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U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

# Iroquois

*National Wildlife  
Refuge*



*The 10,828-acre Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge lies within the rural towns of Alabama and Shelby midway between Rochester and Buffalo, New York. Part of what locals call the “Alabama Swamps”, the Refuge’s 6,000 acres of wetland host more than 100,000 Canada geese and 20,000 ducks and swans annually. More than 3,000 acres of bottomland hardwood and 1,800 acres of grasslands and shrublands support migratory and resident birds as well as other wildlife.*

*Cover: Wood duck hen with duckling.*  
©Douglas Domedion

### **Creation of a Swamp**



This blue goose, designed by J.N. “Ding” Darling, has become the symbol of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

At the end of the last glacial period, Lake Tonawanda covered much of western New York. Through the slow passage of time the lake drained and filled. The lingering swampy areas flourished with wildlife.

Centuries later, the Seneca Indians, who had established villages in the area, began to drain the swamp and clear some of the forests for farming. To the first European settlers in the early 19th century the remaining clusters of oak trees were reminiscent of an orchard so they aptly named the area “Oak Orchard Swamp.” Artificial drainage of the swamp continued into the 20th century in an attempt to improve logging and farming operations. Plagued by high costs and a cycle of muck fires and floods, the outcome was marginal at best.

*Frog in water:*



## Wildlife Gets a Helping Hand

On May 19, 1958 the federal government established the Oak Orchard National Wildlife Refuge adding to the growing chain of National Wildlife Refuges across the United States. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service purchased the land with funds from the sale of Migratory Bird Conservation Stamps also known as “Duck Stamps”. To avoid confusion with its neighbor, the Oak Orchard State Game Management Area, the refuge was renamed Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) in 1964, in recognition of the Iroquois nation. Some of our pools and nature trails are namesakes for these early inhabitants.

Before the addition of fifteen impoundments, over 5,000 acres of the refuge was normally inundated in the spring and mostly dry in the fall. A system of dikes (man-made barriers) and water control structures regulate water levels to mimic the

flood and drought cycle in a natural, undisturbed marsh and to reduce flooding. Periodic draining of the impoundments (draw downs) allows the re-growth of smartweed, wild millet, and several other species whose seeds provide waterfowl with food after the pool is re-flooded in the fall. Cattails, bulrushes, bur-reed, and sedges provide additional food and cover for waterfowl as well as other wetland-dependant species.

Oak Orchard Creek feeds many of the refuge’s marshes as it meanders east to west through the refuge en route to Lake Ontario. Wood ducks, hooded mergansers and prothonotary warblers are just a few of the species found in the forested wetland along its banks or bordering marshes.

Grasslands provide nesting habitat for migratory birds such as savannah sparrows, bobolinks, eastern meadowlarks, upland sandpipers and many species of waterfowl. To keep grasslands open the refuge employs a combination of mowing, prescribed fire, spraying and haying.

Sugar maple, American beech, and white ash dominate the 1,738 acres of upland forest, much of which is in second growth (re-grown after the original forest was harvested). Because some animals prefer woodlands that are periodically disturbed, forest management aims to create open spaces interspersed with thickets of dense, young shrubs and trees. Berry-producing shrubs provide food, cover or nesting areas for white-tailed deer, ruffed grouse, wild turkey, eastern bluebird, mourning dove, American kestrel and raccoon.

*Hooded merganser*



## Wildlife Happenings

### Birds

Western New York lies along the Atlantic Flyway, a major north/south route traveled by migrating birds between their nesting and wintering grounds. Two hundred and sixty six species of birds have been recorded on Iroquois NWR. Sixty species are considered year-round residents.

Of the tens of thousands of Canada geese winging their way northward each year, only about two hundred pairs nest on the refuge. For most, Iroquois is a stopover point on their way to nesting grounds in Canada. Waterfowl migration peaks in the spring from mid-March through early April. Fall migration peaks, generally from mid-September through early October.

Shorebird migration usually peaks in the months of May, July and August with yellowlegs, dowitchers, sandpipers, killdeer, American woodcock and snipe being common species.

Additionally, the refuge is used by over twenty-one bird of prey species which either nest on or migrate through the refuge annually. Red-tailed hawks and American kestrels are the most common. Over the years, two pair of bald eagles and one pair of osprey have established nest sites on the refuge. Occasionally immature eagles are also seen. Although the ospreys migrate out in the fall, the eagles generally stay on or near the refuge for most of the year, leaving only to find open water in winter or in times of drought.

### Mammals

The diversity of refuge wetland and upland habitats support most of the resident mammals common to western New York, with 42 species recorded for the refuge. The most conspicuous species include white-tailed deer, muskrat, red fox, eastern cottontail, and gray squirrel.

### Adult bald eagle.

© Douglas Dornetich



Infrequent sightings of coyote and river otter have been reported.

### Reptiles and Amphibians



Painted turtle  
Robert Savannah

The most familiar reptiles on the refuge are the midland painted turtle and snapping turtle. During sunny days painted turtles perch on logs in the marsh to bask in the sun. Snapping turtles are often seen searching for a place to lay their eggs along roadsides or on dikes.

Snakes including eastern garter snake and northern water snakes may also show themselves on sunny days. Less common sightings include northern brown snake, northern redbelly snake, smooth green snake, black rat snake and eastern milk snake— none of which are poisonous.

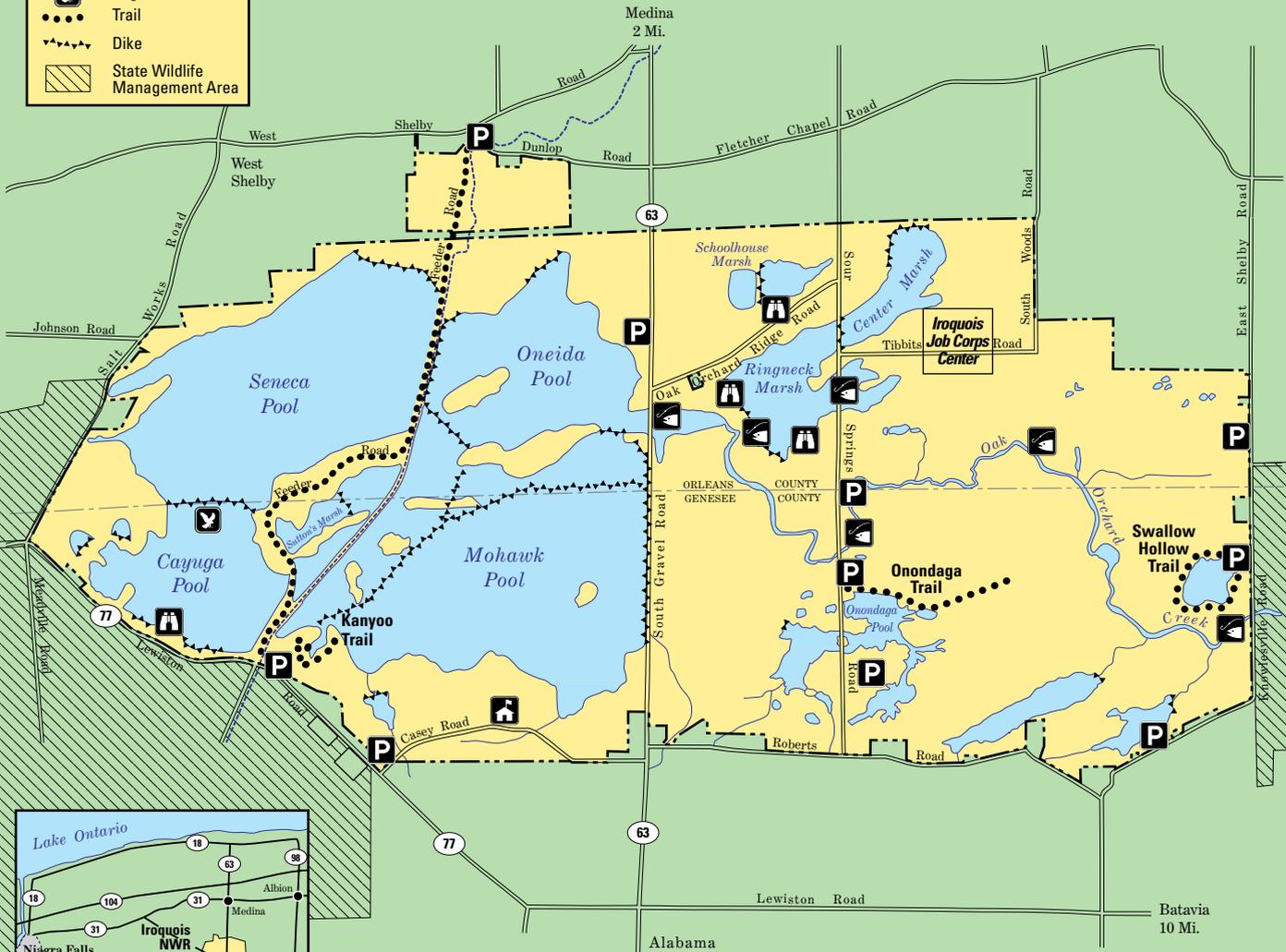
Many amphibians (frogs, toads and salamanders) live in both wetlands

# Iroquois

*National Wildlife Refuge*

**LEGEND**

-  Refuge Boundary
-  Headquarters
-  Parking
-  Overlook
-  Fishing
-  Eagle Nest
-  Trail
-  Dike
-  State Wildlife Management Area



and forests on the refuge. As the temperatures rise in the spring, spring peeper, western chorus frog, northern leopard frog, gray tree frog, green frog, and American toad make their presence known through a chorus of songs as they try to attract mates. Salamanders including blue-spotted and Jefferson salamanders are rarely seen, only coming out in the evenings from their shelter of leaves to hunt for insects along the forest floor.

### *Fish*

Fish living in refuge pools and Oak Orchard Creek provide food for larger wildlife. Warm water species include northern pike, bass, black crappie, bullhead, sunfish, yellow perch and carp (an invasive species). Freshwater clams and mussels can also be found here.

### **Enjoying the Refuge**

Wildlife-dependent recreational and educational opportunities are allowed on Iroquois NWR. These include wildlife observation, wildlife photography, interpretation, environmental education, fishing and hunting. The refuge has been identified as an Important Bird Area by the Audubon Society because of its importance to breeding and migratory waterfowl as well as its support of at-risk species. Nature trails, overlooks and fishing areas are open year-round from dawn to dusk.

### *Prothonotary warbler*



© Donald Cook

The visitor center/refuge office, located on Casey Road, midway between Routes 77 and 63, 1 mile north of Alabama Center, has exhibits and information. Office hours are Monday – Friday, 7:30 am – 4:00 pm year-round, except holidays. The visitor center is also open on some weekends during the spring and fall migrations. Please contact refuge staff for dates and times. The Flyway Nature Store, operated by the Friends of Iroquois NWR is located within the visitor center.

Nesting is a critical time for our wildlife. From March 1 – September 30, please stay on nature trails, overlooks, and public fishing areas. All other areas of the refuge are closed to public entry.

### **Wildlife Observation, Photography and Walking**



Kanyoo Nature Trail – (Route 77) – 2 loops: 0.66 miles and 1 mile. This dirt and gravel trail is bounded by wildflowers and fungi, and takes visitors through mixed woods and vernal wetlands. A small observation platform and boardwalk gives views of a marsh. A trail guide is available at the trailhead or visitor center.

Swallow Hollow Nature Trail – (Knowlesville Road): 1.3 miles. An elevated boardwalk and gravel trail will loop visitors through marsh and forested wetlands for unique encounters with wetland species. Interpretive panels describe common sightings along the way. Warblers are in abundance in late spring and summer.

Onondaga Nature Trail – (Sour Springs Road): 1.2 miles one way. A dirt and gravel dike leads visitors through the Onondaga Marsh into mixed mature woods with evergreen plantations which predate the refuge. A quiet walker will be greeted by a variety of songbirds, waterfowl and

*Green-winged teal*



©Mark Wilson

mammals that assemble here. At the third bench rest, reflect and retrace your steps.

Feeder Road – (Route 77 and Dunlop Road): 3.5 miles one way. The original Feeder Road was built using the spoils from digging the Feeder Canal in 1823. The canal carried water pumped from Tonawanda Creek to augment the flow from Oak Orchard Creek into the Erie Canal in Medina. To access the south end off of Route 77, park at the Kanyoo Trail lot and take the grass path to the west. This dirt and gravel road will take you through wetlands, woods and grasslands where you can view shorebirds, waterfowl, songbirds and bald eagles. Vehicles are permitted between Route 77 and the gate at the half way point from October 1 – the end of February. There is also a parking lot at the north end, off of Dunlop Road.

### Overlooks



These elevated parking areas provide views of marshes below.

Cayuga Marsh Overlook – (Route 77): 0.5 mile north of Kanyoo Trail. One of the bald eagles nests is visible from the parking area as well as waterfowl and black terns. A covered observation platform with mounts for spotting scope is available.

Ringneck Marsh Overlook – (Oak Orchard Ridge Road): 0.5 mile east of Route 63. Views Ringneck Marsh from the north. This is a popular spot for watching migrating geese.

Schoolhouse Marsh Overlook – (Oak Orchard Ridge Road): 0.25 mile east of Ringneck Marsh Overlook. Waterfowl and shorebird observations are possible here.

Mallard Overlook – (Sour Springs Road): 0.5 mile North of Oak Orchard Creek. From here, views of Ringneck Marsh from the south east are possible. Look for the osprey nest, also waterfowl and great blue heron.

### Cross-Country skiing



Cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are permitted on Feeder Road, Kanyoo and Onondaga Nature Trails and the Mohawk Ski Trail, conditions permitting. The Mohawk Ski Trail, a 7.5 mile loop around Mohawk Pool, begins and ends at the Visitor Contact Station/Refuge Office. The relatively flat course goes through fields, woods and along straight dikes. The Mohawk Ski Trail closes for the season on March 1.

### Boats



Canoes, kayaks and fishing boats without motors are permitted on Oak Orchard Creek east of Route 63 only. The creek flows through bottomland hardwood swamp so expect primitive conditions and possible beaver activity. You can access the creek at the bridges on Route 63, Sour Springs Road and Knowlesville Road.

### Hunting, fishing, frogging and trapping



Hunting, fishing, frogging and trapping are permitted within most state seasons and in accordance with New York State laws. Specific maps and refuge regulations are available at the visitor center. We require refuge permits for all hunting and trapping. Special youth events include the following:



*Sunset at  
Iroquois  
National  
Wildlife  
Refuge*

## Interpretation



Youth Spring Turkey Hunt on the first Sunday in May. The hunt is open to hunters 12-17 years but space is limited. Registration and attendance at orientation is required.

Youth Fishing Derby on the first Saturday in June to coincide with National Fishing and Boating Week. Kid's 17 years of age and under can fish for fun and prizes.

Youth Waterfowl Hunt on the first Sunday of the regular waterfowl hunting season. The hunt is open to junior hunters 12-17 years but space is limited. Registration and attendance at orientation is required.

Schools, organized civic groups and professional groups may reserve dates for talks, movies and/or guided walk. Teachers may also develop activities to coincide with their course of study and utilize the refuge as an outdoor classroom. Activities taking place other than on trails and overlooks will need pre-approval.

Iroquois Observations – each spring and fall the Buffalo Audubon Society presents nature programs in partnership with the refuge. Programs include: birding tours, scope watch, guest speakers, canoe treks, nature walks, hands on activities and owl prowls. Programs are free and open to the public.

*Blue jay*



## Environmental Education



Environmental education programs are presented to school groups through various partnerships. Please contact refuge staff for information.

## Special Events

Spring Into Nature – Our annual spring celebration with nature related exhibitors, demonstrations, kid's activities, and interpretive programs welcoming spring to the swamp. Usually the last Saturday in April, this event is free and open to the public.

## We need your help

To protect wildlife and visitors, the following are prohibited and subject to state and federal prosecution.

- Open Fires
- Cutting Firewood
- Removing plants and animals (other than hunting and fishing)
- Snowmobiling
- Off-road vehicles
- Horses or horseback riding

## Pets



Please note that dogs must be kept and controlled on a leash no longer than ten feet at all times. No other domestic pets are allowed.

## U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge is one of more than 560 refuges in the National Wildlife Refuge System administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a federal agency. The National Wildlife Refuge System is a network of lands and waters managed specifically for the protection of wildlife and wildlife habitat for the continuing benefit of the American people. It represents the most comprehensive wildlife resource management program in the world.

## More Information

We hope you enjoy your visit to Iroquois National Wildlife Refuge. If you would like more information about the refuge, the refuge system or if you would like to volunteer please contact the Refuge Manager using the phone number listed on the back of this brochure.