in Oatka Creek Park in the Town of Wheatland, Monroe County, New York. Prior to initiating a field survey of the park, existing environmental data were collected. This information provided an indication of the probable occurrence and general location of wetlands and other waters of the United States under Federal regulation, as well as the possible occurrence of rare species and/or significant habitats on the site.

Eight vegetation community and wildlife habitat types were identified in the park. These include developed (7 acres), hedgerow (25 acres), old field (76 acres), shrub upland (71 acres), old field/shrub upland (51 acres), deciduous forest (293 acres), wetland (12 acres), and stream and stream edge (15 acres). All of these community types are considered common throughout New York State.

The field investigation confirmed the presence of four wetlands, a perennial stream, and an intermittent stream within the boundaries of the park. The wetlands meet the three requirements of wetland vegetation, hydric soils, and wetland hydrology as defined by the Corps, and therefore under the juris-

diction of the Corps. However, none of the wetlands are under the jurisdiction of the NYSDEC.

Oatka Creek is a perennial stream occurring along the western and northern boundaries of the park. This stream is classified by the NYSDEC as a Class C stream with C(t) standards. It is under the jurisdiction of the Corps and NYSDEC. Oatka Creek flows in a northerly and then easterly direction through the park and eventually joins the Genesee River about 4 miles from the park. The portion of the stream within the park is a completely wild fishery and considered one of the best trout streams in western New York.

Field investigation and agency information showed that there are no plant species occurring on or adjacent to the park that are listed as endangered, threatened, rare, or of special concern. In addition, none of the vegetation community or wildlife habitat types identified in the park are considered significant. However, 1980-1985 BBA data provided by the NYSDEC indicated that 9 species of birds found breeding or possibly breeding in or near the park are listed by the state as Special Concern. These include Sharp-shinned Hawk, Common Nighthawk, Red-headed Woodpecker, Horned Lark, Golden-winged

Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, Vesper Sparrow, and Grasshopper Sparrow. Although none of these species were observed in the park during the wildlife inventory, it is possible that Sharp-shinned Hawk, Red-headed Woodpecker, Golden-winged Warbler, Cerulean Warbler, Yellow-breasted Chat, and Grasshopper Sparrow might occur at some time within the park.

Oatka Creek Park has a diverse complex of deciduous forests. This community type ranges from rather mature forests to fairly early successional forests, as well as areas that are dominated by only one tree species. The abandoned agricultural fields are also quite diverse, with one large area consisting of a grass-dominated old field, while the other areas range from old fields that are dominated by forbs to old field and shrub upland mixes to fields that are dominated by thick shrubs with scattered trees and saplings. This complexity of vegetation community types provides diverse wildlife habitat, resulting in a wide variety of wildlife species that utilize the park. The undeveloped nature of the park also provides a relatively undisturbed sanctuary for wildlife species, while the trails provide a unique opportunity for recreational and educational experiences based on the park's natural resources.